For over 50 years, The Asia Foundation has been cooperating with Indonesian organizations to expand women’s rights and opportunities, and enable them to participate and be effective leaders in the political and economic life of their society. While Indonesia is now the world’s third largest democracy, Indonesian women are still struggling to take part in decision-making processes and gain political power at the local and national levels. Many continue to lack financial independence and personal security.

The Asia Foundation partners with local Indonesian organizations to help women advocate for their rights and improve their lives. Our programs support leadership training, microfinance, and community-budgeting to enable women to effectively contribute to Indonesia’s development as both community members and potential leaders.

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

Our programs assist Indonesian women’s organizations to provide women with the skills and confidence to effectively present their priorities and incorporate them into community development plans that meet both women’s and men’s needs. Simultaneously, we work with government officials and prominent community and religious leaders to encourage their support for women’s participation in public decision-making.

For the 2009 elections, our programs have trained nearly 500 women to run effective election campaigns. These trainings included communication strategies, leadership skills, and education on substantive issues to contribute to their success once elected.

**PUBLIC RESOURCES**

Local government budgets determine how public resources are used in local communities. Indonesian women have historically received fewer benefits from public spending as their interests are often not considered in budget planning processes.

The Asia Foundation and our local partners have improved the ability of over 4,500 local government officials and civil society representatives, both women and men, to develop and monitor budgetary processes to ensure public resources are shared equitably. These trainings facilitate the involvement of community members in the important community planning and consultations that contribute to the government’s annual budget planning processes.

As a result of the Foundation projects, five of our six targeted districts in Sulawesi have increased funding for women’s priorities. Significantly higher levels of funding for health and education resulted in improved
services for women. Moreover, analysis of the budget further identified approximately US$1.4 million in wasteful spending. These resources have since been reallocated to better serve women’s priority needs.

**COMBATING HUMAN TRAFFICKING**

Foundation programs combat human trafficking at the community level and reform national government policies. Our local partners design innovative anti-trafficking programs to educate women on potential trafficking risks and how to avoid them. This includes working with the Foundation’s expert local staff to design a unique anti-trafficking training curriculum based on Islamic teachings for use by local religious leaders – often the most influential figures in a community. Religious leaders can reach thousands of people with critical culturally-appropriate information on the dangers of trafficking. As a result, communities across Indonesia are working together to prevent trafficking.

**ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT**

Our program in Aceh provides microloans to a network of 42 women’s groups with over 1,500 women members. Through our local partner, the Center for the Development of Women’s Resources, poor Acehnese women receive microloans and the technical training necessary to manage their funds and start productive small businesses. Loan recipients also gain vital skills and confidence to participate in the public arena, enabling them to help make decisions and solve community problems. Foundation programs also provide computers and training to build the capacity of local women’s groups to better track their lending and increase transparency.

**ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE**

Many Indonesian women do not have access to important information on reproductive health or adequate healthcare during pregnancy. Consequently, maternal mortality rates are almost double those in neighboring countries. To date, Foundation programs have trained community leaders on reproductive health information dissemination and data-collection techniques. Approximately 3,000 women across Indonesia have already received critical information through this program and are mobilized to pass their knowledge to other women.

**STAFF HIGHLIGHT**

**LIES-MARCOES NATSIR, INDONESIA**

“My work at The Asia Foundation allows me to play the important role of bridging the different perceptions and approaches of academics and grassroots activist communities, secular and religious women’s groups, and the traditionalists and modernists, to promote gender equality.”

Lies Marcoes-Natsir is a Senior Program Officer in The Asia Foundation’s Indonesia office where she manages a range of gender-focused programs. An internationally recognized trainer in the area of gender and Islam, Lies currently manages a program on reproductive health care, funded by the Royal Netherlands Embassy. Lies has worked for over 20 years to promote gender equality within Islamic communities, exploring Islamic values that protect and promote women’s rights.

**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).

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