



# ANNUAL REPORT 2020



The Asia Foundation



The Asia Foundation improves lives, expands opportunities, and helps societies flourish across a dynamic and developing Asia. We work with innovative leaders and communities to build effective institutions and advance critical reforms. Together with our partners, we are committed to Asia's continued development as a peaceful, just, and thriving region of the world.



# Addressing the global crisis

*Mobilizing responses to the critical issues facing Asia*

The Asia Foundation's 18 country offices, on-the-ground staff, deep expertise, and relationships with local partners have been crucial in identifying needs and responses to the coronavirus pandemic on the world's most populous continent. The communities we serve—women, ethnic and religious minorities, low-wage earners, migrants, small business owners, and those who work in the informal sector—are especially vulnerable. Interruptions in public education, community support networks, and the flow of timely, accurate information compound these impacts. Here are examples of our efforts to address immediate needs.



Emergency support for women first responders



Domestic violence counseling, legal aid, shelter, and services



Support for small business owners to adapt to e-commerce



Launched [letsreadathome.org](https://letsreadathome.org) in 10 languages for children out of school



Support for returning migrants and their families



Remote learning support for young women scholars

#change**start**shere

# Annual Report letter from Chairman

The devastating events of the past year have shown the value of community, livelihoods, and resiliency that anchor people in times of crisis. In the months before the pandemic, The Asia Foundation had just embarked on our 2025 Strategic Planning exercise to assess a changing political, economic, and development landscape, and to inform and strengthen our work in the years ahead. We did not know that this process would coincide with an unprecedented global pandemic that has had far-reaching impacts and shaped the programs and countries where we work. In these dynamic and rapidly changing times, the strategic planning process's greatest value may come from identifying uncertainties and subsequently sharpening our responses. Today, we are responding to the challenges of the Covid and post-Covid era from a strong programming and operational foundation, centered on the people and communities we serve.

**Whatever crises may come, the Foundation remains committed to our mission of improving lives and expanding opportunities, even in times of great uncertainty.** As the global health crisis unfolded, our core values and longstanding regional presence enabled the Foundation to work practically and impactfully to address critical social, economic, and political challenges across Asia. The trust, accountability, and partnership—built up over many years—ensured our ability to fast-track and respond quickly to meet the range of urgent needs. Through a community-centered approach, we were able to mobilize basic relief support and reduce economic challenges for the most vulnerable populations. Our commitment to the inclusion of diverse perspectives and flexible thinking will be crucial as livelihoods are restored, communities recover, and societies re-open.

A few examples from this year's Annual Report illustrate the impact we could achieve through a combination of our rapid response capabilities and long-term perspective.

- As millions of children across Asia and the Pacific were kept home from their schools, the Foundation's **Books for Asia** program jumped in to support their safe learning with book collections and reading activities that strengthened their health, resilience, critical thinking, and STEM. In a time of intense strain, we provided parents digital materials to connect with and read aloud with their children. We rapidly expanded the number of children's books available in local languages through virtual translation events, and **Let's Read, our free digital library across Asia, now contains 6,065 titles in 42 different languages, 624 book creators, and 2,970 translators.**
- In 2020, to seed the entrepreneurial vision of our own young development leaders, we launched the **Changemakers Development Fund: Small Bets for Change to support Asia Foundation Development Fellows alumni** as they pilot their own cutting-edge ideas and

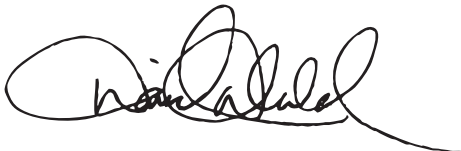
## and President

continue to deepen their impact in their respective countries. One turned the solar powered food carts he'd built and mobilized to give Afghan women a way to make a living in their own communities, into mobile sanitations stations to counter the spread of Covid-19.

