

# Advancing Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality in Vietnam



**The Asia Foundation**

Improving Lives, Expanding Opportunities

The Asia Foundation has worked to advance women's empowerment in Vietnam for more than 25 years, recognizing that when women and girls thrive, families and communities flourish. By forging strategic partnerships with government institutions, local NGOs, and the private sector, we pioneer results-based projects to strengthen women's and girls' economic opportunities, political voice and participation, and rights and security, while pursuing an integrated approach that promotes gender equality across all sectors.



## EXPANDING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

Despite difficulties, women-owned small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have been increasing in number, accounting for an estimated 31% of Vietnam's 500,000 SMEs, providing jobs for more than 1.63 million workers. The Foundation is working with the Vietnam Women Entrepreneurs Council to accelerate the growth of women-owned SMEs. Through research and advocacy, the collaboration is providing empirical inputs to support the development of implementation guidelines for Vietnam's new SME law as well as the formulation of support programs to expand women-owned SMEs.

With funding from the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade under the Business Partnerships Platform, the Foundation has facilitated a public-private partnership between the Vietnam Bank for Social Policies (VBSP) and MasterCard to develop VBSP's first mobile banking platform for low-income populations. The Foundation



commissioned a gender assessment in 2017 to uncover opportunities and challenges women and men encounter when using information technology to access financial services. Findings included that women are less likely to own and use a smartphone, and are more hesitant to use mobile services. The study also evaluated VBSP's operations to enhance gender mainstreaming within the bank's policies and served as a baseline to measure gender-related changes resulting from the project's interventions.

## ADVANCING EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES FOR GIRLS AND WOMEN

### SECONDARY SCHOOL SCHOLARSHIPS

In 2017, The Asia Foundation provided 333 girls in Nam Dinh, Can Tho, An Giang, and Hau Giang from low-income families with secondary school scholarships. By providing tuition support, books, uniforms, and bicycles, this scholarship program reduces the financial obstacles families face to keeping their daughters enrolled in school, and



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creates a supportive environment for girls to focus on their education. By the end of the academic year, 75% of scholars who graduated from high school had enrolled in universities or vocational schools.

## UNIVERSITY SCHOLARSHIPS

The Asia Foundation is committed to improving women's access to higher education, and through the Merali and Ludlow-Teillon Scholarship Programs, supports 120 disadvantaged young women to pursue university degrees in technical, information technology and agriculture fields. The programs also provide English classes, soft skills trainings, career orientation, mentoring, and counseling. Through these programs, young women are excelling in STEM careers and surpassing expectations about the role women can play in science and technology when given the tools to achieve success.

## ENHANCING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN ELECTIONS, PUBLIC LEADERSHIP, AND DECISION-MAKING

In the lead-up to the 2016 elections, with support from The Asia Foundation's Lotus Circle donors, we partnered with the Vietnam Women's Union (VWU) to increase women's representation in the National Assembly and People's Councils by supporting VWU to recruit and coach strong female candidates. This enabled the VWU to successfully advocate for a provision in the law that requires at least 35% of candidates in the official list to be women. The advocacy efforts resulted in achieving a significantly higher number of female candidates, 39%, on the final ballot, and higher rates of women elected.

In 2017, the Foundation supported the launch of the Women Leaders' Network in Vietnam, bringing together women from political and public

leadership positions, including young and newly appointed leaders, to discuss women's leadership issues, network, and learn from each other. The network is expected to promote and improve the quality of women's participation in politics and public administration.

## STRENGTHENING MIGRANT WOMEN'S RIGHTS

At least 25% of the 90,000 Vietnamese who migrate annually to work abroad are women, who are vulnerable to deception, labor violations, abuse, and trafficking. The Foundation is working to improve safe migration education and counseling for male and female migrant workers, enhance labor market reintegration for returnees, and improve the policy environment through advocacy. We are working with the Vietnam General Confederation of Labor to extend safe migration education and counseling to thousands of potential women and men migrant workers by training trade union officers in 60 high-risk communities. The project has reached more than 284,000 people.

The Asia Foundation partnered with The Center for Social Work and Community Development Research and Consultancy, the Center for Development and Integration and Lao Dong (Worker) Newspaper to create a civil society network to support migrant workers through mobile legal clinics and dialogues with local authorities. Due to the elevated risks faced by women, the project made a special effort to target women: 70% of the workers reached through outreach initiatives to improve access to legal information and advice were women. The project also created a social networking platform using information and communication technology and reached more than 2 million migrant workers.

*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.*



### SUPPORTING URBAN FEMALE FARMERS IN VIETNAM

"I have been linked with the farm since my early childhood; I want to continue living by farming and do not want to leave our farm." Mrs. Vu Thi Thuy, a farmer living in the Long Bien district, is among a group of local farmers who have lost most of their agricultural land to new urban development projects. With funding from GSRD, The Asia Foundation's Sustainable Livelihoods project enabled Mrs. Thuy to be trained in new skills and techniques for growing vegetables and she applied these lessons to her family's land with technical coaching from the project's experts. As a result, her farm yielded a higher volume and better quality produce, while lowering production costs. Mrs. Thuy also switched from selling her produce in wet markets to the nearby mobile sale point. She took the lead in running one of the mobile sales kiosks in a new urban area in the Giang Bien ward and has been improving her business management skills.

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