

Environment

Asia represents 30% of the world's land area yet is home to 60% of the world's population. Even with declining growth rates, Asia still adds approximately 40 million people to the region every year—creating higher demand for an ever-shrinking natural resource base. As natural resource extraction and exploitation intensifies to meet growing demands for food, water, energy, and other essential inputs for economic growth, the underlying ecosystems upon which these environmental services depend become ever weaker. Water, arable land, fish stocks, and other necessities for rural dwellers are becoming increasingly scarce—problems that are significantly exacerbated by droughts, floods, and ecosystem disruptions brought on by a changing climate. There is a growing concern that access to basic natural resources, especially water, are fast becoming national security concerns, and will soon be the basis for conflict both within countries as well as between them.



GOVERNANCE: THE CRITICAL ELEMENT

Tackling environmental problems requires strong governance structures that enable each country's leaders, practitioners, and affected stakeholders to understand root causes, evaluate short- and long-term trade-offs of response options, and engage in constructive dialogue within and between government, the private sector, research institutions, and civil society as a whole to forge a shared vision for progressive reforms, and build the collective political will to see them through. The Asia Foundation utilizes politically informed, evidence-based programming approaches to help Asian countries address critical national and regional environmental challenges. We employ a systemic approach that promotes the active engagement of key actors and stakeholders to advance progressive change on complex environmental challenges. Informed by a deep understanding of the political, social and economic dynamics that shape governance reform, the Foundation cultivates change agents, facilitates partnerships, conducts research, and helps to build stakeholder networks—to inform public

policy formation, decision-making, and public scrutiny of governance standards. Using political economy analyses, we balance demand-side inputs that organize and document community participation, oversight, and claims for justice, while offering supply-side technical inputs to improve government processes and performance.

BREADTH, DEPTH, AND INTEGRATION

The Asia Foundation's long-standing presence and networks throughout the Asia-Pacific region enable us to work across a wide range of sectors and boundaries, employing unique capabilities in multi-stakeholder engagement; public participation, transparency, and accountability; and transboundary cooperation. Our reputation and capacity as a neutral convener, moreover, allows us to play a critical role in building consensus and developing stakeholder-driven solutions. Recognizing the integrated nature of environmental challenges, the Foundation's environment programs intersect with other Asia Foundation program areas in governance and

OUR PROGRAMMING AREAS

Natural resources management

Disaster risk reduction and climate resilience

Green growth and climate mitigation

law, economic development, and women's empowerment. Indeed, gender equity represents an especially significant and growing segment of the Foundation's work, as environmental programming consistently employs a comprehensive gender lens in program design, development, implementation, and evaluation to ensure interventions are both sustainable and responsive to the needs of all stakeholders.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Facing Asia's mounting environmental challenges, The Asia Foundation's environmental program leads initiatives that help countries to improve the management of their natural resources, reduce risks from natural disasters, increase resilience to climate mitigation, and advance environmentally sustainable economic development strategies to support a safe, resilient, and prosperous Asia.

NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

Natural resources are the basis of local livelihoods and national economies across Asia. Population growth, rapid economic development, poor resource management, and corruption, however, have had devastating impacts on the region's ecological systems. These impacts are compounded by transboundary environmental problems such as pollution. There is a pressing need for improved governance of natural resources across the region. The Foundation approaches these challenges by facilitating stakeholder engagement, policy dialogues, and regional cooperation.

Promoting Community-based Forest Management in Indonesia: Deforestation and land use change are directly linked to Indonesia's globally high level of greenhouse gas emissions, accounting for 80 percent of the country's current emissions. Poor governance of key sectors such as mining, palm oil, pulp, paper, and logging have enabled deforestation and land degradation in Indonesia to continue at alarming rates. The Foundation's program in Indonesia helps to ensure that forest and peatlands are managed sustainably and in partnership with local communities. As of 2018, the Foundation's advocacy and technical assistance efforts protected more than 4.3 million hectares of forest and land from deforestation and degradation. We helped 15 villages gain formal recognition by the government to carry out Community-Based Forest Management schemes, and 222,385 ha of forest has transitioned to effective local community management. The program, which began in Kalimantan, has since expanded to provinces in the Papua region.

