

Malaysia

Malaysia is an advanced, upper middle income country poised to achieve developed-nation status as early as 2020. With a commitment that began in 1954, The Asia Foundation today continues to support Malaysia's development. The Foundation works with government, civil-society, and private-sector partners to promote political and economic reform, encourage youth engagement, and foster dialogue on the key development issues facing contemporary Malaysia, including state-society relations, governance and accountability, international development cooperation, and achieving inclusive economic development.



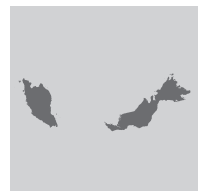
RESISTING CRIME AND EXTREMISM BY BUILDING RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

Asia Foundation programs in Malaysia work to strengthen state-society relations by promoting citizen engagement in governance reform. In the East Malaysian state of Sabah, in the sensitive, tri-border region of Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines, isolated villages with limited security resources offer attractive entry points for smugglers, human traffickers, and armed, nonstate actors who take refuge in locations that are notoriously inaccessible to police. While the government of Malaysia has been active in addressing border security, these efforts have focused on improving the capabilities of law enforcement and have not fully engaged local communities.

The Asia Foundation is working with the PACOS Trust, a community organization supporting indigenous communities in Sabah, to forge relationships between local law enforcement, community leaders, and youth that will complement the government's efforts to tackle these security threats.

By raising community awareness of basic rights, understanding the modus operandi of violent criminals, and sensitizing law enforcement to local values and norms, the program seeks to develop a community-based security network with shared mitigation strategies that will strengthen trust and cooperation between law enforcement and vulnerable villages, empowering whole communities to prevent crime and violence and safeguard their way of life.

In Peninsular Malaysia, the recent emergence of violent, extremist ideologies calls for innovative thinking to grapple with their subliminal appeal. Because cultural dislocation and alienation are proven catalysts of extremism, a new Foundation initiative seeks to integrate cultural programs with national security policy, summoning the power of traditional art forms to address the root causes of violent extremism. With its partner Pusaka, an NGO dedicated to the traditional Malaysian performing arts, The Asia Foundation is working to help marginalized youth reconnect to their



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cultural heritage through the practice and conservation of the traditional arts, including the creation of a comprehensive audio, visual, and written archive of the stories, performances, and pedagogy of the tradition.

CREATING CHANGE THROUGH FINANCIAL LITERACY AND SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT

As Malaysia stands at the brink of developed-nation status, it must provide the next generation with the essential skills to participate effectively in their nation's development. The Asia Foundation works with local partners to train young Malaysians, age 15-17, in financial literacy. The program, which combines financial education with social empowerment, has 150 qualified trainers and has reached more than 5,000 young men and women from 100 public schools in Malaysia. Participants have improved their social awareness, while acquiring essential skills like budgeting and saving.

In a related initiative, Foundation offices in Malaysia and Thailand launched a program to build entrepreneurship among young women in the conflict-affected region of the Thai-Malay border. The program focused on women whose economic prospects are threatened by the subnational conflict environment. The training module was designed to teach strategic business skills to new and existing entrepreneurs, increasing their self-reliance by providing them with the knowledge and resilience to raise their incomes without depending on loans. Forty-three young women entrepreneurs participated in the program, which included a three-day, intensive training in strategic entrepreneurship followed by in-person mentoring over a two-month period.

PROMOTING GENDER-RELATED LABOR REFORMS

Despite recent gains, the rate of female participation in Malaysia's labor force remains the lowest in Southeast Asia, reaching just 54.1 percent in 2015. This is well below neighboring Thailand (64 percent), Cambodia (79 percent), and Vietnam (70 percent), and is largely due to rigid policies such as inflexible work arrangements, lack of family-friendly facilities, a culture of working late into the evening, and the obstacles women must overcome to return to the workforce if they leave their job due to family commitments. Women

employees also face strong gender bias among employers, and sexual harassment, with one study reporting that 20 percent of women experienced threats or verbal harassment on the job. Women in manufacturing suffer a 25 percent pay gap, and tend to hold lower-wage and lower-skilled jobs than men.

In partnership with the National Association of Women Entrepreneurs Malaysia and the human rights organization Tenaganita, and in close consultation with the Ministry of Human Resources, The Asia Foundation is working to increase women's labor-force participation, by promoting internationally recognized, gender-related labor rights and domestic labor laws, and building the capacity of trade unions and women's organizations to support decent work for women. The Foundation educates workers and employers about gender-related labor laws, strengthens the support mechanisms for workers to exercise their legal rights, promotes leadership opportunities for women, and contributes to the dialogue on gender-related legal reforms.

BOOKS FOR ASIA

The Asia Foundation's Books for Asia program in Malaysia targets underserved and rural communities, distributing 52,615 books to more than 1,000 public schools, universities, and libraries in Peninsular and East Malaysia in 2016. New strategic partnerships with the Sarawak Foundation and the University of Malaya, on top of its existing partnership with the PACOS Trust in Sabah, expanded the program's reach in 2015, enabling dedicated, annual book shipments to the states of Sabah and Sarawak in East Malaysia, as well as Peninsular Malaysia. Books for Asia has distributed over 2.7 million books in Malaysia since its independence in 1957.

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.



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