



The Asia Foundation

Advancing Women's  
Empowerment and  
Gender Equality in Asia

**A Year in Review**



A photograph showing four women sitting at a long table in a classroom or training room. They are all wearing headscarves and are looking towards the right side of the frame. The woman in the foreground is wearing a black headscarf and a plaid jacket. The woman next to her is wearing a blue and white patterned headscarf and glasses. The woman in the middle is wearing a blue headscarf with a floral pattern. The woman in the background is wearing a dark patterned headscarf. They appear to be engaged in a learning activity, with papers and pens on the table.

**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 are mutually reinforcing and are essential to women's advancement. Further, we know that investing in women and girls improves outcomes for economies and societies. In concert with these core elements of women's empowerment, we work to advance gender equality through all Asia Foundation 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 fully in society.
- › Women and men need to work together to forge locally-determined strategies to achieve gender equality.

*Investing in women and girls produces exponential returns. We invite you to learn how our programs align with these values and the impact we have had in one year, with our partners, to help women and girls across Asia to advance their rights, voice, and leadership.*



# Engaging with the **Global Community**

**The Women's Empowerment Program actively engages with the global community to advance women's empowerment and gender equality. We do this by collaborating on regional and global events on issues ranging from women's entrepreneurship and worker rights to ending violence against women and girls.**



In May and June, Jane Sloane, Director of the Women's Empowerment Program, spotlighted the women, peace, and security agenda at two high-profile events: a conference on ASEAN legal issues at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore, and a global forum at the Centre for Women, Peace, and Security at the London School of Economics. Both events called for a Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security.

In 2017, the Foundation's gender experts presented Foundation programs and research at several international fora, such as the *Women's Funding Network Conference* in San Francisco with more than 300 attendees.



In July, we promoted innovative public-private partnerships that are increasing economic opportunities for women in Asia at a forum at the Australian Embassy in Washington, D.C. Jane Sloane moderated a dynamic panel featuring Foundation staff Nguyen Thi Ngoc Anh of Vietnam, and Amarzaya Naran of Mongolia; as well as Luna Shamsuddoha, Founder and President of Bangladesh Women in Technology.



In November, we highlighted key gender-related findings from the Foundation's annual Survey of the Afghan People at an event in Washington, D.C., in collaboration with the United States Institute of Peace and the George W. Bush Institute's Women's Initiative. Foundation staff Tabasum Akseer and Zach Warren shared data on the crucial roles women play in Afghan society, and women's and men's attitudes towards women's rights, gender equality, the economy, and security.



In December, the Foundation collaborated with seven other organizations to convene a global tweetchat relay to mark the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence. Four hundred people participated in the day-long tweetchat, which reached an estimated 1.5 million people.



# Expanding Women's **Economic Opportunities**

**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, and supporting women's access to sustainable livelihoods and advancement in the workplace.**

## WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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

- In **Mongolia**, we continued to support the first women's business center and incubator in Ulaanbaatar. The center provided mentoring, consultancy services, training, networking opportunities, and access to capital to more than 3,750 women entrepreneurs, including migrant women, women with disabilities, and single mothers.
- In **China**, we partnered with Chinese NGOs to provide business training and mentoring to 107 migrant women entrepreneurs in Shanghai and Kunshan, and conducted virtual training sessions through livestreaming platforms and podcasts. This inspired the local women's federation to establish the first-ever women entrepreneurship incubation center, funded by the local government and managed by the project's local partner.
- In **India**, we worked with partners to convene a conference on expanding the benefits of trade to women-owned businesses in South Asia; and released a report that highlights the gender-related challenges women in trade face in the region, with key strategies to expand benefits to women business owners.
- We supported a group of women artisan entrepreneurs, together with representatives from artist training organizations, from **Bangladesh, Timor-Leste, and Laos** to attend the Santa Fe International Folk Art Market to have access to 20,000+ buyers. The artisans participated in various training sessions to enhance their business and marketing skills, and engagement with market buyers.



*The Santa Fe International Folk Art Market brought Asian women artisans into the global marketplace.*

## WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE

The contribution of female workers in formal and informal sectors is critical to sustainable growth and development across Asia. Discriminatory gender norms make it difficult for women to access safe and secure work, occupy senior managerial positions, and effectively engage in the workplace.

