



The Asia Foundation

Women's Empowerment Program

A Year in Review



A close-up photograph of a man and a woman laughing joyfully. The man, on the right, is wearing a blue t-shirt and has his eyes closed in a wide smile. The woman, on the left, is wearing a blue and orange plaid shirt and is also laughing heartily. The background is a soft-focus green and pink floral pattern. At the top of the image, there is a decorative gold-colored border with intricate scrollwork patterns.

When women thrive, families, communities, and societies flourish.

The Asia Foundation envisions a world where women have the opportunity and the means to reach their goals, and are full participants in economic, social, and political life.

The Women's Empowerment Program strengthens women's and girls' rights and security, political participation, and economic opportunities. These key pillars of empowerment reinforce each other and are essential to women's advancement. In addition to focusing on these core elements of women's empowerment, we promote gender equality through all Asia Foundation programs.



Our Values

- › Women must be active decision-makers at all levels of society.
- › Women's and girls' lives must be free from violence and discrimination.
- › Women must participate fully and fairly in economic activities.
- › Investing in women and girls produces exponential returns.
- › Women and men must work together to forge locally driven paths to gender equality.

In the following pages, you will read about how our programs align with these values and the impact we and our partners had on the lives of women and girls across Asia in the span of one year. Featured examples reflect some of The Asia Foundation's key achievements and progress towards women's empowerment and gender equality in 2015.



Engaging with the Global Community

The Women's Empowerment Program actively engages with the global community to advance women's empowerment and gender equality. In the past year we joined numerous international events and fora on issues ranging from women's entrepreneurship to the promotion of gender equality in national policies.



The 59th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women reviewed global implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the historic roadmap for the realization of women's rights endorsed by 189 governments in 1995. Carol Yost, Founder of the Women's Empowerment Program, spoke on a panel on Initiatives to Prevent Violence against Women in the Asia-Pacific Region that was organized by 2015 Lotus Leadership Awardee, Ranjana Kumari of the Center for Social Research.



In May, Women's Empowerment Program Founder Carol Yost presented at the Alibaba Global Conference on Women and Entrepreneurship in Hangzhou, China. She discussed opportunities technology presents in facilitating women entrepreneurs' access to information, online marketplaces, and networks.



In August, we collaborated with the Government of Japan to organize a roundtable at the World Assembly for Women Symposium in Tokyo. Associate Director of the Women's Empowerment Program, Eileen Pennington, moderated a roundtable discussion on Supporting Women Entrepreneurs Across Asia, and served as a subject-matter expert for the Equal Futures Partnership inter-governmental meeting.

In September, Carol Yost joined a distinguished group of women leaders to speak at the launch event of the Women 20 (W20) Summit in Ankara, Turkey, where she outlined the barriers for women-owned businesses to conduct trade and steps to overcome them. She also contributed to the W20 Policy Brief: Meeting the G20's Gender Goals.



In Washington, D.C., Eileen Pennington discussed The Asia Foundation's efforts to address gaps in women's political participation in post-conflict and complex environments in Asia.



Unite to End Violence against Women and Girls in Bangladesh

#OrangeTheWorld



In December, we leveraged social media platforms to raise awareness of gender-based violence to mark the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence campaign. Program Officer Elizabeth Silva and Assistant Director Barbara Rodriguez led a global #GBV Tweetchat relay in collaboration with eight other organizations. More than 450 people participated directly in the day-long tweetchat, which reached an estimated 7.9 million people.

A photograph of three women in traditional attire. The woman on the left wears an orange headscarf and a purple garment. The woman in the center wears a pink floral headscarf and a pink floral garment. The woman on the right wears a red patterned top and a red headscarf. They are all looking towards the camera. The background features colorful fabrics and a patterned wall.

Expanding Women's **Economic Opportunities**

Investing in women is one of the most powerful ways to reduce poverty and accelerate development. We expand economic opportunities for women by improving access to education, addressing institutional and cultural barriers, and providing women entrepreneurs with the tools they need to be successful.