- Bangladesh's economy employs 3.6 million workers in the garment industry, most of them women, but due to Covid-19, it fell from its position as the world's second-largest apparel exporter. Last year, **we joined the H&M Foundation in a new partnership** to coordinate immediate disaster relief for female garment workers in Bangladesh impacted by the pandemic, and to upskill workers to adapt to the Future of Work, and to succeed in a shifting economy.
- Operating remotely, **the Foundation also organized and hosted the 2020 APEC App Challenge**, cultivating the vast human capital potential in the region and a booming digital economy. Fifteen teams comprised of 91 local software developers worked virtually and created 15 apps to help small businesses active in the tourism sector address Covid-related challenges and help support recovery.

None of these strategic and nuanced investments would have been possible without the region's strongest asset: its people. We have been deeply inspired by our own staff's hard work, dedication, and flexibility through these long months of lockdown and remote work. Under difficult and challenging conditions, Asia Foundation colleagues have shown great determination and commitment to meeting the challenges, needs, and impacts of Covid-19 on the communities and partners with whom we work.

We are also profoundly indebted to the wide circle of dedicated friends, donors, and sponsors who have provided urgently needed resources that enable the Foundation to continue this vital work throughout these challenging and uncertain times. With your continuing help and support, we remain committed to achieving our shared vision of a peaceful, just, and thriving Asia.



**David D. Arnold**  
*President and Chief Executive Officer*



**Sunder Ramaswamy**  
*Chairman of the Board and Executive Committee*

A close-up photograph of a woman in profile, looking towards the right. She is wearing a wide-brimmed, pink woven hat with a yellow cord tied around the base. Her face is partially covered by a red fabric mask that leaves only her eyes visible. She is wearing a dark blue and purple striped shirt. The background is a blurred field of tall, dry grasses and some green plants.

## What We Do

Our work remains as urgent and relevant today as it was when we were established in 1954. Asia continues to face critical issues that threaten the aspirations of billions. Communities remain impacted by the lack of access to justice, rising inequality, pervasive subnational conflicts, challenges of urbanization, violence against women, and a closing space for civil society. Left unaddressed, these challenges threaten Asia's many political and economic gains and undermine its future prospects. Read more about the issues central to The Asia Foundation's programs and impacts.



# Where We Work

## ASIA

Afghanistan  
Bangladesh  
Cambodia  
China  
India  
Indonesia  
Japan  
Korea  
Laos  
Malaysia

Mongolia  
Myanmar  
Nepal  
Pacific Islands  
Pakistan  
Philippines  
Singapore  
Sri Lanka  
Thailand  
Timor-Leste  
Vietnam

## UNITED STATES

San Francisco  
Washington, DC  
New York City



# Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, the Foundation maintains strong relationships with the government and civil society, leading to sustainable initiatives in governance and law, women's empowerment, education, regional cooperation, and the *Survey of the Afghan People*, conducted annually across all 34 provinces.

In 2020, we made efforts to increase access to education and justice as Afghanistan's national Ministry of Education struggled to provide quality education to all the country's young people. The Foundation supported a national online resource for remote learning, including efforts to establish and expand affordable private schools across five cities. Simultaneously, we supported efforts to promote greater access to rule of law for Afghanistan's women and other marginalized populations. With our support, legal fellows assisted 1,687 clients (1,231 women) on a multitude of pressing issues the past year.





## Bangladesh

The Asia Foundation works with government, civil society, community and religious leaders, and the private sector in Bangladesh to address community challenges, build leadership capacity that reflects the country's diversity, and facilitate broad-based participation in the country's development.

