



## March 2020

**In this issue:** The Asia Foundation COVID-19 Response, Lotus Leadership Awards Gala, COVIBOOK, Women's Economic Participation, Australasian AID Conference, Violence and Social Media, Philippines, and ASEAN

### [Addressing the COVID-19 Crisis](#)

**March 27, 2020** — As Covid-19 continues to spread, The Asia Foundation is responding. There are significant implications for public health and safety, economic security, governance, and political stability across Asia, and the Foundation is refocusing its work to battle the emerging global Covid-19 pandemic. Our 18 country offices are communicating closely with our partners, donors, and counterparts in government, civil society, and the private sector. The Foundation's long-term presence and networks across Asia are providing for effective operational continuity and ongoing adaptation of programs appropriate to the evolving situation.

The challenges created by the health crisis are disproportionately impacting communities The Asia Foundation serves, and we are creating thoughtful responses to urgent needs—especially for women, the poor, and other vulnerable communities for whom Covid-19 poses exceptional risks. Here are some areas where we are working to meet immediate needs:

- Expanding access to Asia's [only free digital library for children](#), The Asia Foundation's [Let's Read](#), which delivers e-books to children any time, any place, in numerous languages, dramatically improving access to educational materials. With growing shelter in place orders, the need for resources to help children understand the world around them and maintain normalcy is greater than ever. This week we added [#COVIBOOK](#) to our library, a new volume that explains the virus to children. Currently translated into 11 languages, more will follow in the coming days.
- In many countries, millions of people live in densely populated areas where access to running water and primary health care is limited. The Asia Foundation's [Coalitions for Change](#) program in the [Philippines](#) supports the efforts of longtime partner [Action for Economic Reforms](#) and its health-focused networks to track case infection demographics, and monitor the effectiveness of local government and community mitigation policies, and facilitate platforms for government, civil society, and the private sector to coordinate information sharing and advocacy to address the spread of Covid-19. [Read more in the DevPolicy blog from Asia Foundation experts.](#)
- Quarantines, emergency settings, overcrowding, and other circumstances amplified by Covid-19 pose serious risk of increased incidents of **gender-based violence (GBV)**, including child abuse. The Foundation is strengthening women's networks to respond to GBV and providing data on prevention strategies as well as services for survivors.
- Small businesses often rely on in-person cash purchases. We are working to provide **digital literacy coaching and support** for small and medium enterprises to help them adapt to the digital commerce required during social distancing and to sustain a sound economy.

In the days and weeks to come, the Foundation will continue to adapt and reposition our programming as possible to address the most critical issues facing Asia during the crisis. As the emergency unfolds, the health and safety of our staff, community, partners, and grantees remains our top priority. In this new operating environment, we are holding steadfast to The Asia Foundation's mission of improving lives and expanding opportunities throughout Asia. Your continued encouragement and [support](#) during this critical time is deeply appreciated.

[David D. Arnold](#)

President, The Asia Foundation

## Events

The Asia Foundation has postponed or made events virtual in light of the COVID-19 crisis.

## Upcoming Events

**ONLINE – April 14** – The Impact of Transportation Services on the Mobility and Safety of Women in Asia

Despite growing evidence of the unique ways women and men experience transportation services, gender and social inclusion issues have long been overlooked in the transportation sector. The sector has traditionally been male-dominated, from decision-makers to transport workers, despite women comprising a large portion of public transport users globally and influencing key mobility decisions within the family. Join [Diya Nag](#), Associate Director of Programs, The Asia Foundation (India) and [Karla Dominguez Gonzalez](#), Gender Specialist, World Bank for a discussion on how we can advance safety, inclusion, and empowerment in the transportation sector. For more information on our Women's Empowerment Program, click [here](#) and [register](#) for the upcoming webinar.

