



# Advancing Women's Political Participation

Women's participation in political life and public decision-making is fundamental to equitable societies, effective governance, and improved human development outcomes. When women are able to contribute to decisions that affect their lives – as active citizens, educated voters, and effective leaders – entire communities benefit. The Asia Foundation works to dismantle obstacles to women's political participation and empowers women across Asia to play active roles in political and decision-making processes.



## SUPPORTING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

While globally the proportion of seats in parliament held by women has doubled from 11 percent in 1995 to 22 percent in 2015, on average, women make up only 16 percent of parliamentarians in the Asia-Pacific region. Despite progress, women continue to face serious gender-related barriers as candidates and elected leaders at local and national levels.

In **Timor-Leste**, where women represent less than 3 percent of *xefe suku* (village chiefs), women's voices and concerns often go unheard in decision-making processes. In response, The Asia Foundation has supported training for women *suku* council representatives on public speaking, conflict resolution techniques, how to effectively raise issues at *suku* meetings, and civic campaigning. We also helped establish Women District Networks to provide platforms for women representatives to share experiences and to advocate for government agencies to advance their development priorities.

To respond to the decrease in the percentage of women elected to the National Assembly in **Vietnam**, the Foundation and its partners organized a regional workshop in 2015 that convened

more than 70 representatives from the National Assembly, government agencies, international organizations, and gender-focused organizations to discuss strategies to encourage more women to work in politics and governing bodies. Prospective female candidates are now being provided with coaching on campaigning skills and action planning strategies.

In **Myanmar**, more than 30 million voters cast parliamentary votes in 2015, many for the first time. One hundred and fifty women were elected. The Foundation conducted a study to better understand the challenges and constraints faced by women who served in Myanmar's parliamentary bodies from 2011 to 2015, and is now working to apply the lessons learned by this extraordinary first class of women representatives to support women currently involved in the political arena.

## ENHANCING WOMEN'S CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

While free and fair elections are an important component of a robust democracy, it is crucial that citizens cast informed votes. Women often have limited access to information about elections, particularly in contexts with lower levels of literacy and restrictions on mobility.

Recognizing the gender imbalance among newly registered voters in **Bangladesh**, The Asia Foundation helped create a coalition of more than 35 CSOs united around the “Women Count” campaign to increase the number of women included in the next voter list. The initiative combined a national-level media campaign with local voter education campaigns targeted at women in districts with the greatest gender imbalances. By October 2015, 48 percent of new voters added in the first phase of the 2015 update were women, a significant improvement from the previous year.

In **Indonesia**, we supported the development of a community reporting platform to promote women’s participation in holding governments accountable in the delivery of public services related to drinking water and security. The platform will serve as an important tool for information sharing and advocacy on issues that are critical to women.

### PROMOTING WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION IN PEACEBUILDING

Beyond ending conflict and instability, peace processes present an opportunity to integrate gender equality measures into political settlements. The UN Security Council has affirmed that women’s political participation is critical to bringing peace to war-torn societies and ensuring the long-term durability of peace agreements. The Asia Foundation actively supports women’s participation in peacebuilding and conflict resolution.

In the **Philippines**, we commissioned a groundbreaking study on the intersections of gender and conflict in Mindanao. The study identified key issues: conflict-related shifts in mobility that constricted men’s freedom of movement and created new opportunities for women, shifts in gender norms that increased women’s economic participation, and limited opportunities for women’s participation in the peace process. The report provided recommendations on how to address gender dynamics and sustain gender-transformative change in the post-conflict context. Following the 2014 peace agreement, the Foundation is supporting the political party development of Bangsamoro women to improve women’s participation in and influence over post-conflict governance processes.

### STRENGTHENING GENDER-RESPONSIVE POLICYMAKING

While formal legal protections can help establish the foundation for women’s participation in national and local politics, policymakers often lack the skills necessary to ensure that policies address the needs of women. The Asia Foundation helps political and community leaders to incorporate a gender perspective into their work and effect policy change that benefits women and girls.

In **Nepal**, the Foundation trained government representatives and political leaders, including youth, on gender budgeting, gender analysis, and social inclusion. Trainings included budgeting exercises on how to identify gender gaps in access to and control over resources, and planning methods and tools to support women and girls to participate in the political process. The trainings have supported leaders in Nepal to use policy and advocacy tools to facilitate and promote gender equality.



*The Asia Foundation promotes gender-responsive policy planning and budgeting to respond to the needs of women, including by analyzing the impact of policies on women and girls, and promoting resource allocation to advance gender equality and women’s rights.*

In **Indonesia**, the Foundation partners with local CSOs to ensure that policy plans and budgets meet the needs of women. We have supported the formation and strengthening of gender advocacy coalitions, which have promoted increased budget allocations for programs targeting women and those living below the poverty line. In addition, we have helped establish centers of excellence in gender-responsive planning and budgeting in Sulawesi and at the national level.

*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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