Bangladesh's economy is heavily dependent on the garment industry, which employs 3.6 million workers. Following the outbreak of Covid-19, the country lost its position as the world's second-largest apparel exporter, demonstrating the vulnerabilities of its ready-made garment sector. Last year, we joined the H&M Foundation in a new partnership to coordinate immediate disaster relief for female garment workers in Bangladesh impacted by the pandemic, and to upskill workers to adapt to the Future of Work and succeed in a shifting economy. In addition, close monitoring of the private sector is required to inform economic recovery post-Covid. The Foundation conducted a Business Confidence Survey of 300+ firms in Bangladesh to chart the expectations and needs of businesses in manufacturing, textiles, pharmaceuticals, light engineering, and food processing on issues such as profitability, investment, wages, employment, business costs, sales, exports, and stimulus packages. This will help chart the future development of the country.



# Cambodia

In Cambodia, we are equipping young people for success in the future economy, expanding economic opportunities, and minimizing the negative impact from the Covid-19 crisis. Our focus is on economic inclusion, online safety and security, integrated regional development, and improving public service delivery.

Digital literacy and online safety have become increasingly important, especially with Covid-19 forcing so many to conduct their activities online. This is true for the micro and small enterprises that are the backbone of ASEAN's economy and for the 80 percent of the region's workforce they employ. Targeting isolated communities across ASEAN, our Go Digital ASEAN initiative is managed out of our Cambodia office and partners with Google.org to equip hundreds of thousands of workers in the emerging workforce with digital skills and tools. This year our TEK4Good project supported four Cambodia startups including a woman-run company, and hosted skill-sharing events for entrepreneurs, students, and experts. Our newly dedicated co-working space for Women in TEK Network members in Phnom Penh provides a home for women-led tech startups enabling them to expand their markets and customer bases, even during the pandemic.

# China

In China, the Foundation focuses on developing the charitable sector, disaster management, gender equality and women's development, child welfare, regional cooperation, and constructive U.S.-China relations. We work closely with partners in Asian countries to increase awareness of China's development projects and their local impacts. We also support research and analysis focused on China's development strategy, development assistance, and overseas investment. We also seek to strengthen the capacity of Chinese civil society organizations.

As the cost of living continues to rise across China's cities and more factory jobs move abroad, a growing number of migrant women aspire to start their own businesses. However, lack of access to training and capital makes micro and small businesses started by migrant women particularly vulnerable to market shifts, limiting their growth potential. Our Accelerate Women's Entrepreneurship: Supporting Migrant Women-Owned Businesses in China project in Shanghai gets migrant women entrepreneurs up to speed in management, innovations, project design, cost control, taxation planning, and corporate social responsibility. When Covid-19 hit, our long-term local partner provided advice on labor disputes, contract and lease issues, financial challenges, and reducing operational costs.





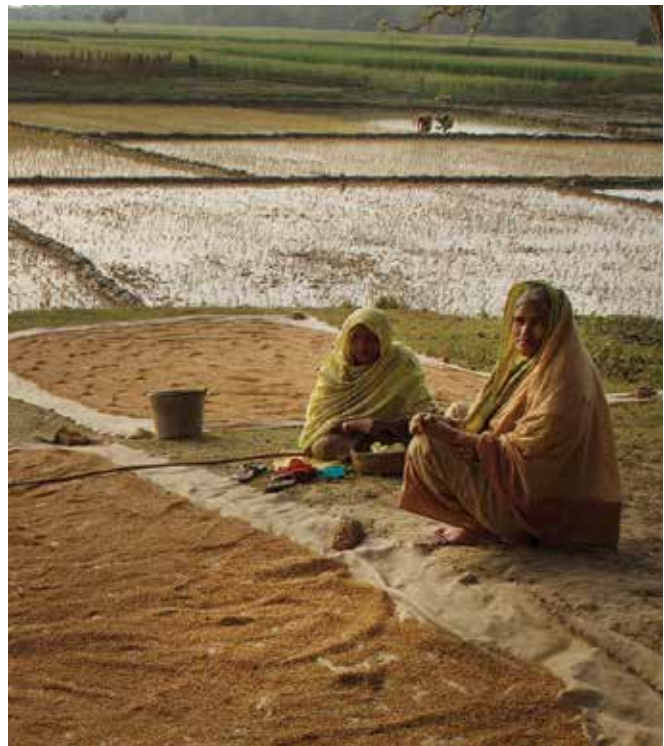
## India

Our New Delhi office supports local initiatives to enhance women's safety, security, economic empowerment, and initiatives that facilitate India's engagement in regional and global affairs. The office also serves as a focal point for the Foundation's regional programs in South Asia, including transboundary water governance and intraregional trade.