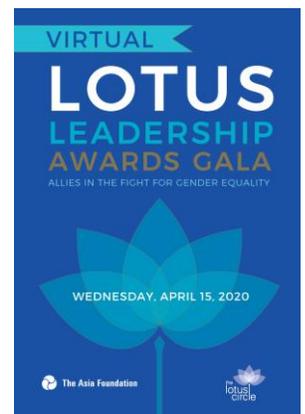
**ONLINE - New York City, March 11** – Embracing new ways to convene, The Asia Foundation will celebrate our annual Lotus Leadership Awards virtually on Wednesday April 15, at 6 pm EST. Honoring individuals and organizations who are powerful allies in the fight for gender equality, the awards are hosted annually by the [Lotus Circle](#), a community of philanthropists who invest in The Asia Foundation's work to strengthen economic, social, and political rights and opportunities for women and girls in Asia.



Ziauddin Yousafzai

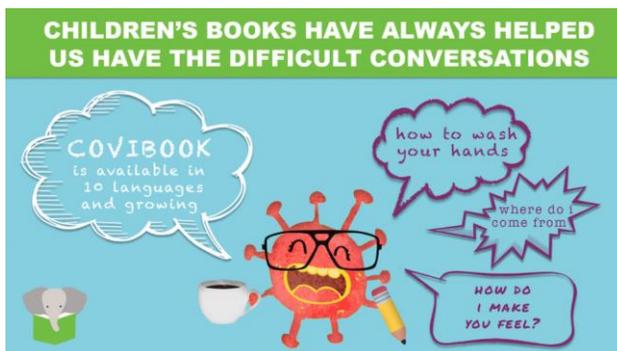
[The 2020 Lotus Leadership Awards](#) will honor Ziauddin Yousafzai for his activism of girls' rights to education as co-founder and board member of Malala Fund; Mastercard for their commitment to women's economic empowerment and financial inclusion; and The Gender Lab in India, for their engagement of boys as allies in the movement for gender equality. Click [here](#) to learn more about The

Asia Foundation's [Women's Empowerment Program](#).



## Technology and Development

### [New Children's Book Explains COVID-19 for Children](#)



With the spread of COVID-19 and many countries, the need for resources to help children understand the world around them and maintain normalcy in their lives is greater than ever. In response, The Asia Foundation's [Let's Read](#) initiative published [COVIBOOK](#), written by Manuela Molina Cruz, to guide and inspire conversations between parents and children about COVID-19. It helps children and their families explore the emotions they may be experiencing and shares best practices to stay healthy. [COVIBOOK](#) is available in 20 Asian languages in our [digital library](#) 3000 locally relevant home reading resources in 28 languages. Read more about [Books for Asia](#).

## Notes from the Field

### [Getting Her Gig on: The Future of Work for Indian Women](#)

On the eve of International Women’s Day, [Indian](#) women are still too often excluded from the formal economy. But they’re finding a place in the gig economy, thanks to a raft of tech start-ups that have given them new freedom, flexibility, and economic [dignity](#). Gig start-ups offer considerable [economic opportunity for women](#); female participation is twice that in the gig-economy labor force and the pay gap is narrower than in the formal economy.

However, lack of clarity on how the gig economy will be governed poses risks, particularly given that women are more vulnerable to sexual harassment and assault. Further research is needed to understand the experiences of low-skilled workers and how these new technologies affect women’s economic participation. It is also essential to develop a regulatory framework that protects women from violence, exploitative labor practices, and provides access to benefits and insurance. This will require the concerted efforts of government, civil society, and the legal fraternity, but most importantly, the voices and participation of women gig workers themselves.



### [Insights from the Australasian AID Conference 2020](#)



*The Asia Foundation’s Civil Society panel with Nicola Nixon (Photo: Anthea Mulakala/The Asia Foundation)*

