



The Asia Foundation

Advancing Women's
Empowerment and
Gender Equality in Asia

A Year in Review





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

The Asia Foundation envisions a world where women and girls have the opportunity and means to realize their potential, and are full participants in economic, social, and political life. For 25 years, our Women's Empowerment Program has worked with local partners to make this vision a reality.

The Asia Foundation's Women's Empowerment Program (WEP) strengthens women's and girls' rights and security, political voice and leadership, and economic opportunities across the Indo-Pacific. These key pillars are mutually reinforcing and are essential to women's advancement. In concert with these core elements of women's empowerment, The Asia Foundation is committed to advancing gender equality and inclusion in all programs.



Our Values

- › Women and girls need to know and realize their rights.
- › Women must be active decision-makers at all levels of society.
- › Women's and girls' lives must be free from violence and discrimination.
- › Women need to have equal opportunities to participate and lead.
- › Advancing gender equality requires all people working together to shift power, resources, and norms.

We invite you to learn how our programs align with these values and the impact we have had in one year, working with local partners, to help women and girls across Asia realize their rights and exercise their voice and leadership.



CROSS-CUTTING STRATEGY



APECO
APP CHALLENGE

Engaging with the Global Community

The Women's Empowerment Program actively engages with the global community through regional and global events on issues ranging from women's entrepreneurship and climate resilience to ending gender-based violence.



At the Women Deliver conference in Canada, Diya Nag, The Asia Foundation's Associate Director of Programs in India, spoke on a panel organized by Global Girl Power regarding gender-based violence and women's mental health, and highlighted the Foundation's psychosocial support service programs.



The Asia Foundation and the Asian Development Bank launched a report, *Emerging Lessons on Women's Entrepreneurship in Asia and the Pacific*, at a public forum in Washington, DC moderated by WEP Senior Director Jane Sloane. Co-author Kate Francis; Amarzaya Naran, former manager of The Asia Foundation's Women's Business Center in Mongolia; and Priya Basu, head of the World Bank's Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative, discussed the need for gender-sensitive banking services and financial products and strong care policies to support women.



Jane Sloane moderated a discussion in collaboration with the Australian Embassy and the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security (GIWPS) featuring The Asia Foundation's Senior Program Officer in the Philippines Noraida Chio, GIWPS Managing Director Dr. Jeni Klugman, and Air Vice Marshall Alan Clements CSC. Highlights included the importance of engaging women in peacemaking and peacekeeping, and ensuring gender-inclusive training across the military.



At Women Funded 2019, the Foundation's India Country Representative Nandita Baruah and representatives from the Fiji Women's Rights Movement, the Chinese Academy of Sciences, and the Julie Ann Wrigley Global Institute of Sustainability for Hawaii and Asia-Pacific joined moderator Jane Sloane for a plenary session on gender and climate justice. Panelists discussed promoting gender-responsive governance in technology development and disaster preparedness.



At the APEC Women in the Economy Forum in Chile, the Foundation hosted sessions on the future of women in the economy in the digital age. WEP Assistant Director Elizabeth Silva moderated a panel on accelerating women's entrepreneurship in APEC with representatives from Mastercard, Global Sisters, and the International Center for Research on Women.



Expanding Women's **Economic Empowerment**

Women's active participation in economic activities is critical to their individual empowerment as well as to the well-being of their families, communities, and societies. The Asia Foundation has decades of experience providing women entrepreneurs with the tools they need to be successful, while supporting women's access to financial services, sustainable livelihoods, and workplace rights and advancement.

WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP

We support current and aspiring women entrepreneurs to acquire the necessary skills, resources, and networks to start and grow profitable enterprises, while confronting the legal and regulatory constraints that limit their potential. We work with the private sector and build the evidence base regarding what works to overcome the key challenges women entrepreneurs face across the region.