Women have traditionally been excluded from discussions and decision-making around water and ecological management in South Asia's river basins. To ensure more collaborative and effective water management, we supported a series of multi-stakeholder dialogues in the Kosi Basin on interstate water cooperation and challenges, and the evolution of international laws on transboundary water.

The India office has expanded our work to address trafficking in persons and gender-based violence. We are leading a multi-country research project to study screening and support services for trafficking in persons and gender-based violence survivors in India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, which will provide national and regional recommendations to government and nongovernment stakeholders. We're also supporting a vulnerability mapping in the state of Jharkhand, a trafficking hotspot, to inform the government's preventive measures.

Also this year, The Asia Foundation's study, *India's Emerging Gig Economy: The Future of Work for Women Workers*, explores the growth of the mobile-based platform economy in India and its engagement of the female workforce. Research indicates 60 percent of the surveyed women gig workers are the primary breadwinners in their households. The study makes recommendations to government, platform-aggregators, and civil society organizations towards expanding opportunities for women to participate in economy.



# Regional and International Relations

The Foundation's focus on international relations, cross border issues such as trade, conflict, and transboundary resource management, and our work with regional institutions like ASEAN and APEC distinguish us from others working on development issues in Asia. Our work enhances cooperation in international affairs, improves understanding, accountability, and outcomes in Asian development cooperation, and increases foreign policy capacity in select Asian countries.

Recently, we convened an independent task force to examine U.S.-Southeast Asia relations and to assess the greatest challenges and opportunities for the new U.S. Administration and Congress against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic. The report, *Urgent Issues in U.S.-Southeast Asia Relations for 2021*, includes recommendations and prospects for on addressing critical issues in security, economics, trade, infrastructure, and climate change. The Foundation also hosts a monthly Southeast Asia Roundtable in Washington, DC engaging specialists from government, think tanks, academia, NGOs, business, and diplomatic communities in examining key political, economic, and security issues.

The Foundation also continued its important work on Asian development cooperation. This includes a number of research projects, conferences, and publications to advance understanding about the growing role of Asian countries, especially China and India, in international development through their overseas investments and South-South development cooperation in the region.

# Indonesia

In Indonesia, we advance reforms that improve Indonesia's environmental governance, increase social inclusion, strengthen justice systems, protect human rights, and promote tolerance and equitable economic growth.

Corruption is widespread in Indonesia and in 2020 we assisted the Supreme Court in developing systems to improve tracking, monitoring, and adjudication of corruption cases. We developed eLearning modules for Anti-Corruption Certification for judges and created a robust judicial online data analysis hub to improve knowledge around and the quality of corruption case adjudication. The hub now attracts 12,000–20,000 visitors daily, processes 27,000–52,000 searches per day, and hosts more than 5.3 million judicial decisions. The Supreme Court issued new regulations on sentencing guidelines for corruption in May 2020.

Many vulnerable community members lack legal identity documents in Indonesia, meaning they are essentially invisible to the system and therefore cannot access health care or social assistance. The Foundation's social inclusion program, Peduli, improves access for these communities; this year 7,063 people received legal identities that they previously could not obtain, a move made even more urgent during a global pandemic.





