

# Strengthening Women's Climate Leadership

Engaging women as climate leaders is essential to developing effective policies and strategies to respond to the impact of climate change and to building resilience in local communities. When women's climate leadership is elevated and coupled with financial and technical resources to support grassroots women's solutions, communities are more resilient to climate impact, better decisions are made, and more lives are saved and improved. The Asia Foundation works with women's, feminist, and youth networks, in addition to governments, across Asia and the Pacific to support women to lead in climate change adaptation and risk reduction strategies and programs.



Asia and the Pacific face growing vulnerability to climate-linked disasters, flooding, drought, and other environmental problems, which have severe consequences for affected rural and urban communities. Climate change undermines livelihoods, economic development, security, health, and fundamental rights, and exacerbates the social, cultural, economic, political, and legal forces that perpetuate inequality, poverty, and structural discrimination.

Among marginalized populations that are especially vulnerable to extreme climate events, women and girls, in particular those who are poor, face profound consequences. They bear a greater risk of economic loss and injury from natural disasters than boys and men and are constrained by social and cultural norms that deprive them of appropriate skill sets, restrict their ownership of land and other assets, limit their access to information and decision-making roles, and prevent them from accessing education and healthcare.

Women's place at the frontline of climate impact also positions them as frontline responders. Their direct experience of impact gives them unique perspectives,

skills, and expertise in planning and leading inclusive climate action. Increasing women's voice and leadership to inform climate policies and strategies and expanding their access to capital helps meet the diverse needs of a community and, by doing so, builds community resilience. The Asia Foundation works to elevate women's climate leadership to ensure diverse views and experiences inform the design and implementation of climate policies, laws, financing, and programs. This approach assures strategies and solutions are relevant and responsive to the needs of a greater cross-section of the population, including those who are structurally disadvantaged by climate impact and climate-related emergencies.

## **SUPPORTING INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE AND CAPACITY-BUILDING**

Deforestation and land use change are directly linked to Indonesia's greenhouse gas emission levels, which are high by global standards. Governance challenges and capacity constraints in the country's mining, palm oil, and logging industries have led to alarming rates of deforestation and land degradation. The Asia Foundation's long-running programs in Indonesia promote good land governance as a means of achieving

sustainable forest management, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and supporting low-carbon economic development. Crucially, the Foundation supports gender-responsive governance processes that promote women's engagement and safeguard their rights in forest, land, and resource management. This is achieved through efforts to enhance women's participation in both national policy advocacy and community decision-making committees. The Foundation also works to enhance local community capacity on gender mainstreaming and conducts gender-sensitive environmental impact assessments that have led to improved governance, resource allocation, and more sustainable management of forest resources.

In 2021, the Philippines was identified as the deadliest country in Asia and third in the world for environmental defenders, with women facing unique vulnerabilities and grave threats. To advance women's leadership in addressing the devastating environmental impact of current extractive practices, the Foundation's WE-Defend program strengthens the role and capacity of women environmental defenders (WEDs). This includes partnering with law schools for legal advice for WEDs, psychosocial support services such as counseling, and dialogues with the security sector to better understand the landscape and equip WEDs with the necessary skills to safely conduct their work. It also includes socializing environmental defense into a broader movement to strengthen public and institutional knowledge about environmental issues and better advance the work of WEDs at the frontlines through targeted campaigns about the importance of their work and fellowship programs for young WEDs.

### **STRENGTHENING INTERSECTIONAL COALITIONS, NETWORKS, AND CAPACITIES**

The Foundation supports coalitions and networks to sustain and strengthen their work and capacity to represent diverse stakeholders in advocating for social and economic policy changes for women. In the Pacific Islands, the Foundation supports the Shifting the Power Coalition, a women-led regional alliance that builds the collective influence of Pacific women in responding to disasters and climate change, Covid-19, and gender-based violence.

Coalition members implement evidence-based innovations that reflect women's unique perspectives, influence national and regional advocacy, and invest in institutional strengthening and collective learning. By working as a diverse coalition, they demonstrate the impact of intersectional approaches that leverage the capacity and experience of women with disabilities, young women, rural women, and LGBTQI+ communities. The Asia Foundation created a PowerShift fund to provide core funding to coalition members to support their capacity development, networking, and operational roles.

### **ADVANCING GIRLS' CLIMATE LEADERSHIP**

Enhancing girls' education and community climate engagement are critical to paving the path to women's climate leadership. With support from Estée Lauder, the Foundation has provided 100 adolescent girls in Vietnam with academic scholarships and skills development modules to strengthen their understanding of key climate, environment, and related social issues. In addition, the Foundation has strengthened their capacity as climate leaders and strategists and facilitated their study in fields such as green energy, ensuring they are well positioned for careers in the growing green economy.

### **MANAGING CLIMATE CHANGE AND DISASTER RISK REDUCTION**

India's Kosi River Basin experiences massive flooding, while outside constant seepage makes soggy farmland unusable. This has led to widespread food insecurity, especially among women and children, and forced migration to other cities, resulting in another set of conflicts and social challenges. The Foundation surveyed the river basin and developed a Resilient Village Plan for five vulnerable villages, which included workshops for 124 women farmers to provide training in sustainable farming for better economic returns. The farmers also learned about existing government support programs and available subsidies for fertilizers, seeds, and pesticides.

*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.*



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