- The Women's Business Center in **Mongolia** creates an enabling environment for women entrepreneurs by providing business skills training, one-on-one consulting, and networking events, as well as offering a customized accelerated business incubator program. Since it opened in 2016, the business center has served more than 4,000 clients, and is launching an online training and e-commerce platform. The center also provides targeted support to female tech entrepreneurs and supports all entrepreneurs to integrate ICT into their businesses.
- In **China**, the Foundation advances opportunities for migrant women entrepreneurs in Shanghai, Kushan, and Chongqing to accelerate the growth of their micro and small businesses by providing business skills trainings and mentoring. A new six-module curriculum was developed for ongoing trainings and a case study report documented the importance of an entrepreneurship support model that includes mandatory skills training and follow-on customized support.
- Our research report, *Accelerate Women's Entrepreneurship and Economic Opportunities in Korea*, identified critical gender-based challenges and provided practical recommendations for policy and programmatic engagements based on different stages of business growth for women entrepreneurs.



WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE

Women's participation and leadership in the labor force is critical to their economic empowerment as well as sustainable, inclusive growth. Yet women continue to face a range of barriers to access safe and secure work, advance into management positions, and receive fair treatment and compensation.

- In **Cambodia**, the Foundation developed a series of six videos in collaboration with the International Finance Corporation's Better Factories Cambodia that highlight the opportunities, success, and motivation of real factory workers in the garment industry. The videos aim to increase understanding of working conditions in the industry and encourage women workers to demand safe, good working conditions from their employers.
- Information toolkits for employers and employees on gender equality in the workplace were developed for Chinese textile and apparel investors in **Bangladesh, Vietnam, and Cambodia** and were further refined through workshops in the three countries. Over 70 employers in **Cambodia** and **Vietnam** were trained to apply gender equality principles and practices and protect women's rights in the workplace.
- In **Vietnam**, the Foundation is pilot-testing an innovative blockchain solution to address challenges faced by domestic workers, most of whom are women. The blockchain platform will connect domestic workers with potential clients through a mobile phone app; maintain accessible, private employment records; create a contracting system that limits the need for cash transactions; and build a rating system for service providers and clients.





Strengthening Women's Rights & Security

The Asia Foundation is committed to strengthening legal and policy frameworks supporting women's rights and working collaboratively to end gender-based violence. We address barriers that prevent women and girls from accessing justice, while providing them with the information and resources they need to exercise their rights.



ENDING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Gender-based violence (GBV) denies the human rights of people of all gender identities and constrains their participation in social, economic, and political life, with profoundly negative repercussions for society. We pursue a holistic, trauma-informed and survivor-centered approach to ending GBV through evidence-based strategies rooted in decades of experience, including strengthening the delivery of quality services and improving access to justice.

- In **Timor-Leste** through the Foundation's flagship Nabilan program, civil society organizations supported 1,520 new clients experiencing GBV with over 9,800 services, including legal aid and medical treatment. Nabilan's adaptation of SASA!, a community-based approach to address GBV, reached over 1,500 men and women.
- In **China**, the Foundation and its local partners developed a toolkit and conducted five awareness raising dialogues for 188 employers and human resources/CSR representatives in four cities on the impact of domestic violence on the workplace and how to support employees.
- In **Afghanistan**, the Foundation facilitated 749 trainings on women's rights under Islam and national law with 864 members and facilitators from Family Resolution Centers and Community Dialogue Groups, as well as 120 *khateeb*s (Islamic preachers) and 229 schoolteachers. Over 150,000 people were reached through Friday Sermons, and trained facilitators helped resolve 139 community-based cases and referred 168 others.
- In **Sri Lanka**, the Foundation engages the formal justice system to respond to GBV cases and supports civil society advocates to deliver justice to survivors. Twenty model police stations received technical support on case management systems, and over 1,000 police officers received training. Social media campaigns reached more than one million users. Foundation partner Women in Need's community mobilization activities reached over 5,000 beneficiaries.



ENDING HUMAN TRAFFICKING

As a leader in the fight against human trafficking, The Asia Foundation supports effective, locally-driven, survivor-centered strategies within and across borders. Strategic investments promote legal and structural reform and strengthen anti-trafficking leadership and coordination among all stakeholders. We promote safe migration and work with local partners to comprehensively address the individual needs of trafficking survivors based on their gender identity.