# Korea



Our office in Seoul partners with South Korean government agencies, the private sector, and civil society involved in international development and facilitates regional cooperation in Northeast Asia. Entrepreneurship development and a sustainable finance ecosystem play a key role in promoting inclusive economic growth for South Korea. The Foundation's Startup and Social Innovation Ecosystem Analysis study assesses the landscape, challenges, and opportunities for Korea's startup and social innovation ecosystem and provides recommendations for both policy and programmatic engagements. Findings were presented at the Silicon Valley Business Forum and during the UN General Assembly in 2020. Small and vulnerable entrepreneurs in Korea, including women and refugees, have faced significant challenges to access finance, especially during the pandemic. Our online Impact Investment Digital Platform serves as a direct link between global impact investors, social enterprises, and women entrepreneurs, and reduces transaction costs in identifying, assessing, and connecting them. In addition, our regular Impact for Breakfast (IFB) Seoul meetings brings together impact investors, regular investors, and ecosystem builders such as foundations, government, and NGOs, to strengthen the sustainable finance ecosystem in Korea and other Asian countries. IFB is a global network of impact investors with chapters in 16 cities.

# Leadership and Exchanges

The Asia Foundation has been investing in future leaders for more than 65 years. The Asia Foundation Development Fellows program continues this tradition by identifying, nurturing, and supporting the next generation of thinkers, entrepreneurs, and innovators who are shaping Asia's future. The region's rapidly changing development landscape presents new challenges that require skilled, creative, and committed individuals to solve them. The year-long program builds development knowledge and enhances leadership skills for lifelong impact and is creating a powerful network of reform-minded emerging leaders across Asia.

In 2020, we launched the Changemakers Development Fund: Small Bets for Change to support Asia Foundation Development Fellows alumni as they pilot their cutting-edge ideas and continue to deepen their impact in their respective countries.

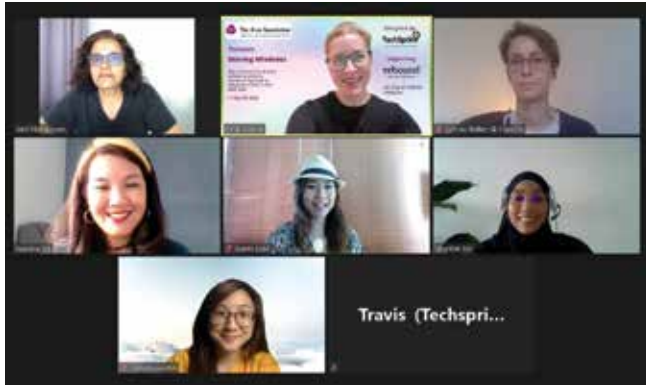




## Laos

In Laos, we work with local partners and the Lao government to improve governance and access to justice for all citizens, advance women's rights and opportunities, help communities manage development and safeguard their natural environment, increase access to information, and promote Laos' international cooperation.

More than a third of economic growth in Laos relies on the country's natural resources, especially water, but rapid growth and heavy demand is putting added pressure on the environment. Last year we supported three villages in Xe Bang Fai district, Khammouane province, to develop their own wetland management plans, resulting in regeneration of crucial wetland habitat and aquatic species. One village used the wetland resources to earn money to support small-scale riverbank erosion protection measures. To increase access to justice in the country, the Foundation's Legal Aid Program is providing support to the Lao Ministry of Justice and the Lao Bar Association to establish and operate 94 legal aid offices and eight legal aid clinics throughout the country, including essential and important legal aid services such as documentation and court representation.



# Malaysia

In Malaysia, our focus is on strengthening entrepreneurship, international development cooperation, and international competitiveness; providing opportunities for women and girls; improving security in vulnerable regions; and engaging young Malaysians to improve skills and resilience to succeed in the new economy.

Despite significant gains in recent years, women's participation in Malaysia's labor force remains relatively low. Compounding the situation, the pandemic has greatly impacted the women-dominated hospitality and tourism sector, with significant reductions in business activity and incomes. We piloted a technology upskilling program for women to support continuity of income during the lockdown, providing digital skills to 150 women whose careers were interrupted. The Foundation also conducted a study on Retaining High-Skilled Women in the Malaysian Workforce, exploring relevant government-backed childcare models from other countries and different models for financing them in Malaysia. Findings will be used to develop an action plan for the government to push this initiative forward.





