Welcome to The Asia Foundation's Washington, D.C. April newsletter. This issue features updates about our recent roundtable on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Updates from Asia and the Pacific and Women's Roles in Peacebuilding: The Power of Women Leading Peace in Mindanao, featuring the Bangsamoro Women’s Movement in the Philippines; an InAsia blog post and podcast episode about climate change and overlapping vulnerabilities in Bangladesh, as well as recent publications on digital trade agreements, strengthening the care economy, international peace support and effective peacebuilding in Myanmar, and securing legal recognition for the rights of persons with disabilities in Indonesia.

Recent Events

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Updates from Asia and the Pacific
April 10 – Gender inequality in Asia and the Pacific is compounded by the current climate and environment crises, the lingering socio-economic effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the ever-evolving technology landscape in the region. Jane Sloane, Senior Director of the Foundation’s Women’s Empowerment and Gender Equality program, provided an overview of the current challenges facing women and girls in Asia and the Pacific, while focusing on the Foundation’s work to address the gendered impacts of climate change and technology-facilitated gender-based violence. Learn more about the Foundation’s Women’s Empowerment and Gender Equality program.

Women’s Roles in Peacebuilding: The Power of Women Leading Peace in Mindanao

April 23 – Women are critical to achieving sustainable peace and can play a significant role in peacebuilding and security efforts globally. In the Philippines, the Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front signed the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro to end nearly four decades of intermittent violent civil conflict in Mindanao. A strong movement of Bangsamoro women played a crucial role in leading efforts to secure peace in Mindanao, and they have continued playing a vital role in the formation of the new Bangsamoro Constitution, Parliament, and government. The Asia Foundation supported these efforts during the peace process and is now supporting sustainable economic development and strategies to strengthen social cohesion and sustain peace in the region. This panel featured Dr. Jennifer Hawkins, Acting Division Chief, Women, Peace, and Security, Secretary’s Office of Global Women’s Issues, U.S. Department of State and key Bangsamoro women leaders, Chairperson Bainon Karon and Atty. Sha Elijah Dumama-Alba, reflecting on their role in advancing peace, justice, and prosperity in Mindanao. Learn more about the Foundation’s work in the Philippines.

On April 25, the Bangsamoro Women’s Movement is being honored at the Lotus Leadership Awards Gala in New York, for their groundbreaking contributions to the Mindanao peace process. The gala is hosted by the Asia Foundation’s Lotus Circle, a
vibrant community of committed individuals and organizations supporting the Women's Empowerment program to strengthen economic, social, and political rights and opportunities for women and girls in Asia.

Voices from the Field

Hearing Local Voices at "Ground Zero" of Climate Change

Bangladesh is facing a climate emergency. Although it is one of the world's least polluting nations, it is already experiencing some of the most severe effects of changing weather patterns, including seasonal flooding, erosion, and salinity intrusion, all of which can be catastrophic for local communities and their livelihoods. The Asia Foundation is working in partnership with the Centre for Peace & Justice of BRAC University in Bangladesh to develop a framework for assessing how existing drivers of fragility interact with the onset of climate change, in order to answer the question of how climate adaptation strategies reflect and respond to broader social and political fragilities. This InAsia blog and podcast provide an overview of the findings from the initial scoping study of the project, as well as examples of the human impacts of climate disruption where the social compact is precarious. Learn more about the Foundation's Environment and Climate Action program.

Recent Publications
Strengthening Care Economies in Asia and the Pacific

Women’s equal access to economic opportunities is imperative for future growth and prosperity in Asia and the Pacific. The participation of women in the labor force is also critical to women’s advancement and achieving gender equality in the region. This is further influenced by low-middle, and high-income countries.

For example, in India, including just 35 percent of non-working professional women in the economy would add $40 billion (USD). Yet, in 2016, India had 9 million women also working as wage-earners in the workforce as a part-time business.

However, women’s access to the labor force is the double burden of care and household responsibilities that disproportionately fall on women. This burden is particularly acute in Asia.

To advance women’s economic security and opportunities, there is an urgent need to establish a robust care economy ecosystem that redistributes the burden of care through effective care policies and investments in promoting care delivery systems. This focus will also continue to provide these in most of care with gender options and choices. Understanding the nature of care work is crucial to future care policies, delivery, and services. However, current care data is very limited.

