It is widely recognized that when you educate a girl, her life and the lives around her are changed forever. Education can improve economic opportunities by preparing girls with the knowledge and skills they need to find employment. Attending school also allows girls more time and opportunities to learn basic life skills, often resulting in later marriages for them, and fewer, healthier, and better educated children. However, in many developing Asian countries girls are often kept out of school, and many women are unable to read and write. Women who lack education and skills become vulnerable to cycles of illiteracy, poverty, and abuse. Our programs create opportunities for women and girls to avoid this trap. The Asia Foundation has long been committed to empowering girls and women by developing education initiatives across the Asia-Pacific region because we know it is smart development to invest in girls.

Our programs in action:

- In Afghanistan, with support from The National Geographic Society, the Foundation has helped the Rabia-e-Balkhi Girls High School in Kabul, which was nearly destroyed by years of war, to refurbish 14 classrooms and establish science and computer labs and a library now used by thousands of students.

- With support from Estée Lauder Companies Inc., the Foundation is providing scholarships to 70 disadvantaged girls in Vietnam who may not have been able to continue their education. In addition to the scholarships, which enable them to attend secondary school, the Estée Lauder Scholars also receive books, materials, and other educational materials.

- In Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Mongolia, and Vietnam, the Shirin Pandju Merali Foundation is providing scholarships to poor and vulnerable girls to pursue university education in math and the sciences. The highly competitive Shirin Pandju Merali Scholars Program offers girls the financial resources to pay for tuition, fees, books, educational materials, and other costs that would otherwise prohibit poor families from sending their daughters to college. This scholarship program offers gifted young women a chance to seek opportunities that will lift them and their families out of poverty.

- In Afghanistan, with support from USAID and in partnership with local organizations, The Asia Foundation is working to provide education to
3,100 girls in nine provinces. The Foundation is aiming to educate the segment of the population that was deprived of education during the 25 years of war and those who were living as refugees without access to formal education, as well as to provide teacher training and meet other needs identified by the Ministry of Education. The Foundation is also supporting enrichment activities, physical education, and computer and English courses for female students at Kabul University.

**VOCATIONAL TRAINING**

Disadvantaged women often lack marketable skills. Vocational training matched to market needs enables women to get better paying jobs and to start their own businesses. The Asia Foundation takes pride in encouraging women to break into higher-paid employment sectors traditionally dominated by men, such as auto mechanics, taxi driving, and motorcycle repair.

- In Cambodia, Foundation programs have enabled 100 vulnerable young people, primarily girls, to attend an 11-month vocational training course that provides hands-on experience working in hotels and restaurants in the tourist town of Siem Reap. Through job placement services, all of our graduates have been able to earn salaries twice the average wage in Cambodia.
- In China, the Foundation provides jobs skills training and microcredit for migrant women to start or expand their own businesses.
- In Nepal, the Foundation developed a life skills education and vocational training program that equipped vulnerable women with marketable skills in a range of high demand industries, such as motorcycle repair, electrical house wiring, and taxi driving, and then provided job placement support and counseling. Many of these women are now supporting themselves and significantly contributing to the livelihood of their families.

**PARTNER PROFILE: THE JANET W. KETCHAM FOUNDATION**

Janet Ketcham, founder of the Janet W. Ketcham Foundation, first traveled to Afghanistan in 1971. Her experience there led her to become a passionate advocate of Afghan girls’ education. Ms. Ketcham’s generosity has enabled our local Afghanistan office to provide much needed assistance to the Lama-e-Shaheed Girls’ School in Kabul. The school, which enrolls more than 4,500 girls, K-12, had been badly damaged during the past several decades of conflict. Through Ms. Ketcham’s support, the school building has been significantly upgraded with an improved roof, conference hall, chairs, and desks for students and teachers, and a complete overhaul to the school’s plumbing system.

**OUR DONORS MAKE OUR PROGRAMS POSSIBLE**

With contributions from private individuals, corporations, foundations, and public funders, we are able to create exciting new models and expand successful programs that are making a significant difference in the lives of girls and women across the Asia-Pacific region. To support our programs, please visit the Women’s Empowerment Program page at: [www.asiafoundation.org](http://www.asiafoundation.org).

The Asia Foundation is a private, non-profit, non-governmental organization working to advance mutual interests of the United States and the Asia-Pacific region. It is funded by contributions from corporations, foundations, individuals, and governmental organizations in the U.S., Europe, Canada, Australia, and Asia, and an annual appropriation from the U.S. Congress. Through its programs, the Foundation builds leadership, improves policies, and strengthens institutions to foster greater openness and shared prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region.