## Mongolia

In Mongolia, we strengthen anticorruption efforts, improve urban governance, support justice sector development, increase gender equality, and advance climate change mitigation efforts.

Declining voter turnout in parliamentary, presidential, and local elections is a growing concern for democracy in Mongolia. The Foundation supported a range of youth and women-led organizations to improve voter education and energize youth political participation through social media campaigns and interactive content, including democracy hackathons, youth policy dialogues, and networking events, reaching over 19,000 people with 8 million social media impressions. These efforts contributed to a 12 percent increase in the turnout among young voters aged 18-25, an increase that was not observed in any other age group.

Despite the challenges of the global pandemic, the Foundation's Women's Business Center (WBC) continued to provide a range of services to women entrepreneurs including registering 600 new clients; conducting 196 individual and group advisory sessions; providing 31 online training courses for 1,000+ participants; and hosting 13 networking events. Seventy percent of graduates of the center's flagship Business Incubator program are now employing other women. The WBC also launched psychosocial counseling services and small grant support for women entrepreneurs facing the challenges created by the pandemic.

# Myanmar

Our work in Myanmar in 2020 included efforts to strengthen institutions, contribute to informed dialogues on the peace process, support initiatives for inclusive economic development, promote women's empowerment, and increase public access to information. In early 2021, Myanmar experienced a military coup and protests ensued, creating instability and uncertainty in the country.

Prior to the coup, the Covid-19 crisis had already resulted in severe economic hardship for many in the country, women in particular. While at the same time lockdowns created an environment that led to a marked rise in gender-based violence (GBV). Last year we helped 750 female micro-business owners in Myanmar adapt and sustain their businesses in response to the pandemic. Recognizing that loss of jobs and increased financial pressure are key triggers of domestic violence, the Foundation supports local partners providing GBV awareness trainings and information about registering GBV cases. We also partnered with Legal Clinic Myanmar to help GBV survivors and affected households during the pandemic with legal and financial support for 123 at-risk households.



# Conflict and Fragility

The risks of instability and armed conflict have risen across much of the Asia-Pacific region, threatening development and security. In response, The Asia Foundation works with government and civil society partners to address conflict by supporting formal and informal dispute resolution processes, advancing social justice, fostering dialogue, and reducing past traumas.

Drawing on evidence from conflicts in the Philippines, Myanmar, and other countries, the Foundation's report on *Violent Conflict, Tech Companies, and Social Media in Southeast Asia* provides a broad analysis of how violent conflicts in Southeast Asia are shaped or affected by online platforms and social media. This milestone research stimulates further research, informs programming, and encourages responsive actions across the region. Our FCDO-funded Cross-Border Local Research Network project supported policy-focused research and the development of local research capacity through work in the Afghanistan-Pakistan frontier region, Myanmar's border areas, and the maritime region separating the Philippines and Malaysia, as well as with Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.

After decades of subnational conflict in the Southern Philippines, Mindanao suffers from strained social cohesion and a lack of trust between different identity groups. Our Peace Connect program fosters trust and promotes intra-group harmony in communities that are threatened by violent conflict and extremism, bringing together Muslims, Christians, indigenous people, and youth in facilitated group dialogues and activities across 13 provinces.

# Nepal

In Nepal, the Foundation supports the country's efforts to strengthen subnational governance, mitigate conflict, empower women, expand economic opportunity, increase environmental resilience, and promote regional cooperation.

