



**June 2018**

Dear Lotus Circle Advisors, Members, and Friends,

Last week, one of my colleagues in India told me that he cannot think of a more important topic to be working on right now than strengthening women's climate resilience. And so, I'm delighted to share that, thanks to your support, we're now helping women leaders in local government to develop local flood warning systems and community response protocols in flood-prone parts of India and Bangladesh. This work will amplify women's leadership, create a cross-border network of women to share best practices, and increase the safety and wellbeing of their communities.

I'm also pleased to report that we have commenced our Asian Development Bank-funded work to increase women's engagement in the rising green economy and to improve the gender responsiveness of climate change and disaster risk management policies in Mongolia, Laos, and Fiji. With the increased number of disasters and urban growth, this focus on women's leadership and gender inclusive responses is much needed. We see important opportunities to develop and share innovative and effective approaches in the time ahead and in so doing, save lives and strengthen communities. This would not be possible without the flexible funding support provided by the Lotus Circle. Thank you, all.

Warm regards,  
Jane

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## HIGHLIGHTS

### Asia Foundation hosts Women MPs Forum in Myanmar



As 48 women lawmakers assembled in Yangon, Myanmar, for the Third Women Members of Parliament Forum, Dr. Kim Ninh, the Asia Foundation's Country Representative in Myanmar said: "As extraordinary as it is for Myanmar to have a woman leader in Aung San Suu Kyi, that fact doesn't change the governance structure that has been built over the decades which favors men and inadvertently deepens gender inequality."

Drawing on The Asia Foundation's five-year study on the experiences of women lawmakers in Myanmar, Dr. Ninh added: "These women MPs have a pioneering role to play in bringing new voices to legislative deliberation and prioritization, and political parties can do much more to support women's political participation from candidate selection to what policies they include in their platforms." The Foundation hosted the Forum June 2-4 to strengthen women lawmakers' skills in public financial management and public speaking to better enable them to be effective leaders in Parliament and to champion for gender-responsive governance.

Read more about the Third Women MPs Forum [here](#). You can find the "Women's Political Participation in Myanmar: Experiences of Women Parliamentarians 2011-2016" report [here](#).

### Dr. Ramani Jayasundere and the Women's Empowerment Program share learnings at key forums in Washington, DC



On June 11th and 12th, Dr. Ramani Jayasundere, Director of Gender and Justice at The Asia Foundation in Sri Lanka, and the Foundation's Women's Empowerment Program team participated in the Gender 360 Summit in Washington, DC, where they led discussions on girl-focused gender

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analysis, gender-based violence in Sri Lanka, girls' education and leadership in Afghanistan, and gender mainstreaming.

Then, on June 14th, Dr. Jayasundere spoke at the Interaction Forum in Washington, DC on a panel called *How to Achieve Gender Equality in Fragile and Conflict Affected States*, where she made a powerful argument for why the primary barrier to women's empowerment in post-conflict Sri Lanka is gender-based violence.

Dr. Jayasundere also published a blog piece on "Seven Questions to Consider When Promoting Gender Justice in Sri Lanka." Read the blog [here](#).

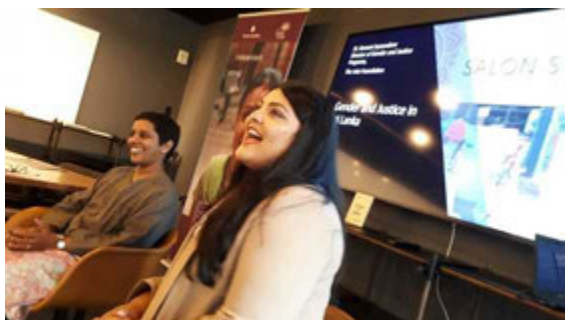
### **Lotus Circle Salon in San Francisco: Readers Into Leaders**



On June 7th, Lotus Circle Bay Area Convener Lucy Lee hosted a Salon in her beautiful San Francisco home exploring how The Asia Foundation is catalyzing girls' learning and leadership by collaborating with authors and illustrators in Asia. Melody Zavala, Director of the Foundation's Books for Asia program, discussed how the program is working with local authors and illustrators to create books for young children that depict strong

female lead characters.

### **Lotus Circle Salon in New York: Gender and Justice in Sri Lanka**



On June 13th, The Asia Foundation's Lotus Circle in New York hosted Dr. Ramani Jayasundere, Director of Gender and Justice for The Asia Foundation in Sri Lanka, who spoke in a moderated discussion and offered an overview of the current challenges and insights on the Foundation's work to advance gender justice. Many Lotus Circle Advisors in New York attended this event,

including some new advisors and members and friends of The Asia Foundation.

### **Spotlight: Meet Lotus Circle Advisor Winnie Feng**



Lotus Circle Advisor Winnie Feng says she became aware of girls' perilous lack of opportunity in Afghanistan long ago: "In graduate school, part of my research focused on a historical timeline of girls' education in Afghanistan from 1928 to the post-Soviet era pullout, so I was familiar with the extraordinary underground work of Dr. Sakena Yacoobi during the Taliban era. When I had the opportunity in New York to meet The Asia Foundation's then-country representative in Afghanistan, and she brought up the Foundation's work with Dr. Yacoobi, I realized this was more than coincidental. Professor Yacoobi launched the first learning centers inside refugee camps in Afghanistan and Pakistan. She risked her life to run illegal home schools for girls during the Taliban reign, pioneered student-centered learning and teacher training in Afghanistan, and created first-of-their-kind specialized health clinics for

women, enabling many women and their families to see a doctor for the first time ever.

"The first Lotus Circle project I participated in was to help fund the rebuilding of two schools in Kabul. In 2009, Lotus Circle Advisors and staff from the Foundation's Women's Empowerment Program went to see first-hand the impact that our funds – together with matching grants from the National Geographic Society – were having on young girls. My own sense of personal satisfaction doesn't compare to what this means for more than 4,500 girls at these terrific schools. There are many organizations that promote girls' education in Afghanistan today, but The Asia Foundation provided the early assistance to local partners needed to build capacity in targeted, sustainable ways. We then had the honor of presenting a Lotus Leadership Award to Dr. Yacoobi for her contributions to the education and health of Afghan women and children."

Winnie adds: "I think of Lotus Circle members as modern-day activists, passionate about positive change but who just can't be on the ground. But we can make things happen by raising awareness, taking action, and empowering others in small ways that add up to meaningful change."

Winnie is a trustee of The Asia Foundation and member of the Change Starts Here

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Campaign Cabinet. She is an advocate for children's education and created the Children's Language Program at the China Institute in America and she has served on the Executive Committee for Friends of Asian Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Winnie is a member of the Society of American Archivists and the Library Archivist at the Saint David's School in New York City. She and her husband Michael support programs in the arts, education, and research into modern Chinese history. Winnie holds degrees from the University of Pennsylvania and Columbia University.

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## COMING UP

### July 19: Lotus Circle Salon in New York City with Timor-Leste Country Representative



On July 19th at 9:30am in New York City, Todd Wassel, Country Representative of The Asia Foundation's office in Timor-Leste, will speak about current challenges and opportunities for our work on the ground, including *Nabilan*, the largest program addressing gender-based violence in Timor-Leste.

For more information or to RSVP, please contact Nikita Desai:

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SUPPORT OUR WORK

Missed the May edition of Lotus Letter? [View it here.](#)

*The Lotus Letter photo (top of email) depicts The Asia Foundation's mental health and psychosocial training sessions held with Counselling Assistants in Sri Lanka. Image courtesy of Gemunu Amarasinghe.*

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