- In **Mongolia**, the Foundation partnered with government agencies and civil society groups to advance legislative and structural criminal justice reforms that improve trafficking case adjudication and survivor support. Almost 1,500 cadets studying to join law enforcement agencies received an introduction to key trafficking concepts, and 490 government officials received training.
- In **Myanmar**, the Foundation supported the New Myanmar Foundation to conduct nine workshops and four public campaigns on human trafficking and risky migration, reaching 575 representatives from civil society, women's networks, and political parties to prevent trafficking and establish community-level peer education groups.

A group of women are seated around a table in a meeting room. They are dressed in traditional Southeast Asian attire, including blouses in shades of pink, red, and yellow. Several microphones are positioned on the table, and several bottles of water are visible. The women appear to be engaged in a discussion or a presentation. The background shows a white wall and some yellow chairs.

Increasing Women's **Political Voice and Leadership**

Expanding women's leadership and political participation is vital to shift power and resources to achieve better outcomes for entire communities. The Asia Foundation works to support women's political participation and decision-making at all levels, including in peace and security negotiations and frameworks.

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Globally, the proportion of seats in Parliament held by women has been on an upward trajectory, but Asia lags behind, with women comprising less than 20 percent of parliamentarians. Women face serious challenges as they strive to hold political office and be active citizens, including pervasive gender bias and the closing of civil society spaces. The Asia Foundation supports the global Women, Peace, and Security agenda, and women's participation as voters, candidates, leaders, and activists.

- In **Myanmar** and **Vietnam**, the Foundation worked with partners to strengthen the networks and skills of women leaders. With local partner Phan Tee Eain, we convened the fourth nationwide Women MPs Forum in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar, bringing 58 female parliamentarians together to share common challenges and build their skills. In Vietnam, the Vietnam Women's Union launched Phase III of the Enhancement of Women's Political Participation program to expand linkages and skills among female leaders and potential candidates, supporting seven forums and workshops that reached more than 250 female leaders.
- In the **Philippines**, as part of our work to support the global Women, Peace, and Security Agenda, we supported the Women Organizations Movement of the Bangsamoro to engage more than 50,000 women in activities geared toward advancing peace and the passage and ratification of the landmark Bangsamoro Organic Law. We also organized capacity-building activities and community trainings for diverse groups in Mindanao that benefited nearly 14,000 women scholars, professionals, mothers, and young women leaders.



WOMEN LEADING CLIMATE RESILIENCE

The Indo-Pacific region faces growing vulnerability to climate-related disasters and transboundary environmental issues. Women and girls bear a greater risk of economic loss and injury, and social norms limit their assets, decision-making roles, and inputs to solutions. The Asia Foundation strengthens women's and girls' ability to contribute to gender-inclusive climate resilience and disaster risk reduction strategies, and promotes women's leadership roles in resource management.

- In **Indonesia**, the Foundation's environmental governance program SETAPAK emphasizes a gender-responsive approach to improving forest and land governance while confronting inequalities between women and men. This year, we published a training manual on mediating natural resource conflicts and enhancing women's roles in land use decision-making and conducted community mapping and impact analysis of forest management and mining activities, respectively.
- The Foundation and its local partners trained women along the **India-Bangladesh** border to develop local flood-response plans and to engage with local institutions to improve emergency decision-making and resilience.



Increasing Girls' and Young Women's **Education Opportunities**

Improving access to quality education for girls and young women is a cornerstone strategy to achieving gender equality and ending the cycle of poverty. Completing secondary and university education while gaining life and leadership skills can transform the lives of girls, their communities, and the next generation.





LEARNING AND LEADING

- With support from the Merali Foundation and other donors, The Asia Foundation enabled 184 young women to pursue university degrees in science, technology, business, and agriculture in **Cambodia, Laos, Mongolia, and Vietnam**. The program also provides support to the scholars such as English and computer classes, soft skills trainings, career orientation, mentoring, internship placement, leadership opportunities, and counseling.
- The Foundation provided 749 scholarships to young Afghan women to seek bachelor's degrees at private universities across **Afghanistan**, and scholarships and assistance for 147 Afghan women to pursue master's degrees in **India**.
- In **Vietnam and Cambodia**, 829 girls from low-income families received secondary school scholarships to attend high school. In Cambodia, a new pilot program supported over 100 high school girls to achieve their educational goals and unleash their potential by building self-confidence and key life skills such as goal setting and critical thinking.