EDUCATION

Educating girls catalyzes economic, social, and health benefits that reach far beyond individual transformation, lifting up families and entire societies. The Asia Foundation recognizes that providing girls and young women with an opportunity to pursue an education is one of the most effective ways to promote gender equality and eradicate poverty in Asia. **In one year:**

- Over 230 young women graduated with degrees in science and technology after participating in our scholarship programs in Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Mongolia, and Vietnam.
- 64 girls' schools and women's colleges in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka received 21,000 new books valued at \$75 million.
- Nearly 400 girls in Vietnam received scholarships to support their secondary school education.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The Asia Foundation improves women's economic opportunities and advances women's entrepreneurship by addressing legal, regulatory, and cultural constraints and providing current and aspiring women business owners with tools to help them start and grow profitable, productive enterprises. **In one year:**

- Three public-private dialogues held in India, Bangladesh, and Nepal convened nearly 150 women entrepreneurs, senior government officials, and representatives from financial institutions to discuss and identify policies and practices to build women entrepreneurs' skills, increase their access to finance, and promote a gender equitable policy environment.
- Through a grant to local partner Edu Vision in Nepal, more than 70 women were trained on candle making, sales, organic briquette and other skills, and a women's cooperative was formed to continue to carry on the work.
- We supported 60 rural women entrepreneurs from India and Sri Lanka to develop business and management capacity, and gain skills in marketing, finance, and distribution strategies.
- To build the capacities of women farmers to engage in sustainable economic activities and generate higher incomes in Hanoi, we trained 65 women farmers on safe vegetable production, business management, and marketing. All trained farmers applied green agriculture methods on their own farms.

“This scholarship has provided me not only with financial means, but has also given me awareness of my responsibility and duty to contribute to society.”

— ENKH-AMGALAN, CURRENT MERALI SCHOLAR IN THE SCHOOL OF PHYSICS AND ELECTRONICS AT THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF MONGOLIA



Entrepreneurs from Bangladesh discuss the policy environment for women-owned small and medium enterprises at a public-private dialogue.

A group of women wearing hijabs are sitting together in a room, smiling and looking towards the camera. The women are dressed in various colored hijabs and clothing, including a brown hijab, a grey hijab, a blue hijab, a yellow hijab, and a colorful patterned hijab. The background is a light blue wall.

Increasing Women's **Rights & Security**

The Asia Foundation is committed to strengthening legal frameworks for women's and girls' rights, dismantling barriers that prevent women from accessing justice, and working holistically to end violence against women and human trafficking.



Participants at subnational workshop on preventing intimate partner violence in Cambodia

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Gender-based violence severely limits women's participation in social, economic, and political life, and has harmful consequences for societies as a whole. We work with individuals and communities to transform attitudes and social customs that perpetuate gender-based violence, and help establish sound legal and policy environments to promote effective violence prevention, protection, and response. ***In one year:***

- Over 1,600 women and girls who experienced violence in Timor-Leste were provided services, including medical treatment, shelter, temporary accommodation, counselling, life skills training, and re-integration support.
- We helped the Centre for Social Research, a local partner, facilitate consultations with youth from 10 universities across India to gather recommendations for ending gender-based violence and accelerating gender equality, which were shared during the 59th Commission on the Status of Women.
- In Pakistan, we supported the production and public broadcasting of 169 radio programs in Pashtu, Sindhi, and Urdu on topics such as women's rights legislation, discrimination, and domestic violence reporting.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

As a leader in the fight against trafficking in persons (TIP) for nearly two decades, The Asia Foundation has implemented initiatives in source, transit, and destination countries across Asia. We employ a three-pronged strategy of prevention, protection, and prosecution measures. We coordinate across these areas to improve the ability of law enforcement, justice officials, social service providers, community leaders, and policymakers to collaborate, and to effectively prevent and respond to TIP. ***In one year:***

- The Asia Foundation organized six district labor forums in Cambodia which convened national leaders—including youth, government, police, and NGO representatives—to discuss strategies to strengthen coordination and improve anti-trafficking policies.
- We mobilized communities against TIP and shared effective prevention strategies, reaching over 800 women in Nepal with safe migration messages and conducting two community mobilization campaigns in Cambodia. The campaigns involved 210 youth in Siem Reap and Prey Veng, who distributed 5,200 leaflets with helpline telephone numbers, and shared stories of sexual and labor exploitation.
- We supported Nepal's Office of the Attorney General to develop and conduct a training on existing TIP and gender-based violence laws for 149 public prosecutors in Kathmandu, Rupandehi, Makwanpur, and Banke.