Engaging Civil Society in Transboundary Water Governance in South Asia: Transboundary river systems play a crucial role in meeting water resource needs in South Asia,

linking the regions in codependence on this scarce resource. Decision-making on water governance issues in this region is dominated by technologically-centered, top-down approaches while civil society and other non-state actors' voices are largely underrepresented. The exclusion of local and civil society stakeholders serves to exacerbate risks for vulnerable communities, including amplifying negative economic impacts and reducing resilience to a changing climate. Through the Civil Society Fund (CSF) of its South Asia Water Governance Program, the Foundation improved understanding of transboundary water issues among civil society organizations and communities across Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, and Pakistan. Over the past year, CSF mobilized more than 40 community service organizations on cross-border collaboration and consultative decision-making with governments. It also supported a range of initiatives, including engaging the governments of India and Bangladesh to refine transboundary inland waterway policy; enable local women leaders to improve community's flood resilience; and established frameworks for transboundary river treaties. To date, the program has reached 19,000 direct beneficiaries through the support of nearly 800 strategic dialogue platforms engaging stakeholders from governments, communities, and civil society organizations.

Promoting Sustainable Fisheries Management and Safeguarding Food Security in Southeast Asia: Fisheries are a vital source of food and livelihoods for millions of people throughout Southeast Asia. Yet this shared resource is under severe risk of overfishing and destructive fishing practices. Sustainable management of Southeast Asia's fisheries requires effective domestic policies and legislation to manage resources within each country's exclusive economic zone, as well as cooperation and commitment at the regional level to create strategies and ensure effective enforcement. In March 2018, the Foundation hosted an ASEAN Regional workshop on sustainable fisheries management and food security. The workshop drew 91 policy makers, researchers, and practitioners from 16 countries to assess the state of the region's fisheries, identify key management issues, and explore next steps to improve coordination within the ASEAN context. Workshop participants identified aquaculture as an important trend that can help reduce pressures on wild catch fish stocks, contribute to increased employment and incomes of fishermen, and help safeguard regional food security.

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION AND CLIMATE RESILIENCE

The Asia-Pacific region experiences more natural disasters than any other region. Its vulnerability is exacerbated by rapidly growing but poorly planned urban centers located

in coastal regions and river deltas vulnerable to cyclones, flooding, storm surges, and more. Disasters claim lives and have lasting negative cascading effects on livelihoods, education, health, and economic opportunities. For over 20 years, The Asia Foundation has been helping communities to strengthen their resilience through effective planning and rapid response to these challenges. We cultivate leadership within local and national governments, build capacity of vulnerable communities, particularly women, and engage the private sector in disaster risk reduction and management.

Climate Resilience for Vietnam's Businesses: Disasters in Vietnam have caused more than 13,000 deaths and more than \$6.4 billion in property damage over the past two decades. Efforts to mitigate disasters primarily focus on rural, agricultural, and community-based needs, but too often ignore the role of the private sector. Studies show that the post-disaster recovery of businesses is integral to broader recovery efforts. The Foundation is addressing this gap in Vietnam. Drawing upon findings of a survey it conducted in Long An province, we found the corporate sector there was almost wholly unprepared to deal with climate risks. In response, the Foundation developed and implemented an online climate risk assessment toolkit that assists enterprises to conduct climate risk self-assessments, and develop informed adaptation plans to mitigate these risks. The toolkit also provides a database on business-related climate risks to provincial government agencies to be used to assist in developing and implementing provincial action plans. The Foundation now works in Da Dang and Quang Nam provinces to similarly help enterprises build their disaster risk management and resilience capacities, and is supporting the creation of a business-led network for resilience in Vietnam and regionally.

China: from National Capacity to Regional Support: In China, where natural disasters have long posed a threat, the Foundation is working with national and local governments and communities to foster a culture of disaster preparedness. At the national level, we worked with China's new Ministry of Emergency Management to improve incident command capacity. As part of our ongoing support for disaster relief at the national level, we introduced the U.S. Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program to China. The Foundation has also worked with local governments to train officials and leaders to mitigate community-level disaster risks. Recognizing the potential to significantly improve the resilience of communities against disasters, the Chinese government formulated standards for a national system of community-based disaster reduction based on these works. In addition to its work in China, the Foundation works to



share disaster risk management practices in neighboring countries. For example, in Laos the Foundation drew upon China's CERT program to train national and local officials, which subsequently paid dividends in preparedness with a dam collapse that caused severe flooding in the Attapeu province.