ENGAGING MEN AND BOYS IN GENDER EQUALITY

Gender equality requires the collaborative efforts of people of all genders. The Foundation works with local partners to engage men and boys in conversations and actions that challenge patriarchal attitudes and harmful gender norms. Boys and men can break from rigid expectations about their own roles, while supporting women, girls, and LGBTI persons to do the same.

In India, the Foundation provided seed funds for The Gender Lab Boys Program, which affirms the power of collective action by engaging boys to disrupt gender norms that disempower women and perpetuate violence against them. This year, the project reached 2,500 boys from 61 schools in Mumbai, Indore, and Delhi to redefine masculinity and advance principles of gender equality.

Advancing Gender Equality

Achieving gender equality in Asia is critical to ensuring productive, equitable, and prosperous societies. This means confronting harmful gender norms that limit the ability for people of all genders to fully utilize their skills and exercise decision-making, while reforming policies and laws that discriminate against and disenfranchise women, girls, and especially marginalized populations.



Foundation-wide State of the Art Gender Workshop in Colombo, Sri Lanka

GENDER SMART INITIATIVE

We are grateful to Trustee Emerita and Lotus Circle Advisor, Gina Lin Chu, for her generous support in launching the Gender Smart Initiative, which strengthens the Foundation's gender equality work institutionally and programmatically. We invest in professional development opportunities for Foundation staff to gain specialized skills in gender integration and women's empowerment, and facilitate participatory gender equality trainings that are adapted for specific country contexts.

Our flexible training curriculum promotes small group discussions and hands-on practice in applying various gender analysis tools so that staff can identify and address gender issues in Foundation programs and improve project outcomes.

GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION APPROACH

The Asia Foundation promotes gender equality and social inclusion across our work on governance, women's empowerment, economic empowerment, environmental sustainability, international cooperation, and conflict and fragility.

- The Foundation partnered with the Secretary of State for the Support and Socio-Economic Promotion of Women in **Timor-Leste** to convene five live-broadcast debates on the gender equality policies of 29 political parties, which were later re-broadcast on TV.
- The Asia Foundation's report on *Promoting Gender Equality and Social Inclusion* provides detailed analysis of **Nepal's** legal, policy, institutional, and administrative frameworks on gender equality and social inclusion and offers constructive feedback in designing and implementing targeted interventions. In addition, our new *Gender and Identity Transformative Training Manual* focuses on mitigating gender and caste-based conflict in Nepal by using a gender and social inclusion lens to identify and respond to challenges and enhance trust, empathy, and social ties between diverse groups.

GENDER TRAINING SPOTLIGHT

Since the training curriculum was developed in 2011, the Women's Empowerment Program has conducted 15 trainings reaching hundreds of Foundation program, finance, and administrative staff, as well as trainings for other organizations. This year, we conducted gender trainings in China and Mongolia, engaging almost 50 staff members.



Empowering Women and Girls with **Technology**

Technology can be a circuit breaker to end gender inequality. Improving girls' and women's access to technology while closing digital gender gaps and challenging biases and cyber violence are essential to ensuring that the solutions technology offers are available and relevant to all populations in Asia.





CLOSING THE GENDER DIGITAL DIVIDE

The Foundation worked with local organizations in Nepal to host 300 women at the first Women in Data conference. Topics included gender statistics, barriers to female inclusion, and employment opportunities for women. A series of pre-and post-event videos of women working in data was also produced, and a new fellowship enabled 10 female data fellows to develop their skills and gain work experience.




MOBILE TECHNOLOGY FOR WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

The Foundation hosted the third annual APEC App Challenge, in which the majority of software developers and designers were female. Eleven teams from nine APEC economies worked to design, build, and demonstrate innovative mobile and web apps that help women entrepreneurs grow their businesses. The winner, FundShe, helps female entrepreneurs gain visibility for their projects, attend events, meet mentors, and set up investor meetings.