During the pandemic, formal and informal justice system agencies in Nepal have had to limit or suspend operations, with devastating impacts for vulnerable populations. As Nepal struggled to respond to increasing concerns about access to justice, the Foundation's Subnational Governance Program was well positioned with alternative dispute resolution, dialogue, and community-based justice programs that helped reduce the burden on formal judicial mechanisms. During the pandemic, these community-based networks played an important role in coordinating Covid-19 containment strategies, sharing health information, and distributing relief to communities. We continued to support 74 judicial committees and 23 dialogue forums across the seven newly established federal provinces serving 6,000 community members. The benefits have been particularly significant for women and impoverished and vulnerable groups.



Five years ago, Nepal was reeling from a massive earthquake that killed and injured thousands and destroyed homes, livelihoods, and critical infrastructure. During the reconstruction that followed, we launched a social impacts monitoring project to develop an accurate picture of long-term disaster effects, recovery patterns, and evolving needs.



The Independent Impacts and Recovery Monitoring Project has collected data from thousands of earthquake-affected households over five years, making it possible to paint a detailed and evolving portrait of the nation's recovery and the challenges that remain. Key findings assist the Nepal Reconstruction Authority to develop effective approaches to disaster response.



# Pacific Islands

In 2020, the Foundation moved forward with programs and plans for expanded work in the Pacific and the re-establishment of an office in Fiji. We hired a Pacific Islands Director and Program Manager to oversee our work; expanded our relations with governments, civil society organizations, and development partners in the region; launched both print and digital book distribution programs; and supported important research, conferences, and publications on Covid-19, cyber issues, and the Future of Work for women.

To improve cyber resilience and knowledge sharing, we organized the Pacific Cyber Dialogue in partnership with the Government of Papua New Guinea's Department of ICT, the Asia-Pacific Network Information Centre, and the Australian and New Zealand Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Trade, with 15 Pacific Island countries represented. The Foundation also produced *The Pacific Covid-19 Infodemic* report, which outlines the state of online information ecosystems in Pacific Island countries and territories, the risks and challenges these ecosystems have faced during

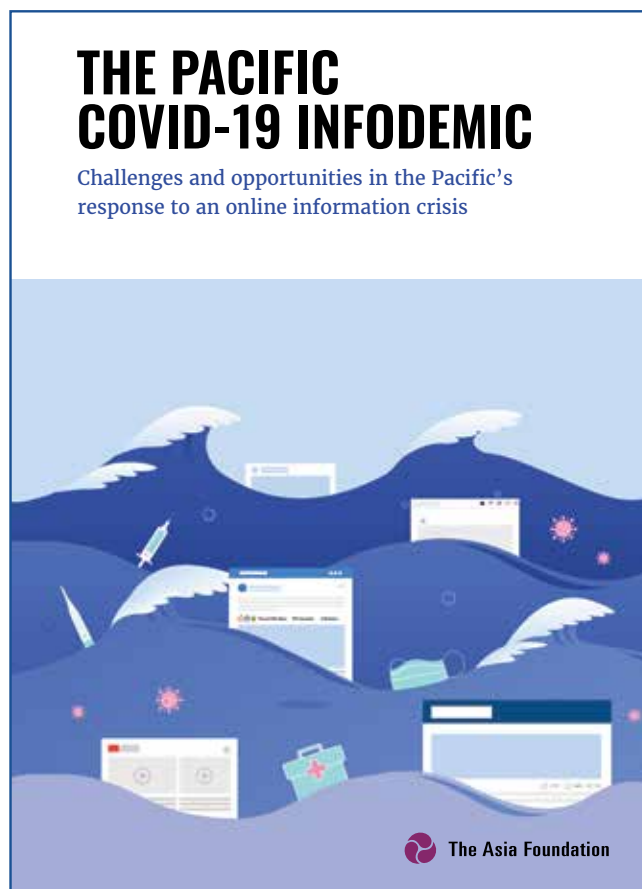
the pandemic, and potential actions by government, the private sector, and civil society to respond to them.

