EMPOWERING WOMEN

Cambodian women represent 51 percent of the country’s population, yet their ability to participate as equal partners in social, political, and economic life is severely constrained. Conservative traditional norms value women less than men, and persistent gender power imbalances lead to poverty, illiteracy, gender discrimination, and other obstacles that prevent women from effectively participating in Cambodia’s development.

The Asia Foundation’s decades of work in women’s empowerment focuses on three key, mutually reinforcing areas: expanding women’s and girl’s basic rights and security, promoting their economic, educational and legal rights, as well as promoting women’s effective participation in political public life.

PROVIDING EDUCATION TO WOMEN AND GIRLS

Serious gaps in education persist in Cambodia, with fewer girls attending and completing school, as parents prioritize boys’ education while girls are expected to help out at home. As part of The Asia Foundation’s Tertiary Scholarship for Girls program the Foundation provides girls with a quality education.

Education equips women and girls with the skills to pull themselves out of poverty and claim their rights. The Foundation’s scholarship program enables young women to give back to their communities using the skills and knowledge that only an education can provide.

COMBATING HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND UNSAFE LABOR MIGRATION

Unsafe labor migration practices put Cambodians at risk of exploitation and abuse, most commonly in the form of labor and sex trafficking. For over a decade, Cambodia has been monitored by NGOs and government agencies as a source, transit, and destination country for human trafficking. While the causes are complex, poverty remains a significant driver for human trafficking. The widening social-economic disparity between rural and urban areas places pressure on many to migrate for work.

The Asia Foundation’s approach to combating human trafficking is guided by an integrated strategy of prevention, protection, and prosecution support, as well as socially responsible labor recruitment. Through support to our partners at both grassroots and national levels, the Foundation has raised awareness of safe labor migration practices and strengthened social safety nets, including psycho-social support, access to justice, and shelter provision.


Books for Asia donates books on subjects including government and politics, business administration and management, economics, culture, the environment, information technology, medicine, and English.
ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND PROTECTING CITIZEN RIGHTS

The Cambodian justice system has often been seen to suppress the voices of nongovernmental organizations, unions, the media and individual human rights activists. Most commonly, activists or civil society representatives have been charged with criminal offenses such as defamation or incitement.

The Asia Foundation has been a pioneer in its support for the work of leading human rights organizations in the promotion and protection of human rights. The Foundation’s justice and human rights programs in Cambodia focus on issues such as resolving land disputes, monitoring imprisoned human rights workers, investigating human rights abuses, and providing legal representation to victims. In order to ensure that Cambodians have access to fair treatment under the law and have their rights protected, the Foundation is working to train lawyers to better represent human rights defenders, and to strengthen the capacity of local NGOs and CBOs to push for legal reform.

PROMOTING RESPONSIVE GOVERNANCE & CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

Since the 1993 elections, Cambodia has experienced challenges in creating a stable and mature democracy. To promote stability after years of civil war, the increased centralization of authority has led to a fracturing of civil society. The Asia Foundation supports Cambodian efforts to address citizen demands for efficiency and transparency in economic and social regulation. With Cambodia now engaged in a long-term process of decentralization, the Foundation’s Demand for Good Governance program, promotes citizen participation and engagement, particularly at the local level, and explores new strategies for improving the quality of governance.

STRENGTHENING LOCAL ECONOMIC GOVERNANCE

While overall poverty in Cambodia has fallen, the pace of development between urban and rural areas varies greatly and 50 percent of Cambodians are living on less than $2 a day. Cambodia is experiencing an increasingly unequal distribution of wealth geographically, as well as within the social structure where elites have been able to benefit disproportionately from an uneven playing field.

In Cambodia, The Asia Foundation considers micro, small, and medium enterprise (MSMEs) development as a critical step to achieve sustainable and a more balanced economic growth. For almost 10 years, the Foundation has been working with MSMEs in Cambodia to help create a more productive, enabling environment for local businesses, with the ultimate aim to improve the business environment for Cambodia’s provincial MSMEs so they can flourish and compete domestically and in foreign markets.

IMPROVING URBAN SERVICES

Phnom Penh’s population has doubled in the last decade, mostly due to inward migration. As a compounding factor, the authorities have evicted thousands of urban poor from central locations and relocated them to the peri-urban areas of Phnom Penh where services are few or non-existent. One of the major problems is the lack of garbage collection which leads to illegal dumping at informal dumpsites, on-site burning of waste, and the accumulation of household waste in waterways, drainage systems, and community streets. The accumulated waste fouls water sources, releases toxic gases during burning, threatens public health, and reduces the overall livability of communities.

The Asia Foundation’s Urban Services program focuses on the improvement of service delivery in Phnom Penh in Solid Waste Management. The Asia Foundation works closely with and provides technical assistance to local government on developing new policies and procedures to regulate and manage solid waste management, so that communities have affordable access to basic services such as clean drinking water or garbage collection.

BOOKS FOR ASIA

The Asia Foundation’s Books for Asia program envisions a world where every child has access to books that inspire them to develop to their full potential. An educated population is a powerful tool to combat poverty and disease, and to promote stability.

In Cambodia alone, Books for Asia has distributed approximately 900,000 English-language books to Cambodian universities, schools, NGOs, and public libraries since 1955.

In Cambodia, The Asia Foundation’s programs are funded by the governments of Australia and the United States, the World Bank, as well as private donors including Chong-Moon Lee and the Shirin Pandju Merali Foundation.