Harnessing Technology to Empower Women

Technology can be a powerful tool to circumvent barriers and directly reach women and girls with powerful messages and tools they need to change their lives. We use information and communication technologies, mobile technologies and social media to raise awareness of women's rights, increase access to markets for women entrepreneurs, improve opportunities for political participation, and empower communities to end violence against women.



MOBILE APPS TO HELP END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

The Asia Foundation, alongside activists and software developers, launched the first-ever mobile phone applications to help combat violence against women in **Cambodia**. These three apps, for Android and iPhone, offer features including legal information, peer support, anonymous reporting, and personal network alerts.



KROUSAR KOUMROU

(Google Play Store)

Through a series of animated features and a sharable quiz, app developer, Dany, hopes her app will help change negative attitudes and raise awareness to end domestic violence.



SAFE AGENT 008

(Google Play Store)

Safe Agent 008 is a personal network notification app by women's rights activist, Rachana, enabling users to discreetly and quickly contact up to 10 trusted family and friends if they feel unsafe. This app also has an anonymous reporting feature to improve advocacy and safety in urban spaces.



7 PLUS

(iOS App Store)

7 Plus combats harassment and violence in the workplace with a series of voice-narrated features about relevant rights and laws, motivational stories from other working women, and dial-in features to peer and support groups.



INVESTING IN SAFER CITIES WITH SAFETIPIN

In **India**, we provided a grant to SafetiPin which aims to make New Delhi and other cities safer for women through technology. This grant supported the development of a mobile application to identify safe zones in New Delhi with the help of crowd-sourced audits.

Carol Yost meets with Kalpana Viswanath, Co-founder of Safetipin

BUILDING WEBSITES FOR ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

In **Bangladesh**, we are employing information and communications technology to increase women entrepreneurs' access to information and markets, and enhance their networks. This includes creating e-commerce websites in Bangladesh in partnership with the University of Dhaka, and leveraging an existing system via smartphones that allows for instant money exchange. We also provide training so women entrepreneurs can learn how to photograph, post, and market their products in visually compelling ways on e-commerce platforms.

We supported the Election Working Group, the largest domestic civil society electoral network in Bangladesh, to develop a standalone website for a "Women Count" campaign to reduce gender imbalance in the voter list. This initiative, launched in July 2015, combined a national-level media campaign with localized voter education campaigns targeted at women in districts with the greatest gender imbalance, and significantly improved the proportion of newly registered women voters.



Increasing Women's Participation in **Political and Public Life**

When women are able to contribute to decisions that affect their lives, entire communities benefit. The Asia Foundation works to empower women across Asia to play active roles in political and decision-making processes.



(L) An elderly voter practices stamping a sample ballot in Ywar Thar Ywar village, Kawhmu Township. Photo: Thet Htoo (R) Workshop on Promotion of Women's Political Participation in Hanoi.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Globally, the proportion of seats in parliament held by women has doubled from 11 percent in 1995 to 22 percent in 2015. Yet on average, women make up only 16 percent of parliamentarians in Asia. Women continue to face serious challenges as they strive to be effective leaders and politically active citizens. The Asia Foundation helps women develop the skills they need to be informed voters, active members of political parties, and successful candidates. ***In one year:***

➤ In Myanmar, more than 30 million voters cast parliamentary votes, many for the first time. One hundred and fifty women were elected. The Asia Foundation conducted a study to better understand the challenges and constraints faced by women who served in Myanmar's parliamentary bodies from 2011 to 2015, and is now working to apply the lessons learned by this extraordinary first class of women representatives to support women currently involved in the political arena.

- In Vietnam, we partnered with the Vietnam Women's Union to organize a workshop on empowering women to participate in the political process. More than 70 representatives from the National Assembly, relevant government agencies, political party, international and gender-focused organizations and researchers gathered in Hanoi to discuss initiatives and solutions to encourage more women to work in politics and political governing bodies.
- In Indonesia, we supported the development of a community reporting platform to promote women's participation in supporting government accountability in the delivery of public services related to drinking water and security. The platform will serve as an important tool for information sharing and advocacy on issues that are critical to marginalized women.
- Recognizing the gender imbalance in new voter registration in Bangladesh, The Asia Foundation helped create a coalition of more than 35 civil society organizations united around the "Women Count" campaign to increase the number of registered women voters.

Expanding and Applying the **Evidence Base**

The Asia Foundation supports rigorous research across the region to ensure that our approaches are gender-responsive, innovative, and evidence-based. This data informs our programming and the policies of the countries where we work.



