



Summer 2019

In this issue: Advancing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda; Access to Justice in Laos; Read Aloud Challenge; Timor-Leste; Prospects for US-India Burden Sharing; and Thailand's Inequality

Recent Events

July 10 — The event on [Views from the Ground: Advancing the Women, Peace and Security \(WPS\) Agenda in Asia and the Pacific](#) featured senior program officer [Noraida Chio](#) from The Asia Foundation's [Philippines](#) office; defense attaché [AVM Alan Clements CSC](#) from the [Embassy of Australia](#) in Washington, DC; and managing director [Dr. Jeni Klugman](#) from [The Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security](#). The discussion explored lessons from new and ongoing efforts to adopt and implement national action plans on WPS in the face of emerging issues that demand further attention and action. Read about the Foundation's programs [empowering women](#).

Notes from the Field

[A Long Road: Access to Justice in Laos](#)



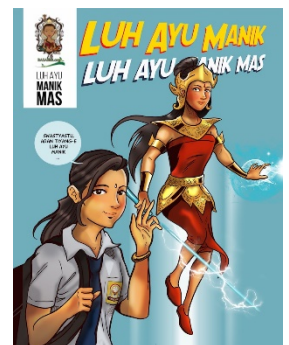
A legal aid clinic in Pakse, in southern Laos.

In Laos, until recently, the formal state has had difficulty bringing the full benefits of the justice system to large parts of the population that live in and around remote villages. The *Master Plan on Development of the Rule of Law in Laos toward 2020* was adopted 10 years ago, but bringing formal legal aid and institutional support to vulnerable citizens living in remote areas started much earlier, in 2007, when the Ministry of Justice, the Lao Bar Association (LBA), and The Asia Foundation embarked on a collaboration to develop a national system of legal aid, shepherding three pilot clinics into existence by 2011. The Ministry of Justice now has a total of 7 legal aid offices at the provincial and district level. The adoption of the *Prime*

Minister Decision on Village Dispute Resolution Committees in 2016 and the approval the Legal Aid Decree in 2018 is expected to further extend legal services to the rural disadvantaged populations, ensuring universal access to justice. Read about the Foundation's programs in [Laos](#), and [law and justice](#).

[Asia Foundation Launches Modern Reading Challenge in Indonesia](#)

The Asia Foundation's [Let's Read Initiative](#) brought together representatives from local nonprofit organizations and media institutions to launch a six-week Read Aloud challenge on June 26, introducing 15 brand new storybooks with gender balance created in partnership with [Litara Foundation](#), as well as a female Balinese superhero who will star in three comic book style children's books created by Balinese language organization [BASAbali](#). The Let's Read Aloud challenge includes three ways for everyone to use the power of books to help children thrive— (1) visit [www.letsreadaloud.org](#) and pledge to read with children; (2) use the #LetsReadAloud on social media to grow the movement; and (3) join The Asia Foundation's 12-hour Read A Thon live broadcast on Facebook and Instagram featuring local community members and celebrities reading their favorite children's books on July 23rd, Indonesia's National Children's Day. Children who develop a love for reading at an early age see [lifelong benefits](#) and are better able to care for themselves and their families as adults, as they are [more likely to be employed](#) and able to contribute to local economies. The Foundation's [Let's Read Initiative](#) is active in 9 countries in Asia, with books in 20 Asian languages and past BookLabs in [Indonesia](#), [Vietnam](#) and [Cambodia](#).



The female Balinese superhero who will star in three children's comic books created by Balinese language organization BASAbali.

Program Highlight

[Specialized Training for Frontline Social Services Workers Expands Its Reach Across Timor-Leste](#)



Students attending the Certificate III in Social Services course in Dili.

The Asia Foundation has designed a specialized Certificate III in Social Services course, which has just kicked off its third year of delivery, to support the development of a skilled workforce of social service professionals in Timor-Leste, who have extremely limited training and professional development opportunities. Students complete 100 hours of class over a six-month period on a range of topics including gender equality, LGBTI rights, legal frameworks, disability issues, counselling, case management and self-care, with student alumni from the two previous years now returning as facilitators. The training is the first of its kind in Timor-Leste, created as part of the Australian Government's Nabilan Program ending violence against women, and in collaboration with a local vocational training provider [ISAT](#). Read more about the Foundation's programs in [Timor-Leste](#) and [empowering women](#).

Publications of Interest

[Trump and Modi: Prospects For US-India Burden Sharing](#)

For nearly two decades, there has been a steady and incremental advance in relations between the United States and India. Refuting skeptics on both sides, the two nations have overcome significant internal political and bureaucratic resistance to advance the relationship. But as a new government takes charge in Delhi after the general elections that concluded in May 2019, India and the US find themselves at a peculiar moment. This collection of papers is a first cut at understanding the potentially new strategic synergy between Washington and Delhi and assessing how it may play out in specific areas in the years ahead. This project was conducted jointly with the [National University of Singapore's Institute of South Asian Studies](#). Read about The Asia Foundation's programs in [India](#) and [international cooperation](#).



[Thailand's Inequality: Myths & Reality of Isan](#)

Although poverty has declined in Thailand over decades of high economic growth, inequality remains greater than in most East and Southeast Asian countries. As economists observed from the 1970s until the eve of the 1997–1998 Asian Financial Crisis, rapid economic growth occurred primarily in Bangkok and a few other cities in the central region, but little improvement took place in the rest of the country. Thailand's wealthiest people have benefited the most from economic growth, and this has increased their control over financial resources, as well as the amount of land they own. And, today, there is quite clear evidence that inequality has risen in key areas such as education, health, and political participation. Isan, Thailand's Northeast region, is the country's largest and most populous region, and has the lowest per capita income. Learn more about The Asia Foundation's programs in [Thailand](#).

The Asia Foundation is a nonprofit international development organization committed to improving lives across a dynamic and developing Asia. Informed by six decades of experience and deep local expertise, our work across the region addresses five overarching goals—strengthen governance, empower women, expand economic opportunity, increase environmental resilience, and promote regional cooperation.