- In **Malaysia**, with local partners, we distributed more than 4,000 worker rights information kits to Malaysian and foreign migrant women workers and employers, and engaged almost 1,000 workers, primarily female, in labor rights workshops.
- In **Bangladesh**, we worked to address specific constraints facing women in the processed and packaged foods and home textiles sectors, and provide greater opportunities for women in the labor market.
- In **Timor-Leste**, we worked with local partners to support seven weaver cooperatives to develop marketing skills, expand access to markets, and improve product quality. Sales are up 500% at local fairs for most participating cooperatives.





# Increasing Women's **Rights & Security**

**The Asia Foundation is committed to strengthening the legal frameworks for women's rights at national and local levels. We work to address barriers that prevent women from accessing justice, while providing women with the information and resources they need to exercise their rights.**



## ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

Gender-based violence is one of the most prevalent and destructive problems that women and girls face, denying them their human rights and constraining their full participation in social, economic, and political life, with negative repercussions for societies. We pursue evidence-based strategies to address gender inequality and other underlying risk factors that contribute to violence in all its forms. This includes strengthening the delivery of quality services, and improving access to justice for women and girls who are affected by violence.

- Our work in **Timor-Leste** provided services including medical treatment, legal aid, temporary accommodation and shelter, counselling, life skills training, and re-integration support for more than 5,000 women and girls who experienced violence.
- We supported the Blue Ribbon Movement in **India** to conduct trainings for 577 adolescent boys about positive masculinity, and to become leaders in advocating for gender equality and ending gender-based violence.
- We worked to address sexual harassment in the textile and apparel industry in **China** by supporting the development of guidelines and manuals for enterprise-based actions for six textile and apparel enterprises. The project engaged 78 factory managers and representatives of local government and industrial associations, reviewed legislation and policy related to workplace sexual harassment, and made recommendations to strengthen judicial protection of victims of workplace sexual harassment.
- In **Sri Lanka**, we supported the development of the first computerized database for the National Police's Children and Women's Bureau, which equips the police to better document, track, and address violence against women and children, discrimination, and domestic violence reporting.



*Counselor meeting with Children and Women's Bureau staff in Sri Lanka*

## HUMAN TRAFFICKING

As a leader in the fight against human trafficking, The Asia Foundation has implemented initiatives to combat trafficking in persons in source, transit, and destination countries across Asia. Our efforts improve the ability of law enforcement, justice officials, social service providers, community leaders, and policymakers to coordinate in their efforts to promote safe migration, prevent trafficking, protect victims, support survivors, and prosecute traffickers. We also build their capacity to identify and address the different needs of trafficking victims, based on their gender identity.

- In **Nepal**, we completed a seven-year project to combat trafficking that provided legal aid and counseling to 799 survivors, provided reconstruction and recovery-related information and services to 4,849 people in six earthquake-affected districts, and trained 15,407 community members and 98,638 government officials and criminal justice actors on safe migration and trafficking prevention strategies.
- In **Myanmar**, we supported a local partner to develop a Trafficking and Risky Migration curriculum, and trained more than 700 girls to increase their practical understanding of safe migration, and build life skills to reduce their vulnerability to trafficking, violence, and exploitation.
- In **Mongolia**, the Foundation supported research that will inform targeted trainings for over 500 law enforcement officers to adhere to international best practices on victim-centered investigations and prosecutions of trafficking cases.

A woman in a red sari is seen from the back, addressing a large group of men and children. The men are mostly wearing white shirts and turbans, some with colorful headgear. They are gathered outdoors in a rural setting. The children are sitting on the ground in the foreground.

# Increasing Women's **Political Voice and Participation**

**Women's political participation is vital in shifting power and resources and in achieving better outcomes for entire communities. The Asia Foundation works to empower women across Asia to play active roles in political and decision-making processes at all levels.**



## POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Globally, the proportion of seats in Parliament held by women doubled from 11 percent in 1995 to 23 percent in 2017. Yet on average, women comprise less than 20 percent of parliamentarians in Asia. Women continue to face serious challenges as they strive to gain political office and be politically active citizens, due to factors such as pervasive gender bias and the closing of civil society spaces. The Asia Foundation works to support women's participation as voters, candidates, leaders, and activists.