Publications and Research

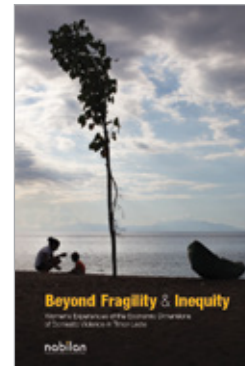
asiafoundation.org/publications



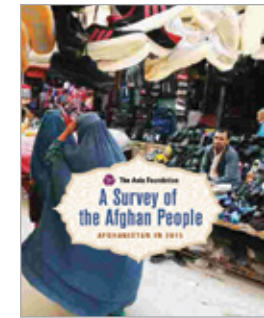
“Achieving Gender Justice in Indonesia’s Forest and Land Governance Sector,” identifies major gender issues relevant to forest and land governance in Indonesia and makes six recommendations to help civil society organizations develop more gender sensitive advocacy and programming, including building staff capacity on gender analysis and using gender-sensitive indicators to track organizational gender integration and equality strategies.



We co-led research on **women’s entrepreneurship in APEC economies**, looking specifically at women’s access to capital and assets; access to markets; skills, capacity-building and health; leadership, voice, and agency; and innovation and technology. This study examined the efforts of governments, the private sector, and others to promote women’s entrepreneurship, and offers a detailed look at the landscape for women entrepreneurs in APEC economies. It contributed to the launch of an APEC-wide regional women’s entrepreneurship network.



“Beyond Fragility and Inequity: Women’s Experiences of the Economic Dimensions of Domestic Violence in Timor-Leste” identifies the socio-economic factors that impact choices women make when determining whether to remain in an abusive relationship. Later in the year we completed the nationally-representative **“Health and Life Experiences Baseline Study,”** which found that 3 in 5 women (59%) who had ever been in a relationship had experienced physical and/or sexual violence by their male partner. These studies now inform government and civil society strategies to combat VAW.



The Asia Foundation’s annual **Survey of the Afghan People** includes extensive data on the status of women’s rights in Afghanistan. In 2015, we brought women’s voices into national discourse through interviews with over 4,700 women representing diverse geographic, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds. In the process, The Asia Foundation built the capacity of hundreds of female Afghan enumerators who were trained to conduct one-on-one interviews with women.

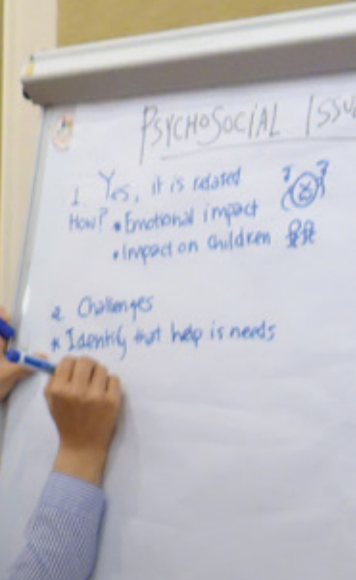
Advancing Gender Equality

The Asia Foundation supports programs that directly address women's needs and experiences, while also ensuring a coordinated approach that advances gender equality through all programmatic work. We are grateful to Trustee Emerita and Lotus Circle Advisor Gina Lin Chu for her generous support of the Gender Smart Initiative, which has strengthened gender integration across Asia Foundation programs.

APPLYING A GENDER LENS TO OUR PROGRAMS

Our three-day training includes an introduction to gender, the relationship between gender and development, and concrete steps to promote gender equality in the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of programs. Through small group discussions and hands-on practice in applying a variety of gender analysis tools, the training builds staff capacity to understand and respond to gender issues and to take steps to improve project outcomes for women, men, girls, and boys across all technical areas relevant to The Asia Foundation's work.

- In May and September, the Women's Empowerment Program organized gender trainings in the Philippines and Sri Lanka, respectively, involving more than 150 staff. Participants gained valuable knowledge about how to analyze their programs with a gender lens, and how to respond to gender dynamics throughout the project lifecycle.
- In September, the Women's Empowerment Program organized a three-day workshop on Best Practice and Emerging Lessons on Ending Violence against Women in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Thirty-eight staff participated from Washington, D.C., San Francisco, and 14 field offices. The workshop cultivated a network of practitioners from across the region, and identified new opportunities to strengthen Foundation efforts to prevent and respond to violence against women.





