

# Bangladesh

The Asia Foundation is a nonprofit international development organization committed to improving lives across a dynamic and developing Asia for more than 60 years. The Foundation opened its first office in Dhaka in 1954, and has maintained a continuous presence since, working with the government of Bangladesh, civil society, community leaders, and the private sector to promote responsive and accountable governance, broad-based and inclusive economic growth, and basic rights and security. The Foundation shares in the goal of seeing a vibrant and flourishing Bangladesh and works across a number of critical programming areas to contribute to this outcome.



*The Asia Foundation improves lives and expands opportunities for the people of Bangladesh.*

## ELECTIONS

For nearly 25 years, The Asia Foundation has been a leader in innovative election programming, supporting civil society efforts in domestic election observation, citizen voices on electoral reform, the participation of women in political processes, and the use of technology to promote open and accessible electoral information. With the Foundation's support, the Election Working Group, a nationwide network of 28 Bangladeshi civil society organizations, has become the strongest civil society voice on elections in Bangladesh, providing accurate, objective, and timely reporting.

## RELIGION AND DEVELOPMENT

Religious leaders in Bangladesh carry considerable influence and command high levels of respect in society as they play important roles in shaping the values and beliefs of individuals and communities. For more than a decade, The Asia Foundation has engaged with religious and community leaders of influence at the national and local levels to advance social justice for women, citizen understanding

of good governance, and interfaith tolerance and dialogue. Through the Leaders of Influence Initiative, the Foundation enhanced the capacity of Buddhist, Hindu, Christian, and Muslim leaders, local government officials, and civil society representatives across the country to work together to contribute to solutions for development challenges and to advance democracy, tolerance, and social harmony.

## YOUTH

Since 2002, The Asia Foundation has empowered youth to actively participate as responsible citizens in social, political, and economic life. The Foundation builds leadership skills, experience, and civic consciousness among youth so that they can effectively participate in electoral and political processes and social development activities. To bridge the gap between police and youth, bring democratic practices and good governance values to schools, and foster civic participation through technology, the Foundation is encouraging youth to become catalysts for building social trust within communities and between citizens and the government.



## BANGLADESH

The Asia Foundation has maintained a continuous presence in Bangladesh since 1954.

With Foundation support, the Election Working Group, a nationwide network of 28 Bangladeshi civil society organizations, has become the strongest civil society voice on elections in Bangladesh.

Since 1954, Books for Asia has met a vital need in a country where poverty and illiteracy are continuing challenges to development.



### **INCLUSIVE GROWTH**

The Asia Foundation promotes inclusive growth through policy reform, participatory dialogue, evidence-based research, and support for women-owned businesses. Using a multi-faceted approach, the Foundation identifies key policy barriers to inclusive and green growth, and supports agents of change who individually or by mobilizing others drive necessary reforms

and actions. In the leather sector, the Foundation helped facilitate an agreement between the Government of Bangladesh and the private sector, paving the way for a long-delayed relocation of the industry to a new environmentally compliant estate. The relocation is expected to decrease pollution and increase leather exports by as much as \$1 billion per year.

### **WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT**

For more than 60 years, The Asia Foundation has worked to expand women's economic opportunities, increase women's personal rights and security, and advance women's political participation. The Foundation has supported district women's business forums to successfully secure commitments from the Bangladesh Bank and several commercial banks to expand access to loans, and helped launch a civil society coalition to increase the number of women included in the voter list. Working with imams and imams' wives, the Foundation has successfully increased women's awareness of their rights and reduced physical violence against women within target communities.



### **PROMOTING LABOR RIGHTS**

The Asia Foundation is providing critical support to ongoing efforts to protect labor rights in Bangladesh by promoting greater awareness and responsibilities among workers, employers, and relevant stakeholders, and facilitating workers' access to legal services in the ready-made garments and tea sectors. In 2015, 345 ready-made garments (RMG) workers participated in Rights Awareness sessions, 473 RMG workers received legal advice, and 52 disputes between employers and workers were resolved through mediation.





## BOOKS FOR ASIA

Since 1954, Books for Asia has met a vital need in a country where poverty and illiteracy are continuing challenges to development. The Asia Foundation donates English and Bangla language books to educational and public institutions nationwide to encourage literacy through a love of reading. The program continues to reach more female beneficiaries by

## THE ASIA FOUNDATION IN BANGLADESH

### 1954

The Asia Foundation is founded in San Francisco, USA, and opens an office in Dhaka, with a focus on agriculture, education, and exchange opportunities for future leaders.

### 1960s

Our “Box Library” initiative for rural students brings a wide range of Bengali language books, and we are early supporters of girls’ education through assistance to Viqarunnisa Noon School, then the most prominent girls’ school in East Pakistan.

### 1970s

We support the rehabilitation of libraries and medical schools and the establishment of a National Medical Library and Health Information Center in Dhaka to help a newly independent Bangladesh recover from the 1971 war for independence. The Foundation’s largest initiative in Bangladesh, support for family-planning services, begins in 1979.

### 1980s

Our scholarship program for girls, later taken over by the government of Bangladesh, helps pave the way for parity in girls’ enrollment in school through the secondary level by providing more than 20,000 scholarships. With our assistance, Banchte Shekha initiates a paralegal program to train village women in Muslim family law. We partner with the Bangladesh Institute of Law and International Affairs to provide judicial training.

### 1990s

To reinforce Bangladesh’s newly established democracy, we help strengthen the Parliament and Election Commission, and educate citizens about their right to vote in free and fair elections. We strengthen the reporting and writing skills of journalists, and support a newly established Transparency International Bangladesh conduct its first corruption survey.

### 2000s

We facilitate the establishment of the Elections Working Group, a network of civil society organizations committed to democracy and independent observation of elections, and foster an enabling environment for businesses and foreign investment outside of Dhaka. Our nationwide collaboration with 26,000 religious, secular, and community Leaders of Influence begins in 2004.

### 2010s

We increase citizen-police cooperation through Community Policing Forums in 518 villages and municipalities in Rajshahi and Rangpur and through university students and the Dhaka Metropolitan Police in Dhaka, support stronger linkages between Parliament and citizens, and mobilize youth to work for the development of their communities.

The Asia Foundation is a nonprofit international development organization committed to improving lives across a dynamic and developing Asia. Headquartered in San Francisco, The Asia Foundation works through a network of offices in 18 Asian countries and in Washington, DC. Working with public and private partners, the Foundation receives funding from a diverse group of bilateral and multilateral development agencies, foundations, corporations, and individuals.



HEADQUARTERS | 465 California Street, 9th Floor, San Francisco, CA 94104 USA  
Tel: (415) 982-4640, Fax: (415) 392-8863  
sf.general@asiafoundation.org

WASHINGTON, DC | 1779 Massachusetts Ave., NW, Suite 815, Washington, D.C. 20036 USA  
Tel: (202) 588-9420, Fax: (202) 588-9409  
dc.general@asiafoundation.org

BANGLADESH | House #5, Road #8, Baridhara, Dhaka-1212, Bangladesh  
Tel: 880 (2) 882-6941  
Fax: 880 (2) 882-6134  
bangladesh.general@asiafoundation.org

Contact: Sara L. Taylor, Deputy Country Representative, sara.taylor@asiafoundation.org

[www.asiafoundation.org](http://www.asiafoundation.org)