

Enhancing Access to Education for Girls & Young Women

Educating a girl changes her life and the lives of those around her. Education catalyzes a range of economic, social, and health benefits that reach far beyond individual transformation, benefiting families, communities, and entire societies. Providing girls and young women with opportunities to pursue an education is one of the most effective ways to promote gender equality and eradicate poverty in Asia.



LITERACY

The Strengthening Education in Afghanistan program in Afghanistan works to improve women's and girls' literacy and educational opportunities, better preparing them for higher education and future employment. Only one in five Afghan women are literate, compared to one in two Afghan men. Literacy is a key factor to leveling the playing field. Preparing for the Kankor, the national college entrance exam, typically requires extra classes, which are costly and can be difficult for young women to access. The Asia Foundation has provided Kankor study kits to over 300 girls' schools across Afghanistan, reaching over 70,000 girls with test prep materials. In 2018, 7,693 (78 percent) of the girls supported by the Foundation passed the exam and gained entry to four-year national universities.

Across the region, the Foundation's Let's Read initiative uses an ecosystem approach to address book scarcity in local languages and demonstrate the power of reading to

change the trajectory of children's lives. Let's Read invests in women to create, translate, and publish children's books; and publishes books with an emphasis on gender equality and dynamic female characters that show children across Asia that girls can do anything.

SCHOLARSHIPS

In Afghanistan, through the USAID Promote scholarship program, The Asia Foundation helps eligible young women with academic potential from economically challenged families pursue higher education at national universities in Afghanistan and international universities in India. The scholarship program takes a holistic approach to women's education, supporting girls from high school onwards with preparatory trainings, academic activities, and financial assistance. Currently, the Foundation provides scholarships to 720 female students at 38 private universities across Afghanistan and supplements their education with English-language and computer-literacy courses

In Cambodia, the Foundation supported a project on Investing in Adolescent Girls' Education in Cambodia: Pathways to a Brighter Future in Prey Veng, Kampong Cham, and Siam Reap—three provinces with high levels of school drop-out and out-migration rates. The project worked to empower local youth, especially adolescent girls, to continue attaining education and become agents of change by providing secondary school scholarships to 410 students (80 percent girls) from underprivileged families. These scholarships included school materials, transportation, and targeted learning activities, such as an English learning program and reading competitions; networking with organizations and companies; and mentoring and career guidance support. Eighty-eight percent of the 410 recipients (75 percent female) passed the 2018 academic year and successfully proceeded to their next academic year.

In Vietnam, the Foundation provided scholarships to 354 girls from poor households in Nam Dinh, Dien Bien, Can Tho, An Giang, and Hau Giang, enabling them to complete their secondary school education. By providing tuition support, books, uniforms, and bicycles, this program reduces the financial obstacles families face to keeping their daughters enrolled in school and creates a supportive environment for girls to focus on their education. The impact of the Foundation's scholarship programs is evident by participants' low drop-out rates, strong grades, and high rates of admission and entry into higher education institutions. By the end of the 2017-2018 academic year, 49 of the 67 Asia Foundation scholars who graduated from high school in June 2018 (73 percent) enrolled in universities/colleges or vocational schools.

Women and girls are underrepresented in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields—areas with enormous growth potential in Asia. The Merali Scholarship Program was established in 2010 to provide young women from low-income families with scholarships to pursue university degrees in science and technology. The program has supported nearly 600 young women to pursue higher education in Cambodia, Laos,

Mongolia, Malaysia, and Vietnam and has shown that when given the tools to achieve success, women surpass expectations.

LIFE SKILLS AND LEADERSHIP

The Asia Foundation implemented the Afla-teen program for male and female youth in Malaysia and girls in Thailand to enhance their financial literacy and inspire them to become responsible agents of change in their communities. In Malaysia, the program reached more than 5,000 15 to 18-year-old adolescents from 100 public schools. The Malaysian program emphasized practical financial literacy skills related to budgeting and savings, and created important awareness about "active learning" methods that promote discussion and problem-solving, including a module on gender equality. In Thailand, the program reached 349 girls and young women. Local women's organizations conducted trainings that boosted the girls' self-confidence and financial literacy and enhanced their knowledge of their rights.

In Nepal, the Foundation supported the organization of the annual Woman Leadership Summit, "Young Mind, Endless Potential." Twenty-five young women participated in a capacity development program, which served as a safe space for learning and discussion, and helped girls gain confidence while increasing their leadership skills and decision-making ability.

In Myanmar, young women are often coerced and trafficked into marriages overseas or into servitude as domestic helpers, both abroad and at home. The Foundation supported a local partner to develop a Trafficking and Risky Migration Curriculum and trained more than 700 girls from the Kachin IDP Camp, Yangon, Mandalay, and Sagaing Region to increase their practical understanding of safe migration and build life skills to reduce their vulnerability. The Foundation also partnered with the Myanmar Library Association to train 40 librarians, who conducted 20 follow-up trainings on trafficking and risky migration with a total of 483 vulnerable youths and participants from NGOs, schools, and the Myanmar Women's Affairs Federation.

The Asia Foundation is a nonprofit international development organization committed to improving lives across a dynamic and developing Asia. Headquartered in San Francisco, The Asia Foundation works through a network of offices in 18 Asian countries and in Washington, DC. Working with public and private partners, the Foundation receives funding from a diverse group of bilateral and multilateral development agencies, foundations, corporations, and individuals.



HEADQUARTERS
465 California Street, 9th Floor
San Francisco, CA 94104 USA
Tel: (415) 982-4640
info.sf@asiafoundation.org

WASHINGTON, DC
1779 Massachusetts Ave., NW
Suite 815
Washington, D.C. 20036 USA
Tel: (202) 588-9420
dc.general@asiafoundation.org

www.asiafoundation.org

06/19