“Mainstreaming is not an end in itself—it is a strategy, an approach, a means to achieve the end goal of gender equality. For us, it has to be an ongoing process during which we all need to absorb, internalize and understand.”

—DINESHA DE SILVA,
COUNTRY REPRESENTATIVE, SRI LANKA

LEARNING FROM GLOBAL BEST PRACTICE

We invest in opportunities for staff to obtain specialized skills in gender integration and women’s empowerment, and to learn from other experts and practitioners who lead work in this field. In 2015, Asia Foundation staff participated in a global Gender-Based Violence Summit in Bangkok, Thailand; the fourth international Sexual Violence Research Initiative Forum in Stellenbosch, South Africa; and a gender-based violence research methods course at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine.



Opposite page: Group work at workshop on Best Practice and Emerging Lessons on Ending Violence against Women. This page, top left: Dinesha de Silva, Country Representative in Sri Lanka delivers welcome remarks during Gender Training. Bottom: Participants in workshop on Best Practice and Emerging Lessons on Ending Violence against Women.

“The world is changing rapidly, and the Lotus Circle wants to give girls a voice and the tools to improve their lives. Every woman’s contribution is important. We also need to send the message that both girls and boys are responsible for the health, prosperity, and safety of our world.”

—LOTUS CIRCLE ADVISOR JANET MONTAG, PHILANTHROPIST AND COMMUNITY LEADER



Investing in change with **The Lotus Circle**



Founded in 2007, the Lotus Circle is a vibrant community of individual and private donors working together to empower women and girls across Asia through financial support to the Women’s Empowerment Program. We invest Lotus Circle funds in programs and activities that help us empower women and girls with the tools they need to change their lives, their communities, and society at large.

From L-R: Lynn Scherr, Missie Rennie, Deshi K. Singh, Neil Singh, Lin Jamison, Swati Bhisé, Winnie C. Feng

OUR COMMUNITY

This community is led by the Lotus Circle Advisors—a group of committed philanthropists who provide valuable strategic advice and support to The Asia Foundation’s Women’s Empowerment Program.

IMPACT IN NEPAL

After the devastating earthquake in Nepal, The Asia Foundation immediately responded to the crucial needs on the ground. With Lotus Circle funds, we were able to immediately commit \$50,000 to purchase and distribute urgently needed materials such as tarps, blankets, medicine, dry food, and solar flashlights. In the first days after the earthquake, we reached more than 131 households with these supplies in the hardest-hit district of Sindhupalchok. We also supported the creation of temporary shelters to replace ones that were destroyed to offer vulnerable women and their families a safe environment.



Two young women reside in a temporary shelter following the earthquake in Nepal



LOTUS LEADERSHIP AWARDS

Each year, The Lotus Leadership Awards recognizes outstanding individuals and organizations that have made major contributions to the well-being of women and girls in Asia.

The fifth annual Lotus Leadership Awards Gala took place in New York City, and recognized Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and author Sheryl WuDunn, and women’s rights advocate and director of the Centre for Social Research in New Delhi, Dr. Ranjana Kumari. Two hundred and sixty guests and nine corporate sponsors gathered to honor our awardees and to support the Women’s Empowerment Program. Proceeds from the gala, which raised nearly \$500,000, will support women’s empowerment programs and initiatives.

On May 11, 2016, the sixth annual Lotus Leadership Awards Gala honors the long history of activism and work of H.E. the First Lady of Afghanistan Rula Ghani, and the Carnegie Corporation of New York, a vital partner in The Asia Foundation’s University Scholarships for Afghan Women program.

JOIN THE LOTUS CIRCLE!

With an annual gift of \$1,000 or more, join the Lotus Circle and help us empower women and girls across Asia.

asiafoundation.org/waystogive/lotuscircle.php



The Asia Foundation

Since 1994, our Women's Empowerment Program has helped tens of thousands of girls go to school, educated over a million women about their legal rights, nurtured women entrepreneurs to start and grow businesses, and trained tens of thousands of women to run for office and cast informed votes. Today we see unprecedented opportunities to work with our partners, from the grassroots to national governments, to help girls and women reach their full potential and transform their societies for the better. We are proud of our dedicated staff in 18 field offices across the Asia-Pacific and in the U.S. that make this work possible.

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When you change the life of just one woman, she will change the lives of many.