- We supported the launch of the Women Leaders' Network in **Vietnam**, bringing together women from various political and public leadership positions, including young and newly appointed leaders, to discuss women's leadership issues, cultivate a network, and learn from and support each other in a safe environment. The network is designed to improve the quality of women's participation in politics and public administration through a platform for peer networking, experience sharing, and mentoring.
- The Foundation increased women's voice in the peacebuilding process in **Thailand** by supporting a network of 23 women's organizations to make key policy recommendations for the Civil Society Council of Southernmost Thailand's 2017 Peace Strategy.
- The Foundation and Global Fund for Women co-sponsored an interactive session in San Francisco with World Affairs on the Power of the Political Voice: Women as Voters, Candidates and Activists, featuring country experts from **Timor-Leste** and **Thailand**.



Recognizing the need to strengthen women's ability to take part in **Myanmar's** political life, we partnered with Phan Tee Eain (Creative Home), a women's empowerment organization, to conduct a survey and series of case studies on first-generation female parliamentarians. In April 2017, we released **Women's Political Participation in Myanmar: Experiences of Women Parliamentarians 2011–2016**. This report documents these experiences of female parliamentarians and includes a comparative analysis with the second generation of parliamentarians who came into their roles after the 2015 election.





# 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 in Asia. Education catalyzes a wide range of economic and health benefits for girls, transforming not only their lives, but their families and entire societies.**





The graduation ceremony of the Merali Scholars' first cohort in Vietnam at the National University of Civil Engineering

## SCHOLARSHIPS

- With support from the Merali Foundation, The Asia Foundation enabled 145 young women to pursue university degrees in science, technology, and business in **Cambodia, Laos, Mongolia, and Vietnam**. The project also provides additional support, including online English classes, tutoring on challenging courses, soft skills trainings, career orientation, mentoring, and counseling.
- We provided 499 young women with full scholarships to pursue bachelor's and advanced degree programs in **Afghanistan** in high-demand fields, and supported girls at 300 schools across the country to pass the Afghanistan University entrance qualification exam and attend university.
- In **Vietnam**, 333 girls from low-income families received secondary school scholarships to enable them to complete high school and 80 young women were supported to pursue university degrees in technical, IT and agriculture fields, with support from The Estée Lauder Companies, Friends of The Asia Foundation Korea, Jerome and Thao Dodson, RYTHM Foundation, and Meredith Ludlow and Marc Teillon.



## GIRLS CAN DO ANYTHING

The Asia Foundation launched a Girls' Empowerment collection of e-books on its Let's Read! children's digital library. The collection includes stories created by Cambodian authors during a Girls Can Do Anything themed Let's Read! e-book hackathon event. The storybooks feature dynamic female characters and will be included in the Cambodia Ministry of Education's children's digital library and other Cambodian e-book apps and websites.

*In **Tori the Brave** (pictured above), Tori is a female cicada who wants to join the flying competition. She is told that only male cicadas participate because female cicadas cannot fly as fast. Undeterred, Tori practices by herself and shows up at the competition. Will she be able to outperform other male cicadas?*



# Advancing Gender Equality

Achieving gender equality in Asia is critical to ensuring productive, equitable, and prosperous societies. This means addressing attitudes toward women, confronting harmful gender norms, and reforming policies and laws that discriminate or disenfranchise women and other marginalized populations.



*Gender workshop with Asia Foundation staff in Vietnam*

## **GENDER SMART INITIATIVE**

We are grateful to Lotus Circle Advisor and Trustee Emerita Gina Lin Chu, for her generous support of the Gender Smart Initiative, which strengthens the Foundation's gender equality work both institutionally and programmatically.

Through this initiative, we invest in professional development opportunities for Foundation staff to gain specialized skills in gender integration and women's empowerment, and facilitate participatory gender trainings that are adapted for specific country contexts.

Our flexible training curriculum introduces gender, the relationship between gender and development, and specific strategies to promote gender equality in the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of programs. Through small group discussions and hands-on practice in applying various gender analysis tools, the training supports staff to address gender considerations in Asia Foundation programs and improve project outcomes.

This year, our gender trainings reached more than 60 staff from Laos, Vietnam, Pakistan, and our headquarters in San Francisco, as well as the 2017 class of Asia Foundation Development Fellows.



