

EXPANDING ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN



One of the most effective ways to reduce poverty is to invest in women. Yet women in many parts of Asia still face discrimination that limits their economic options and impedes their efforts to create a better life for themselves and their children. Women often lag behind men in education and account for the majority of Asia's illiterate population. Training that would enable women to attain higher paying jobs is frequently inaccessible. Women entrepreneurs are hindered by laws that deter their access to credit and ability to register a business in their own name. Women also face challenges in the workplace, including being paid less than men for the same work and suffering harassment on the job.

The Asia Foundation's Women's Empowerment program opens up economic opportunities for women. Working with local partners, our projects provide women with the full range of tools they need to be productive and profitable, including job training and networking, access to credit, and business management training. Our projects also educate women workers on their rights and help them mobilize to reform discriminatory laws and demand fair and equal treatment in the workplace.

RECENT PROJECTS THAT ARE GIVING WOMEN THE CHANCE FOR A BETTER LIFE INCLUDE:

- In Cambodia, we worked with the Phnom Penh-based Women's Business Association to establish a mentoring program that helps rural businesswomen grow their businesses by learning from successful peers in urban areas.

- In Pakistan, we organized businesswomen to establish Mobile Business Service Units that provide business advice, relevant information, skills, and market linkages directly to clients close to home.
- In Mongolia, we partnered with the Women Farmers' Association to provide training and technical support to enable women to farm organic vegetables, raise poultry, and make and sell handicrafts to increase their household income and reduce the risk of domestic violence and trafficking.
- In Nepal, we trained poor and vulnerable young women to repair motorcycles and electronics – both of which are lucrative jobs normally reserved for men – and to establish and manage their own “one-stop shops” where the women could use their new skills to earn a good living.
- For over a decade, our Migrant Women Worker initiative has assisted more than 850,000 migrant women working in over 1,000 factories in 22 cities and districts in China's Pearl River Delta, and more than 50 factories in the Lower Yangtze River, and Beijing. Women workers involved in this initiative benefit from expanded access to health, education, and counseling services, life skills and vocational training, labor rights information, and legal aid.

THE ASIA FOUNDATION

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PARTNER HIGHLIGHT

The Center for the Development of Women's Resources (PPSW), our local partner in Aceh, Indonesia, established a microcredit program that has provided small business loans and basic business skills to 2,740 women in 52 villages following the devastating 2004 tsunami. With training in basic accounting and bookkeeping, as well as leadership skills, poor Acehnese women have been able to use these loans to start and expand small businesses. Their new skills, increased income, and support network have given the women more confidence

and status within their communities. Many are now beginning to voice their concerns to their local government to ensure that development plans and policies respond to their families' needs.

STAFF HIGHLIGHT

Dr. Sandra Hamid, Asia Foundation Aceh Program Director

Dr. Sandra Hamid joined The Asia Foundation staff in Indonesia in 1999. Dr. Hamid is a cultural anthropologist, who holds a Ph.D from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She is a development specialist and former journalist with extensive experience in promoting political participation. She is a current board member of Yayasan Pendidikan Seni Nusantara, an NGO dedicated to promoting education on pluralism through school curricula development. She also has extensive political experience, having served as deputy secretary general in the Indonesian National Mandate Party – one of the first political parties formed immediately after Suharto's downfall.

Since the tsunami struck in December 2004, Dr. Sandra Hamid has been working closely with local organizations on a massive effort to help Acehnese citizens rebuild their lives and communities. In addition, she has played a key role in the Foundation's programs on free and fair elections, pluralism, and women's political participation.



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The Asia Foundation

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