

Vietnam

The Asia Foundation has supported Vietnam's ongoing transformation since 1993 through a network of partners in government, the private sector, and civil society. With a resident office in Hanoi since 2000, the Foundation supports Vietnam's continued growth and rising regional and international stature with programs in critical areas such as women's economic empowerment, environmental resilience, girls' education, inclusive economic growth, migrant-worker rights, and regional and international integration.



STRENGTHENING GOOD GOVERNANCE AND INFORMED POLICY-MAKING

Effective governance requires institutions that are responsive to citizens' needs. The Asia Foundation in Vietnam builds the capacity of civil society to respond to the public interest and public expectations; promotes the use of evidence, including public opinion, in decision-making; and supports accountable, transparent, and participatory governance. This strategy is shaped by a broad definition of civil society that embraces a full range of actors, including community-based organizations, social media groups, labor unions, and professional and business associations.

The Foundation works with the Vietnam General Confederation of Labor and civil society organizations to raise awareness of labor and trade-union rights among white-collar workers and to improve the capacity of professional associations to represent their members, particularly in the policy arena. In partnership with the Vietnam Women's Union, we support women to run for office and succeed as National Assembly members. We assist government agencies and CSOs to conduct public

consultations on new legislation, from the Law on Environmental Protection to the Labor Code and the Law on Freedom of Association. And because cities are laboratories of innovation that can spur nationwide progress, the Foundation works with civil society, business, and government on a range of important urban issues, including municipal finance, urban planning, internal migration, and environmental management.

IMPROVING QUALITY OF ECONOMIC GROWTH

As Vietnam's expanding trade relations have raised concern about the quality of economic growth, our long-standing focus on enhancing competitiveness through reform has become even more critical. SMEs, by far the largest employers in Vietnam, remain small in relative economic terms and have limited opportunities for trade. This reduces incentives to innovate, hindering growth and job creation and constraining state revenues critical to meet growing societal needs.

The Asia Foundation works with business associations, cooperatives, and individual businesses, including women-led businesses, to enhance



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The Foundation trained managers from over 2,000 businesses in 20 disaster-prone provinces.

Books for Asia program distributed over 500,000 books to more than 200 institutions throughout Vietnam since 2000.

productivity through branding, marketing, quality standards, and other strategies. Our program with sectoral and provincial business associations and the Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry reaches out to 2,117 member businesses to provide training in good governance, improve sector standards, and promote policy dialogue with the government. Our work with the cooperative movement helps rural cooperatives improve management, business development, and connections to markets, producing higher incomes for members.

The Foundation's sustained assistance to the Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry has produced respected analytical tools, from the well-known *Provincial Competitiveness Index* to the *Vietnam Business Insight Survey*. We support SME participation in international value chains made possible by foreign trade agreements, and we are currently exploring how the Internet of Things and blockchain technology will allow these businesses to lower operating costs while certifying compliance with safety, worker, and environmental standards.

STRENGTHENING PROTECTIONS FOR WOMEN & VULNERABLE GROUPS

The Asia Foundation is committed to the protection and empowerment of women and girls, as well as other vulnerable or marginalized populations, including migrant workers, impoverished households, and the elderly. Our Women's Empowerment Program has three main components. First, we continue our focus on girls' education, and the Foundation and its local partner have provided year-long scholarships for 1,534 disadvantaged Vietnamese girls and vocational training and job placement for 100 disadvantaged youth. Second, despite progress on other measures of gender equality, female membership in the National Assembly has fallen, and the Foundation is developing programs to provide leadership development, nurture elected female leaders, and remove institutional barriers to women's political participation. Third, we support women's economic empowerment, with a particular focus on access to markets and support services for women-owned businesses.

Financial inclusion is central to our broader economic agenda, which extends beyond women to include the poor, workers abroad, and small-business owners. In partnership with MasterCard, we are working with the Vietnam Bank for Social

Policies (VBSP) to develop Vietnam's first-ever mobile banking platform for low-income clients and women-led microenterprises, which aims to reach seven million active clients of VBSP—mostly poor and vulnerable groups, including women, students, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, people living with HIV/AIDS, and overseas migrant workers.

Other programs promote the welfare of migrant workers through the protection of core labor rights and policies to provide adequate social safety nets. With the Vietnam General Confederation of Labor, the Foundation is working to extend safe-migration education to thousands of potential migrant workers and to improve vocational counseling and job placement for returning labor migrants.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION THROUGH GOOD GOVERNANCE

Vietnam's rapidly growing urban areas and industry development are exposing increasing numbers of people to risks related to both environmental pollution and extreme weather conditions such as typhoon winds, storm-related floods, heat waves, and periodic droughts. They also face a variety of uncertainties that can only be addressed by a wider range of policies and actions that promote human health and welfare, safety and security, economic and social development, reliable infrastructure, a sustainable environment, and effective leadership. The Asia Foundation unites policy advocacy with a business-centered approach to addressing these issues, as seen in a recent white paper on business responses to disaster risks, our work with the Ministry of Construction to develop a *City Resilience Index*, and development of an online toolkit for business disaster risk assessment for a Mekong Delta provincial government. We are also exploring the potential of green finance and SME accelerator programs that focus on renewable energy, energy efficiency, waste-heat-to-energy, and high-tech agriculture. We continue addressing environmental pollution in the country through strengthening state transparency and accountability, and promoting the role of CSOs and vulnerable groups in environmental policy and advocacy.

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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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