#### PROGRAM PRIORITIES

The Asia Foundation's work in women's empowerment focuses on three key areas:

- Expanding women's economic opportunities;
- Increasing women's and girls' personal rights and security;
- Promoting women's full participation in political and public life.

Progress in one area reinforces progress in the others and provides an avenue to greater opportunity and advancement.

**Expanding Women's Economic Opportunities:** 

In many parts of Asia, women face discrimination that limits their education and economic options. Research has demonstrated that investing in women is one of the most powerful ways to reduce poverty and accelerate development. Our projects build on this knowledge through expanding economic opportunities for women.

Education. Women who lack education and skills often become trapped in cycles of illiteracy, poverty, and abuse. The Asia Foundation prepares girls and women with the knowledge and skills they need to earn an income and lift themselves and their children out of poverty.

Entrepreneurship. Our projects identify and address specific constraints faced by women entrepreneurs and businesswomen. By providing women with a full range of tools including networking opportunities, access to information and credit, and business management training, the Foundation empowers women to make their enterprises more profitable.

Vocational Training. Market-driven vocational training can enable women to get better-paying jobs or start their own businesses. The Asia Foundation takes pride in giving women the skills to break into relatively higher-paid employment sectors traditionally dominated by men, such as motorcycle repair and taxi driving.

Increasing Women's Personal Rights and

Security: Gender-based violence and human trafficking are some of the most destructive problems women face worldwide. These practices frequently result in debilitating trauma and exact a heavy toll on social and economic development across Asia.

Gender-Based Violence. The Asia Foundation works with individuals and communities to change negative attitudes and social customs that perpetuate gender-based violence and exploitation of women. For example, we support community activities that engage male religious and community leaders to prevent violence against women. The Foundation also assists victims by providing such services as psychosocial counseling, legal aid, and vocational skills training.

Human Trafficking. As a leader in the fight against the trafficking of men, women, and children for sexual and labor exploitation, The Asia Foundation supports initiatives in source, transit, and destination countries across Asia. Our extensive network of local counter-trafficking partners provides a unique ability to work nationally, locally, and across borders to combat this egregious human rights violation.

Increasing Women's Participation in Political and Public Life: When women are unable to contribute to decisions that affect their lives, entire communities suffer. It is critical that women play an active and effective role in public decisionmaking and have a voice on such critical issues as access to clean water and sanitation, health care, education, and business regulation.

Political Participation. The Asia Foundation helps women develop the skills they need to be informed voters, active members of political parties and successful candidates. Our programs encourage women to engage in political processes and contribute to increased government transparency and accountability. In addition, we organize sweeping pre-election voter education campaigns to ensure that women know their voting rights and can cast informed, independent votes.

Legal Rights. The Asia Foundation advances women's rights by working with Asian governments and local partner organizations to support and strengthen legal systems. We provide women with information on their legal rights and access to free legal aid to enable them to claim these rights.

The Asia Foundation is a private, non-profit, non-governmental organization. Through its programs, the Foundation builds leadership, improves policies, and strengthens institutions to foster greater openness and shared prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region. It is funded by contributions from corporations, foundations, individuals, and governmental organizations in the U.S., Europe, Canada, Australia, and Asia, and an annual appropriation from the U.S. Congress.



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Women in Asia



The Asia Foundation

While women in Asia have made steady gains in recent years, gender inequality remains a significant problem. For almost 60 years, The Asia Foundation has supported women and girls across the Asia-Pacific region. Our Women's Empowerment Program was established in 1994 and has transformed the lives of thousands of women and girls through significant programs that focus on three key areas: expanding women's economic opportunities, increasing women's personal rights and security, and advancing women's political participation.





### **WOMEN IN ASIA**

Against a backdrop of globalization and rapidly growing economies, women in Asia have made remarkable progress in recent years. Improvements in basic democratic rights, strengthened legal systems, and more dynamic civil societies have made this transformation possible. Despite these advances, there remain enormous challenges toward achieving full gender equality.

Many women across Asia still lack access to basic education, and even educated women often face significant challenges in earning an income and having a voice in decisions that affect their lives. Women encounter gender-based discrimination in everything from business regulations to political representation to ability to access basic education and health care.