PROMOTING SAFE MIGRATION

In Nepal, millions of young women and men see foreign employment as a path to a better life. However, they lack information to navigate complex and sometimes risky migration processes. Shuvayatra, a mobile application developed for migrants and their families, delivers valuable content and services from trustworthy sources in a variety of multimedia, including financial literacy training resources, employment services, and migration information. More than 57,000 people have already downloaded the Shuvayatra app.



Igniting change with

The Lotus Circle



The Lotus Circle is a vibrant community of philanthropists that supports The Asia Foundation's Women's Empowerment Program in its work to advance women's and girls' rights and opportunities across Asia. This flexible funding allows us to pilot, sustain, adapt, and leverage programs that provide women and girls with the tools and support they need to change their lives, their communities, and society at large.

Lotus Leadership Award Recipients discuss gender equality in Asia. From L to R: SafetiPin founders Ashish Basu and Dr. Kalpana Viswanath; and award-winning journalist Christiane Amanpour.



Lotus Circle Advisors at the New York Gala, L to R: Masako Shinn, Alice Young, Meredith Ludlow, Hee-Jung Moon, Janet Montag, Winnie Feng, Debby Carter, Swati Bhisé, and Missie Rennie.

LOTUS CIRCLE ADVISORS

Our community is led by the Lotus Circle Advisors, a group of committed philanthropists who provide strategic advice and support to the Women's Empowerment Program. Members meet throughout the year at Lotus Circle events to learn from experts about opportunities and challenges affecting women and girls in Asia. The annual Young Lotus Circle Soiree, founded by Advisor Lin Jamison, brings together emerging philanthropists, supporters, and activists dedicated to supporting The Asia Foundation's work to empower women and girls.

CELEBRATING CHANGEMAKERS

Each year, our Lotus Leadership Awards recognize individuals and organizations that have made major contributions to gender equality and the well-being of women, girls, and their communities in Asia.

"Our premise is really simple and powerful: that by providing economic, social, and political opportunities for women, you can advance entire societies."

—LOTUS CIRCLE ADVISOR MEREDITH LUDLOW

The eighth annual **Lotus Leadership Awards Gala** was held in New York City, honoring award-winning journalist Christiane Amanpour for her leadership in reporting on issues affecting women's rights in the region; and SafetiPin, an India-based social enterprise harnessing the power of data and technology to make Asian cities safer.

The second **Lotus Leadership Awards Dinner** in San Francisco honored Lana Condor, actor and philanthropist, and Jennifer Cabalquinto, CFO of the Golden State Warriors, who have used their respective platforms to promote greater opportunities for women and girls. Vietnam's Center for Education and Development was honored for expanding opportunities for women to pursue degrees in under-represented fields like science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

TRANSFORMING THE LIVES OF WOMEN AND GIRLS

With Lotus Circle funds, the Foundation launched a groundbreaking project in **Sri Lanka** to make the formal justice sector more sensitive to sexual and gender-based violence incidents and survivors' needs. This initial support was leveraged to gain significant funding from the European Union. This grant allowed the expansion of that critical work, strengthened the capacity of local women's organizations, deepened the gender-responsive work on community policing, and facilitated a new multi-million-dollar grant from Global Affairs Canada to invest in the power of women's movements for change.

JOIN THE LOTUS CIRCLE

With an annual gift of \$1,000 or more, become a Lotus Circle member and help us advance the rights and opportunities of women and girls across Asia. Visit us at asiafoundation.org/what-we-do/lotus-circle/ to learn more and sign up!



The Asia Foundation

Women Transforming Asia: Celebrating 25 Years of the Women's Empowerment Program

Since 1994, our Women's Empowerment Program has helped tens of thousands of girls remain in 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, raise their voices for change, and cast informed votes. Today we see unprecedented opportunities to work with our partners in Asia, from the grassroots to national governments, to ensure that girls and women reach their full potential and transform societies. We are proud of our dedicated staff in our 18 permanent country offices across the Indo-Pacific and in the U.S. that make this work possible, and grateful to the wide array of public, private, and corporate donors that have supported our work.

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**WHEN YOU CHANGE THE LIFE OF JUST ONE WOMAN,
SHE WILL CHANGE THE LIVES OF MANY.**