**In September, Barbara Rodriguez, Associate Director, Women's Empowerment Program, and Foundation colleagues Chen Tingting from China, and Xian Warner and Secundino Rangel from Timor-Leste, participated and presented at the 5th International Sexual Violence Research Initiative Forum in Brazil, alongside more than 500 leading researchers, policy-makers, and practitioners from around the world.**



**In May, Elizabeth Silva, Senior Program Officer, Women's Empowerment Program, organized a peer-learning session on empowering disadvantaged women entrepreneurs at the SEEP Network Women's Economic Empowerment Global Learning Forum in Bangkok, reaching 350 donors, practitioners, and activists. Other Foundation staff also participated, including Sunita Anandarajah and Sharifah Shahirah Idid from Malaysia; Chen Tingting from China; and Junayed Jamal and Nurul Islam from Bangladesh.**

# Promoting Gender Integration

Effective, high impact programs identify and directly respond to the different needs of men, women, boys, and girls. The Asia Foundation promotes gender equality across all our work on governance, economic development, conflict and fragility, and climate resilience.





## GENDER ANALYSIS

We are increasingly using gender analysis to inform programming. This year, numerous projects across our country offices conducted gender analyses and assessments in support of the design and delivery of these programs.

- In **Vietnam**, a gender assessment on women's and men's access, knowledge, and use of mobile technology informed the design and implementation of a project aimed at increasing financial inclusion.
- In **Malaysia**, a labor rights project began with a gender analysis that revealed that women were less likely than men to have knowledge of their labor rights, and some were experiencing labor rights violations but were not aware of their rights. Findings from the analysis informed the project's workplan and outreach activities.
- In the **Philippines**, we are working with 20 civil society organizations to support the peace process and political dialogues, while building strong mechanisms to resolve conflict and increase community cohesion and resilience. This work was informed by a Conflict-Sensitive Gender Action Plan, a tool for understanding the interaction between gender programming and the conflict context. This tool has helped our staff and partners design an effective and gender-sensitive stability response in their work with religious leaders, women, and young people.
- In **Pakistan**, our programming on alternative dispute resolution and access to justice began with a gender analysis study that identified key gender gaps and inequalities. Findings informed the design and implementation of the project to promote women's and men's equitable access to and gender equality within alternate dispute resolution services in Pakistan.

## GENDER INTEGRATION

We integrate gender into programs across all sectors to ensure our programs meet the varied needs of all stakeholders.

- In our work to support good public policy in **Timor-Leste**, we partnered with the Secretary of State for the Support and Socio-Economic Promotion for Women to convene five political party debates on the gender equality policies of 29 political parties. These debates aimed to improve public understanding of political party strategies on gender issues in the National Development Plan and inform the public about each political party's gender equality policy. In addition to live broadcast, the debates were re-broadcast on television for an additional two weeks to reach a broad audience.



# Harnessing Technology to **Empower Women**

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



## UNDERSTANDING THE GENDER DIGITAL DIVIDE

In Vietnam, the Foundation conducted a gender assessment on the use of information technology, including access to, and use of, cell phones and 3G networks. The study found that women are substantially less likely to use the internet, less likely to own a smartphone, and less skilled at using a smartphone than men; and that women were less aware of mobile banking services and their benefits. These findings contributed to the design of a mobile banking platform developed for the Vietnam Bank for Social Policies (VBSP).

## STRENGTHENING DIGITAL LITERACY

In Indonesia, with funding from The Estée Lauder Companies, we supported training for 200 low-income women on how to use the internet and software programs including word processing, presentations, and spreadsheets. Based in Jakarta, this initiative focuses on the most socio-economically disadvantaged populations of society concentrated in underserved urban areas. For these women, access to basic digital literacy is the first step to advanced training, employment, and educational opportunities.



## MOBILE TECHNOLOGY TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

We supported Women In Need to launch the first mobile application (2six4) designed to combat gender-based violence in Sri Lanka. With the unprecedented growth of mobile technology in Sri Lanka, the 2six4 app is an innovative mobile solution designed to reach millions of new beneficiaries and empower citizens. It is particularly relevant to women and girls who experience gender-based violence and are in need of information and services.

# Expanding and Applying the Evidence Base

The Asia Foundation supports research to build a strong evidence base that can inform the design and implementation of gender responsive policies and programs across the region.



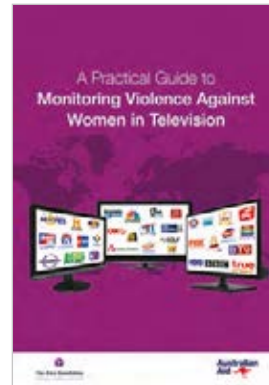
# Publications and Research

[asiafoundation.org/publications](http://asiafoundation.org/publications)



## Impact of Domestic Violence on the Workplace in China

China's first Anti-Domestic Violence (DV) Law passed in 2016 and identified employers as key stakeholders in addressing DV. The Asia Foundation supported research to improve understanding of how DV affects the workplace and inform implementation of this new law. Through surveys and interviews with the general public, employers, and DV survivors, this study established a baseline on the perceptions, experiences, and effects of DV in the workplace among employees and employers.