A concerted effort to deal with the problems that arise from women's low status, such as the pervasive phenomenon of gender-based violence, is critical for women's empowerment and society's development across the Asia-Pacific region. Central to meeting these goals is a strong commitment to gender equality and the promotion of women's active participation in social, economic, and political life.

### AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

Through a coordinated approach that integrates gender into our work in governance, economic development, regional cooperation, and the environment, The Asia Foundation recognizes the integrated nature of the challenges facing women. Consequently, the Foundation's expertise and experience in these areas inform stand-alone efforts that directly target women and girls while integrating gender across our programs. This allows us to:

- Improve understanding of the unique challenges facing women and girls and find solutions to overcome them:
- Address the distinct needs of men, women, girls, and boys through carefully targeted
- Build consensus and cooperation among government officials, the private sector, civil society, religious leaders, and local communities to address key issues affecting women
- Generate pioneering pilot projects that utilize innovative approaches to accelerate women's and girls' progress that can be scaled up for sustainable impact.

# **WOMEN IN ASIA**

The Asia Foundation has worked to empower women across Asia for nearly 60 years.

Building social, conomic, and political opportunities for women improves society as a whole.

Our Women's **Empowerment Program** was established in 1994 and has expanded the organization's efforts to transform girls' and women's lives.

### ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLES OF THE ASIA FOUNDATION'S WORK ON WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

### **AFGHANISTAN**



Under Taliban rule, many women were stripped of their fundamental rights. Girls were banned from attending school; as a result, today the majority of Afghan women and girls are illiterate. The Asia Foundation works across Afghanistan to increase girls' opportunities to attend school and to advance their educations at an accelerated pace. The Foundation has helped renovate some of the

largest girls' schools in Kabul. The Foundation has also increased the number of women at the university level through entrance exam preparation courses and access to affordable, safe housing for women at Kabul University.

# NEPAL



Nepal's weak formal judicial system is an inadequate means of resolving local disputes, many of which relate to domestic violence. Since 2001, The Asia Foundation has worked intensively to support community-based mediation, which is often seen as a more accessible and effective means of resolving these disputes. This successful approach has strengthened local capacity

and engaged women and other marginalized groups in community decision-making. The Asia Foundation specifically supports mediation services that work on cases related to domestic violence in 90 Village Development Committees in 12 districts.

### MONGOLIA



The Asia Foundation has been at the forefront of efforts to stop trafficking of women and men for sexual and labor exploitation in Mongolia since 2002. In cooperation with local partners, the Foundation has trained more than 300 border guards, 600 railway officials, and 450 Crime Prevention Unit members and established anti-trafficking networks across the country. The Foundation has also trained judges, prosecutors, investigators, and advocates to improve their capacity to prevent trafficking, protect trafficking victims, and prosecute traffickers.

## **CHINA**



China's economic transformation over the past three decades has generated a wave of migrant workers, with hundreds of thousands of women moving from rural to urban areas in search of jobs. Many of these women have entrepreneurial ambitions but have difficulty obtaining the necessary credit to make these dreams a reality. The Asia Foundation collaborates with local microfinance institutions to help migrant women entrepreneurs obtain microloans to start a business and then match them with training, networking, and other support services to foster their success.

## **CAMBODIA**



Women in Cambodia comprise a minority in the country's Senate and National Assembly, with only 21 percent representation at the national level, and 12 percent at the sub-national level in 2010. The Asia Foundation and its partners help women in Cambodia build the skills they need to run successful political campaigns and engage in political processes. Activities include forums and study tours for female commune councilors to increase their effectiveness in government positions at the local level, and networking opportunities for the councilors to share information and strategies for addressing challenges.

## **INDONESIA**



When women do not have a say, or are not considered in government budget-planning processes, their basic needs such as health care and education are often neglected. The Asia Foundation and local partners have trained over 4,500 men and women across Indonesia on the link between gender inequality, budget processes, and budget advocacy. This has resulted in the

reallocation of more than \$1.5 million toward programs that meet the critical needs of women, including through support services for victims of domestic abuse and building schools.