This year’s [Australian](#) AID Conference hosted by the Development Policy Center of Australian National University and The Asia Foundation featured 58 panels and 220 presenters on the future of international development cooperation. Panels brought together practitioners, experts, and global leaders to discuss the pressing issues of aid and international development (AID). The Asia Foundation organized an expert panel on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) featuring keynote speaker Sri Lankan lawyer, diplomat, and human rights advocate Radhika Coomaraswamy. The panel called for a stronger evidence base and consultation with women’s movements to inform and drive the WPS agenda. In his presentation on the five necessary paradigm shifts in the future of concessional international finance, development writer and practitioner Jonathan Glennie underscored the need to recognize aid as a scarce

resource for global investment. The Asia Foundation’s Panel “Rethinking Civic Space in Southeast Asia” presented new research on shrinking civic space in seven countries in the region. The study advocates for an inclusive understanding that captures a broader range of civic engagement. The conference featured dynamic debate and coincided with Australia’s announced “refresh” of its AID framework that calls for targeted priorities linked to Australian national interests. Read more about The Asia Foundation’s [Development and Aid Effectiveness](#) programs.

## Program Highlight

### [Violence in the Age of Social Media](#)

The Asia Foundation invited partners who monitor conflict in the region to discuss technology and its role in escalating and mitigating violence during the two-day conference “Violence in the Age of Social Media: Working Together to Respond More Effectively.” The panel included tech companies, academics, and civil society organizations such as Myanmar Institute for Peace and Security. Gullnaz Baig of Facebook trained participants on utilizing social media more effectively in advocacy efforts. Panelists discussed how social media amplifies the impact of conflict in the region and is a tool to mobilize violence and shape supporter perspectives. Experts noted that application is not uniform across groups; those with younger leadership tend to have more advanced social media skills and usage. Panelists identified the need for coordinated response from tech companies to prevent disinformation and extremism. During discussions, participants called for collaboration between CSOs and tech companies to espouse understanding of local contexts and provide alternative knowledge to better [monitor](#), and

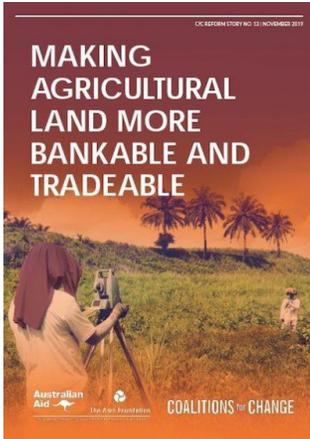


*Violence in the Age of Social Media conference participants.*

ultimately prevent violence. Learn more about the Foundation's work on [conflict and fragile conditions](#).

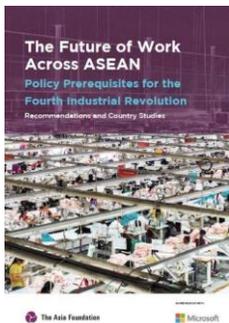
## Publications of Interest

### [Making Agricultural Land More Bankable and Tradeable](#)



In February 2019, President Rodrigo Duterte signed the Agricultural Free Patent Reform Act into law. This new law allows patent holders to sell or use their land as collateral and frees up some 2.6 million parcels, 10 percent of all land titles in the Philippines. This publication provides an overview of poverty and agriculture in the Philippines and the role of property rights at its nexus. It traces the journey of Philippine leaders, the Foundation for Economic Freedom, and Coalitions for Change in bringing about a reform that has the potential to improve productivity and income for Philippine agriculture in the years to come. Learn more about The Asia Foundation's work in the [Philippines](#) and role in [Coalitions for Change](#).

### [The Future of Work Across ASEAN](#)



The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), characterized by interrelated technological advancements that transform the ways we create and transfer services, goods, and information, presents the basis for a new economic paradigm. The implementation of technologies that mimic and transform many human and biological processes presents a variety of opportunities and challenges for the ASEAN region. With support from Microsoft, The Asia Foundation led a regional research program examining the challenges confronting ASEAN policymakers in the face of 4IR transformations and provided recommendations for how stakeholders can work together to promote prosperity, jobs, and inclusive growth. Learn more about the Foundation's [Technology and Development](#) programs.

The Asia Foundation is a nonprofit international development organization committed to improving lives across a dynamic and developing Asia. Informed by six decades of experience and deep local expertise, our work across the region addresses five overarching goals—strengthen governance, empower women, expand economic opportunity, increase environmental resilience, and promote regional cooperation.