



The Asia Foundation IN THE PACIFIC ISLANDS

About Us

The Asia Foundation is a nonprofit international development organization committed to improving lives and expanding opportunities across Asia and the Pacific. Informed by decades of experience and deep local expertise, our work across the region is focused on good governance, women's empowerment and gender equality, inclusive economic growth, environment and climate action, and regional and international relations.

Headquartered in San Francisco, with an office in Washington, DC, The Asia Foundation works through its network of 19 country offices across Asia and the Pacific. Working with public and private partners, the Foundation receives funding from a diverse group of bilateral and multilateral development agencies, foundations, corporations, and individuals. In 2022, we provided \$86.7 million in direct program support and distributed textbooks and other educational materials valued at \$2.4 million.

The Foundation's Strategic Role in the Pacific Islands

The Foundation works with local communities, host government, non-state actors, private sector, and donors where development, strategic, economic and diplomatic interests are closely intertwined. The unique cultural and historical context of the Pacific Islands calls first and foremost for our work in the Pacific Islands to support **Pacific Solutions to Pacific Challenges**. Taking this as our starting point, we work with partners linking country and regional experience through certain program tools and approaches that the Foundation has pioneered and refined over 60 years of experience—including political economy analysis, adaptive management, perception survey research, building coalitions for policy reform, digital upskilling and future-ready workforce development, and the Let's Read platform.

The Asia Foundation's Approach in the Pacific Islands

Office History

- 1980**
1990
 - Non-resident programming, including leadership development and educational programs.
- 1990**
1995
 - Suva regional office provided technical assistance and activities in Fiji, Papua New Guinea (PNG), and other Pacific Island countries (PICs) to support key governance, legal, and women's rights organizations.
- 1995**
2014
 - USG-funded disaster risk management training program in 14 Pacific Islands countries.
 - USAID East Asia & Pacific Women's Initiative on Trafficking and Violence against Women in Fiji, PNG, Solomon Islands, Cook Islands, Tonga, and Vanuatu.
 - Led several activities in partnership with Australian DFAT and other donors in Samoa, Fiji, and Solomon Islands on disaster management, elections, civil society, and women's climate resilience.
- 2018**
2020
 - Technology programs on digital prosperity, cybersecurity, and led research on the future of work for women in the Pacific.
 - Our Pacific Islands Task Force scoped opportunities for re-establishing a Pacific Islands presence and program.
 - Regional Representative appointed in September 2020.
- 2021**
Present
 - Virtual Pacific Islands team established; portfolio of research and small grant activities with local organizations in 10 PICs.
 - USAID's \$10 million, five-year counter-trafficking in persons program in four PICs.
 - Regional office established in Suva, with program officers co-located in focus countries, September 2022.



STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1

Navigating Geostrategic Challenges and Supporting Pacific Regionalism

International geopolitical competition is complicating an already challenging development environment putting pressure on countries and the region. While PICs are largely aligned on regional ambitions, external pressure and tensions between individual PICs can threaten the unity on which strong regionalism rests. The 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent (BPC Strategy) is the convening agenda for the PICs, – a collective, long-term commitment of member states to work together to achieve their shared vision for the sustainable development of the region – grounded in Pacific-defined priorities, Pacific-led approaches, and regional solidarity. The BPC Strategy frames regional cooperation and collective action around a set of priority issues that address the most pressing challenges facing the region: 1) political leadership and regionalism; 2) people-centered development; 3) peace and security; 4) resource and economic development; 5) climate change and disasters; 6) oceans and environment; and 7) technology and connectivity. Special emphasis is placed on combatting the threat and impact of climate change and other environmental threats; supporting young people to realize their full potential; empowering women as active participants in economic, political, and social life; creating accessible services and infrastructure; and strengthening the regional architecture through which the BPC Strategy will be realized. The Foundation is well placed to support the ambitious vision and goals of the BPC Strategy through regional and country-level engagement—helping to strengthen the diplomatic, governance, leadership, and other dimensions of regional cooperation while also helping to build country-level capacities, roles, responsibilities, and commitments. We work on a set of mutually reinforcing program activities that supports Pacific regionalism and South-South cooperation within the region and between the Pacific and Asia—including leadership development; research, dialogue, and information sharing on international aid and investment; strengthening cybersecurity and internet governance; leveraging the transformative impact of digitalization; and facilitating opportunities for citizens and non-state actors to inform public policy development and decision making.

Leadership development:

We will continue to identify promising mid-career foreign service officers and dynamic youth leaders from multiple PICs to participate in the Foundation’s Young Diplomats program and Development Fellows program. As our relationships deepen, we will look to facilitate further opportunities for government officials and key staff of PIF, SPC, and other regional bodies to participate in professional development training programs, secondments, and conferences, and expose the next generation of foreign service officers to cutting-edge diplomatic techniques for negotiating international trade, borrowing, security, climate, and other commitments. We draw on our working relations with ASEAN and other Asian regional organizations to facilitate exchanges between Pacific regional officials and Asian counterparts to study and learn from one another.



International aid and investment:

While China, India, and other Asian countries bring welcome resources to the region, their development assistance and investments tend to look quite different from traditional models. This can pose challenges for countries in understanding, navigating, and managing alternative aid modalities and relationships. We assist PICs and regional bodies to better understand the dynamics of Chinese and Indian aid and investment, including details of Chinese corporate engagement. Building on recent support for research on India’s development cooperation with PICs, we will facilitate development cooperation initiatives between India and Australia; develop primers to help PICs navigate Chinese and Indian development initiatives; and provide regular updates on new policies and priorities emerging from a range of international donors. This will strengthen the negotiating scope and leverage of regional bodies and PICs, helping them to avoid unconscionable debt burdens, harmful environmental and climate consequences, resource degradation and other risks, while in turn encouraging investing countries and companies to be more transparent and more sensitive to the expectations of PICs and regional bodies.