## A Practical Guide to Monitoring Violence Against Women in Television

This manual provides clear, efficient methods to monitor the type and amount of violence against women and girls shown on television. It focuses on why monitoring is necessary, how to form and train a team of monitors, the technology needed to monitor television programs and process the data, and how to report the data so it can be used to influence change. Drawing on Cambodia's experiences, the manual is a step-by-step guide that can be adapted to other low-resource countries.



## Critical Needs and Key Recommendations to Develop the Traditional Textile Industry in Timor-Leste

This study enhances the understanding of market opportunities and market access for women weavers in Timor-Leste, and provides an evidence base for interventions to improve the quality of *Tais* products, the financial management and business acumen of women *Tais* collectives, and their access to international and domestic markets.



## Asian Approaches to Development Cooperation: Focus on Women and Girls' Empowerment

Organized jointly by the Korea Development Institute and The Asia Foundation, the Asian Approaches to Development Cooperation (AADC) dialogue series brings together development experts and government officials from the Asia region and beyond. This report covers the proceedings and outcomes of an AADC dialogue held in Ulaanbaatar, which discussed women's and girls' empowerment (SDG 5).

Investing in 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 rights and opportunities across Asia. We invest Lotus Circle funds in programs and activities that empower women and girls with the tools they need to change their lives, their communities, and society at large.**

*From L to R: Jane Sloane, Director, Women's Empowerment Program; Dr. Amartya Sen, Nobel Laureate and 2017 Lotus Leadership Award Honoree; Masako Shinn, Trustee of The Asia Foundation and Lotus Circle Advisor*



*Advisors in photo: Masako Shinn, Nobuko Sakurai, Alice Young, Winnie C. Feng, Lin Jamison, Meredith Ludlow, Janet Montag, Missie Rennie. Advisors not pictured: Swati Bhisé, Debby Carter, Gina Lin Chu, Lucy Lee, Sydnie Kohara, Carol Rattray, Carol Yost, and Leyli Zohrenejad.*

## 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.

## OUR 10TH ANNIVERSARY

In 2017, we celebrated the tenth anniversary of the Lotus Circle, and launched the Lotus Circle’s expansion to San Francisco with new Advisor Lucy Lee. Members meet throughout the year at Lotus Circle Salons to learn from experts about opportunities and challenges affecting women and girls in Asia. The annual Young Lotus Circle Soiree, organized by Advisor Lin Jamison, brings together emerging philanthropists, supporters, and activists dedicated to supporting the The Asia Foundation’s work to empower women.

“The Asia Foundation, the way I see it, is there for the long haul, and the Lotus Circle is one of the most dynamic groups I have met. They are thinkers, they are philanthropists, they want to make a difference.”

—LOTUS CIRCLE ADVISOR SWATI BHISÉ

## LOTUS LEADERSHIP AWARDS

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

The seventh annual Lotus Leadership Awards Gala was held in New York City, honoring Nobel Laureate, Professor Amartya Sen for advancing the role of women in his pioneering work on economics and inequality, and The Henry Luce Foundation for its commitment to women’s leadership.

In early 2018, the inaugural Lotus Leadership Awards Dinner in San Francisco honors Mrs. Akie Abe, spouse of the Prime Minister of Japan, for advancing women’s empowerment in Japan and Asia, and the Colorful Girls for supporting adolescent girls, their active leadership, and advocacy on issues affecting girls and young women in Myanmar.

## TRANSFORMING THE LIVES OF WOMEN AND GIRLS

In one year, Lotus Circle donations have made it possible for us to engage religious and community leaders to promote women’s rights in Bangladesh, provide safe lodging for female scholarship recipients in Cambodia, conduct groundbreaking research on domestic violence in China, promote tolerance towards LGBT populations in Mongolia, and improve gender-sensitive responses by the courts in Sri Lanka.

## JOIN THE LOTUS CIRCLE

**With an annual gift of \$1,000 or more, become a Lotus Circle member and help us empower women and girls across Asia. Visit us at [asiafoundation.org/what-we-do/lotus-circle/](http://asiafoundation.org/what-we-do/lotus-circle/) to learn more and sign up!**



## 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 societies. We are proud of our dedicated staff in 18 country 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.**