Only 21 of 38 countries in Asia and the Pacific have any data points to measure unpaid care.

Moreover, policymakers on care is difficult because:
1. The right policy offers vary by country. Each nation defines care, gender roles, and child care.
2. The focus on care economy is nascent that there are no evidence-based policies that governments can adopt.
3. There is a lack of coordination on care policies, delivery, and justice.

When there is a focus on care as an area, it can include multiple government functions including gender labor, health, social protection, education, and training.

Our Approach

The Asia Foundation’s approach is building resilient care ecosystems on the key pillars.

1. Develop the care agenda as a national level through influencing care policy, programming, delivery, and advocacy.
2. Improve coordination and collaboration between diverse stakeholders within the care ecosystem.
3. Build the evidence and global knowledge base around care economics, the design and delivery of effective care delivery that increases choice for parents and those needing care.

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Pillar 1: Build the care economy nationally

In Thailand, the Foundation’s work is to increase access to children, to recognize the critical role that affordable and accessible children’s services play in building meaningful and productive lives for children, adolescents, women, and families.

Recognizing the gap in government policies that children aged six to two years, the Foundation has engaged the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security to support the employer of children services providers. This includes promoting policies that strengthen the capacity of children services to offer high-quality services.

Through recent partnerships, the Foundation is also coordinating with Thai government and the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration to develop and strengthen private sector health-affordable, accessible, and high-quality children’s options.

Strengthening Care Economies in Asia and the Pacific

Women’s equal access to economic opportunities is imperative for future growth and prosperity in Asia and the Pacific, yet one critical barrier for women to enter the workforce is the double burden of care and household responsibilities that disproportionately fall on women. Therefore, to advance women’s economic security and opportunities, there is an urgent need to establish a robust care economy ecosystem that redistributes the burden of care through effective care policies and investments. This publication outlines the Asia Foundation’s approach to building resilient care ecosystems. Learn more about the Foundation’s Women’s Empowerment and Gender

Digital Trade Agreements in Asia and the Pacific

Digital trade agreements (DTAs) are instrumental in expanding the benefits of the digital economy in emerging Asia. Moreover, economies in Asia and the Pacific have been the key architects of trade rules for the digital era. DTAs set trade rules and economic collaboration in the digital economy and establish the minimum framework in which data and transactions are performed digitally among economies. This publication reviews the landscape of digital trade and digital economy agreements (DEAs) in Asia and the Pacific, analyzes the future evolution of DTAs and DEAs’ scope, and identifies trends looking ahead. Learn more about the Foundation’s Technology & Development program.
International Peace Support and Effective Peacebuilding in Myanmar

This research project explores the peace process that surrounded the 2015 Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement in Myanmar. It focuses on successes and failures of international support for peacebuilding at that time, drawing together findings that policymakers and practitioners in Myanmar and internationally can apply. While future efforts to find peace in Myanmar will look very different from those of the past, it is vital that lessons from the past are considered. Learn more about the Foundation's Conflict and Fragility program.

Securing Legal Recognition for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Indonesia

This paper is part of the Navigating Successful Policy Reform series undertaken by Coalitions for Change and the Institute for Human Security and Social Change at La Trobe University. It is one of three case studies exploring developmental policy reforms in Vanuatu, Kenya, and Indonesia that demonstrate politically smart and learning-oriented ways of working to achieve change in challenging political contexts. In particular, the cases investigate whether those reform stories are similar to the development entrepreneurship model that has been highly successful in the Philippines. Learn more about the Foundation's Coalitions for Change program.
The Asia Foundation is a nonprofit international development organization committed to improving lives and expanding opportunities across Asia and the Pacific. Informed by 70 years of experience and deep local knowledge, our work is focused on governance, climate action, gender equality, education and leadership, inclusive growth, and international cooperation. We work in more than 20 countries through our 17 permanent country offices and programs across Asia and the Pacific, supported by a headquarters in San Francisco and an office in Washington, DC. Our funding comes from a diverse array of bilateral and multilateral development agencies, foundations, corporations, and individuals.