Facilitating broader public voice in policymaking:

Law and policy making in the Pacific is enhanced through informed civil society, private sector, and broader citizen inputs. One way we are facilitating greater public voice in policy making, is by partnering with the Australian National and Swinburne Universities, and Pacific Islands’ universities in supporting the Pacific Attitudes Survey, exploring public perceptions of political, economic, and social change. We are interested in how to support local technical specialists to leverage survey data to inform critical regional and country-level policy decisions to benefit individual PICs and the region. Public perceptions of regionalism and the implementation and impact of the BPC Strategy will be shared with PIF and SPC. As a complement to the Pacific RISE-CTIP program described under Strategic Priority 2, we will also leverage research-driven data to strengthen national and regional laws, regulations, and protocols to prevent smuggling of persons and forced labor.

Internet governance, cybersecurity, and digitalization:

Building on our recent work on countering misinformation and strengthening Pacific internet governance, we support the local forums to guide policy-makers, technical specialists, and community leaders in identifying and responding to challenges, with the support of the global Internet Governance Forum. We work with PICs and regional bodies to reduce vulnerability to online crime, mis- and dis-information, and other threats through public awareness raising and more rigorous cybersecurity protection. As internet access increases in individual PICs, remote islands and communities are better connected, with opportunities for reductions in access costs, enhancing regional trade and broader cooperation enhanced. Exploratory activities at the regional and individual country level will address the governance dimensions of digital infrastructure improvement, as a complement to digital upskilling, future-ready workforce development, green economy, literacy, and other initiatives to strengthen Pacific resilience under Strategic Priority 3.

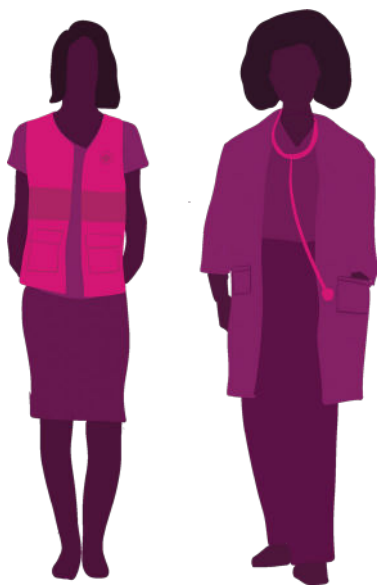
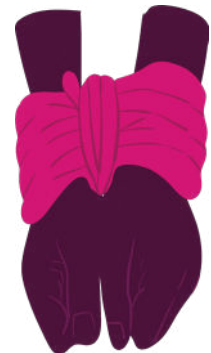
STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2 | Promoting Rights, Equality, and Pacific Women's Leadership

Working individually and collectively, women's organizations have achieved milestone legislative, policy, and other reforms that have advanced the status of women and human rights in the region. However, entrenched norms continue to undermine the security, rights, and voice of women in the family, community, workplace, and public life. GBV threatens the security of women and limits their ability to engage in economic activities. Across the region, there are pronounced gender disparities in labor market participation and the types, level, and compensation of work women and men perform. Women are overwhelmingly employed in the informal economy, with the economic implications of the Covid pandemic and climate-related events resulting in many losing their jobs or facing barriers to engage in income generation. Moreover, women lack significant roles in elected office, government service, and corporate leadership, have limited opportunities for economic advancement through the launch of small businesses and the growth of existing enterprises, and are routinely denied leadership roles in addressing the climate risks that profoundly affect them.

Priority areas of focus include human trafficking, facilitating greater women's engagement in climate action, future of work (including women in STEM), and transforming traditional gender norms.

Combatting human trafficking:

The USAID-funded Pacific Regional Counter Trafficking in Persons (Pacific RISE-CTIP) program focuses on Fiji, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Papua New Guinea, Palau, and Tonga. It takes multi-sectoral approach to address human trafficking by engaging stakeholders from government, civil society, and the private sector at the country and regional level. The program is grounded in a community-centered partnership approach that emphasizes local strategies and interventions. It applies a gender equality and social inclusion lens to improve prevention efforts through local and community-based mechanisms and strategies, strengthens protection and support services for victims, and builds capacity to prosecute traffickers and increase access to legal services by human trafficking victims.



Women's engagement in disaster risk reduction:

Although Pacific women play critical front-line response roles when disasters occur, they are routinely excluded from disaster preparedness and response efforts, resulting in poor coverage and devastating outcomes for vulnerable communities and economies. Compounding the challenges, traditional funding to CSOs encourages competition for scarce resources among groups that would do better to collaborate in effective response measures. In the Pacific Islands Region, women and other marginalized groups including women with disabilities and young women are working together in linking local and regional efforts with broader global response, drawing power from their collective efforts and shared experience. To this end, we will expand our partnership with the Shifting the Power Coalition, comprising 14 women-led organizations working in Fiji, PNG, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Vanuatu. The Coalition's PowerShift Fund is a flexible mechanism that is available to member organizations to respond nationally and regionally to climate-related events, Covid-19, and other disruptions; influence laws and policies, enhance locally-led response efforts directed at mitigating and responding to disasters; and strengthening women's leadership capacity across the region.

