

# WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM

## NEPAL

For more than 20 years, The Asia Foundation has worked to empower Nepali women. Nepal is one of the least-developed countries in the world and experiences high rates of poverty, exacerbating the cultural disadvantages faced by Nepali women. To increase women's opportunities and improve their status, the Foundation has protected women's legal rights and reformed discriminatory laws and policies; provided educational scholarships to disadvantaged girls; supported vocational training and job placement for young women at-risk of trafficking and trafficking survivors; and trained women to run for elected office to ensure their needs are reflected in public decision-making. The Foundation was one of the first organizations to recognize the severity of trafficking of women and children in Nepal and mobilize efforts against it. The Foundation has also worked with both rural and urban organizations to combat violence against women.

During the 11-year Maoist insurgency, more than 200,000 Nepalis, 80 percent of whom were women and children under the age of 18, were forced to flee their homes. These internally displaced persons (IDPs) live in dilapidated settlements on the outskirts of Nepal's urban centers, and many engage in hazardous, low-wage labor to earn enough money to survive. Although many IDPs would like to return to their homes, most conflict-affected villages lack functioning local governments to maintain law, rebuild schools, and provide other basic services. Women IDPs are particularly vulnerable within this environment. Studies show that rates of violence against women IDPs are extremely high, and without education or vocational skills, there are few ways for women IDPs to improve their lives.



### IMPROVING WOMEN'S SECURITY

The Asia Foundation is implementing a comprehensive program to reduce violence against women. To date, our program has catalyzed the formation of 52 "men against violence" groups in conflict-affected communities that engage men to discourage violence against women and intervene effectively when violence occurs. With our support, more than 2,600 men have participated in community-based violence prevention workshops. We have also supported interactive community-based theater performances in IDP communities. These performances have raised public awareness about violence against women by inviting audience members to participate in the dramas and act out positive scenarios for dealing with this violence. The performances have provided over 50,000 men and women with specific strategies to counter violence against women in their communities.

## EXPANDING WOMEN'S LEGAL RIGHTS

Historically, Nepali women have been discriminated against under the law and in practice. Lacking knowledge of their rights and the means to enforce them, injustice remains a fact of women's daily lives. In the 1990s, The Asia Foundation educated more than 100,000 women on their legal rights. As a result, many women were able to hold their leaders and government officials accountable for protecting their rights. Since 2003, we have worked with the Supreme Court and other key actors in Nepal's legal system to reform discriminatory property and inheritance laws and reduce the fee for women to register land in their own name by 10 percent; to enable women to secure a passport without permission from a guardian for the first time; and to implement the first law against sexual harassment.

## INCREASING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

Increasing women's economic opportunities are paramount for women to improve their lives and take control of their futures. In close collaboration with our local partners, we developed a life skills education and vocational training program that equipped vulnerable women with marketable skills in a range of high demand industries, such as motorcycle repair, electrical house wiring, and taxi driving, and then provided job placement support and counseling. Many of these women are now supporting themselves and significantly contributing to the livelihood of their families. Further, by working in traditionally male-dominated sectors, these women are breaking down traditional gender stereotypes and serving as role models to other women in their communities.

## OUR DONORS MAKE OUR PROGRAMS POSSIBLE

With contributions from private individuals, corporations, foundations, and public funders, we are able to create exciting new models and expand successful programs that are making a significant difference in the lives of girls and women across the Asia-Pacific region. To support our programs, please visit the Women's Empowerment Program page at: [www.asiafoundation.org](http://www.asiafoundation.org).

The Asia Foundation is a private, non-profit, non-governmental organization. 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. Through its programs, the Foundation builds leadership, improves policies, and strengthens institutions to foster greater openness and shared prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region.

## STAFF SPOTLIGHT:

### JANNIE KWOK, PROGRAM OFFICER

*"I am committed to working on women's empowerment because I believe if afforded the right opportunities, Nepali women have an incredible potential to realize their economic, political, and social rights and make invaluable contributions to their communities."*

Jannie Kwok is a Program Officer for The Asia Foundation in Nepal where she develops and manages projects to stop human trafficking and violence against women, particularly in Nepal's conflict-affected areas. Jannie also works to promote gainful employment opportunities for trafficking survivors and young women at-risk of trafficking, and supports women to develop productive small businesses to better support themselves and their families.



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