

# Technology Advances The Asia Foundation

## Women's Leadership

Improving Lives, Expanding Opportunities

The Asia Foundation has decades of experience providing women entrepreneurs with tools they need to be successful and supporting women's access to sustainable livelihoods and advancement in the workplace. We support current and aspiring women business owners to acquire skills to start and grow profitable enterprises, and we address key legal, regulatory and social constraints that limit their potential.



### EMPOWERING NEXTGEN WOMEN TECH LEADERS

Women and girls are underrepresented in science and technology, areas with enormous growth potential in Asia. To promote women's leadership in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), The Asia Foundation has supported more than 500 young women since 2010 to pursue STEM and business degrees at prestigious universities and to gain the skills needed to successfully transition into the workforce upon graduation in Cambodia, Laos, Mongolia, Malaysia, and Vietnam. The program provides skill-building seminars, training, job-placement support, and coaching. In Vietnam, the program's university graduation rate is 100%, with women earning degrees in engineering science, civil and industrial construction, and architecture; 95% of graduates were employed or pursuing a master's degree shortly after completion. In Cambodia, 99% of 166 students graduated, earning degrees in accounting, finance and banking; 96% were employed or pursuing further education after graduation.



### RESPONDING TO GENDER GAPS IN DIGITAL FINANCIAL INCLUSION IN VIETNAM

Since 2016, The Asia Foundation has facilitated a shared value public-private partnership between the Vietnam Bank for Social Policies (VBSP) and Mastercard to develop digital financial services for low-income populations and especially women-owned microenterprises in rural Vietnam. The project commissioned a gender and digital financial services assessment, the first of its kind in Vietnam, to identify the different ways that women and men access and utilize mobile phones and technology. It revealed that males were 33% more likely to use the internet, 20% more likely to use their phones to check bank account balances, and 20% more likely to be aware of VBSP's mobile banking services. Phase two will implement interventions to overcome these disparities and advance gender equality and financial inclusion.

## **MONGOLIA'S FIRST-EVER WOMEN'S BUSINESS CENTER AND INCUBATOR**

The Asia Foundation developed the first Women's Business Center and Incubator in the country in Ulaanbaatar in 2016. The center houses an accelerated business incubator for women entrepreneurs and provides direct access to business planning, mentors, networking, capital, consulting, and training. Thousands of women have accessed the Business Center to help launch their start-ups, and a partnership with Korean tech company SOLUTEK has strengthened the center's focus on technology for women entrepreneurs.

## **TECHNOLOGY OPENS NEW DOORS FOR MIGRANT WOMEN IN CHINA**

Since 2013, The Asia Foundation has supported more than 550 migrant women entrepreneurs in Shanghai and Kunshan to sustain and grow their businesses, providing business skills training, access to financing, networking opportunities, mentoring, and apprenticeships. Leveraging technology has been key, including implementing effective utilization of China's WeChat app. The women entrepreneurs use WeChat to market and promote their products and have created a virtual network to exchange information, maintain contacts, get mentoring support, and receive additional training through podcasts. The project also engaged a Chinese online peer-to-peer lending group, Ren Ren Dai, to provide business loans at lower interest rates to migrant women entrepreneurs who would have otherwise been unable to secure financing in Shanghai.

## **APP CHALLENGES DESIGN DIGITAL SOLUTIONS THAT EMPOWER WOMEN**

The Asia Foundation hosts an App Challenge each year which amplifies a core

“digital prosperity” message: local software developers and digital entrepreneurs from APEC economies can connect small and micro businesses to global trade opportunities via the Internet. In collaboration with Google, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Secretariat, and Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the app challenge focuses on raising the visibility of women app developers and on designing digital solutions that empower women. The recent first-prize winner was Crystal Kewe, a 20-year-old self-taught software engineer from Papua New Guinea. The Foundation supported her to design an app called Biluminous, to connect women weavers of bilum handicrafts in Papua New Guinea with customers and significantly expand their businesses. The app is one of the first mobile pay services in Papua New Guinea and enables customers to buy bilum bags directly from women entrepreneurs.

## **LET'S READ E-BOOK COMPETITION LAUNCHES GIRLS EMPOWERMENT COLLECTION IN CAMBODIA**

The Asia Foundation's Let's Read children's digital library recently launched a girls' empowerment collection of e-books. Stories for the books were selected through a Girls Can Do Anything competition in Cambodia to encourage the writing of children's stories featuring dynamic female characters, as part of its creation of local language children's books in Asia. The Khmer-language collection features female lead characters who overcome obstacles with courage and ingenuity. Empowering underserved communities to create their own high-quality local language libraries dramatically improves access to books by girls and boys impacted by conflict, poverty, and inequality.

*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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