Strengthening Women's Resilience to Disaster and Climate Change: Women, particularly poor women, suffer disproportionately from the impact of climate change and natural disasters. Their role in managing climate and disaster risks remain undervalued in climate policies and finance. Empowering women to serve as agents of change and supporting their participation in climate change and disaster risk management (CCDRM) policy and planning is a fundamental requirement of sustainable development. The Foundation is implementing a multi-country project funded by the Asian Development Bank to strengthen Women's Resilience to Climate Change and Disaster Risk in Fiji, Laos, and Mongolia, where countries are facing a significant range of climate change impacts including desertification, floods, droughts, and tropical cyclones. This project aims to demonstrate the potential for green jobs for women, advance gender-responsive national and sector policies and actions on CCDRM and integrate women's rights into relevant environmental law. Similarly, in Cambodia, research on the gender dimensions of environmental management and resilience is limited. The Foundation's Atlas of Gender and Environment provides a more in-depth understanding of how gender informs environment-related vulnerabilities and the different impacts of climate change and disaster risks on the lives and livelihoods of women and men in Cambodia. The Atlas, which produced 70 interactive maps, captured stories of vulnerability and explored possibilities for improving resilience, is used by our local partners to identify target training areas and develop training materials to help women become better equipped to adapt to a changing climate.

GREEN GROWTH AND CLIMATE MITIGATION

Environmental problems are almost entirely the unintended by-products of the very development activities nations pursue to grow their economies. More governments are recognizing that they can no longer afford to pursue growth strategies that negatively impact the well-being of communities and the environment. Dwindling resources, severely polluted air, water, and soil all send a clear and strong message that maintaining a “business-as-usual” approach for production and consumption are no longer acceptable. Over the last decade, Asian countries have begun to integrate the core values of social equity and environmental sustainability into their national development plans, sparking new and innovative approaches to environmentally sustainable economic development. The region has begun to see a surge of new ideas and innovations to reduce greenhouse gases, other forms of pollution, and conserve resources, including a shift to cleaner energy sources, better urban planning, energy efficiencies in building design and manufacturing processes, non-pollution electric transport, and more. Delivering these solutions, however, requires serious investment in new technologies and infrastructure, as well as policy measures that promote social equity and efficient, low-carbon practices. The Foundation is working closely with governments, the private sector, and civil society to advance sustainable approaches to economic development.

Promoting Regional Clean Power Trade in South Asia: The countries of South Asia currently face significant operational, economic, environmental, and security challenges as they seek to keep up with rapidly growing electricity demands. At the same time, this region has vast potential in underexploited renewable energy sources such as micro-hydropower, wind, and solar power. Through improved national energy planning and increased regional cooperation, transboundary power trading could contribute significantly to alleviating these challenges. Over the past two years, The Asia Foundation conducted studies in Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal, as a foundation to understand and identify opportunities to improve regional energy production efficiencies through progressive power trading strategies for the region.



Studies included analyses of political, regulatory, commercial, and other main barriers to power trading in the region, and recommended strategies for interventions, and specific opportunities to promote clean energy trading. These studies now inform ongoing efforts of national energy policy makers, and private sector and civil society stakeholders, to improve regional cooperation to reduce the costs of energy supplies as well as regional power sector CO₂ emissions while strengthening energy security in these countries.

Strengthening Cooperation between Northeast Asian Cities on Green Growth: Following several months of technical support by the Foundation, the City of Ulaanbaatar rolled out its first green growth development strategy in 2015. Keen to share the significance of the green growth concept, the Mayor of Ulaanbaatar, with support from the Foundation, convened the Northeast Asian Mayors’ Forum (NEAMF) on Green Growth later that same year. Mayors and other municipal officials from primary and secondary cities from across the subregion gathered to discuss common challenges, share best practices, and build stronger collaborative relationships. So successful was the first forum that NEAMF has become an annual event, with the most recent conference held in Ulaanbaatar in June 2018 under the theme, “Low Carbon City Development: Improving Air Quality and Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions.” The forum drew high-level delegations from 17 cities of the region, including the capital cities Beijing, Moscow, Pyongyang, Seoul, and Tokyo, and participants voted to draft a charter and establish a Forum secretariat so that NEAMF will become a permanent platform for thought leadership on green growth in the region.

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.



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