In 2020, the Foundation supported a research project and publication on *The Future of Work for Women in the Pacific Islands* to better understand key economic

and other challenges that women face in the context of the pandemic, climate change, and the impacts of technology. The study provides recommendations for policy measures and reforms to support women's equitable economic participation and leadership in the region's transition towards greener, more resilient, and more inclusive economies.

Finally, we began providing books to schools, nongovernment, and government agencies in Fiji, in cooperation with the U.S. Embassy in Suva. We also launched our Let's Read program, which works with local partners to develop local-language

digital and print children's books. In late 2020, we partnered with Bilum Books to translate, digitize, and deliver books in three Papua New Guinea languages.





## Pakistan

In Pakistan, we work with local partners to strengthen the democratic political process, promote inclusive participation, and build the capacity of local institutions to meet the needs of citizens and sustain the gains of economic and social development.

Our flagship Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) program in Pakistan supported a specialized academic course on the philosophy and applied practice of mediation for senior year students at the International Islamic University Islamabad Law School. To enhance women legal practitioners' access, representation, and ease of practice, the Foundation organized a conference with the Punjab Judicial Academy for 400 women judges to address gendered discourse in law, cybercrime, and access to justice for the transgender community and victims of child abuse. We also facilitated a seminar with Kinnaird College for Women for senior members of the judiciary, prominent lawyers, professors, and students to promote ADR as a viable mechanism of dispute resolution for vulnerable communities.

In a society experiencing inequitable healthcare and social services, the pandemic has had an outsized impact on vulnerable populations. Our Safe Home Initiative for Women and Children addressed hygiene needs of women and girls, provided resources for children unable to attend school, and increased access to psychosocial and legal counseling for victims of domestic violence, which rose during lockdowns.

# Philippines

The Asia Foundation's programs in the Philippines promote better governance to support economic growth, strengthen the rule of law, and foster peace and development in Mindanao. We work with government, local NGOs, and the private sector to strengthen democratic institutions and create sustainable growth.

Citizens' access to quality public services improves their standard of living and enables the economy to thrive. The Foundation's Coalitions for Change (CfC) program works with local leaders to develop and enact transformative public policies: in 2020, 13 new policy measures were enacted to improve education, governance, inclusivity, and the economy. To improve public financing of social programs, CfC helped amend the excise tax law on alcohol and e-cigarettes, increasing revenues from \$1.4 billion to \$1.9 billion in one year.

The Foundation's two complementary projects in the conflicted Bangsamoro region of the southern Philippines—CONVERGE (Countering Violent Extremism through Government and Civil Society Engagement) and CIRCLE (Communities of Inclusion and Resilience through Collaborative Local Engagements)—increased the capacity of 15 local government units to respond to violent extremism in their communities. In response to Covid-19, CIRCLE and CONVERGE launched additional online training workshops for more than 70 members of local governments and community service organizations to effectively address local vulnerabilities and strengthen community resilience in times of multiple crises.



A group of children are sitting on a patterned rug, looking at a tablet together. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent green filter. The children are of various ethnicities and are dressed in casual clothing. One child in the foreground is pointing at the screen of the tablet, which displays a colorful illustration. The overall scene suggests a collaborative learning or reading activity.

## Books for Asia

Books for Asia provides brand-new books and digital content to students, educators, and communities. Poor literacy, inadequate education, and lack of access to information can prevent economic growth, impede civic participation, and threaten political stability. Our digital initiative—**Let's Read**—is a community-driven solution to catalyze reading habits and overcome book scarcity. Let's Read inspires communities to create positive reading experiences with children, works with local authors and illustrators to publish relatable children's books in underserved languages, and maintains a free, easy-to-use storybook platform available worldwide. When schools closed across Asia and the Pacific due to Covid-19, the Foundation supported children's learning with curated book collections and reading activities that cultivate important skills such as critical thinking, STEM, health, and resilience. Localized social media campaigns provided parents with tips on how to read aloud with their children, and volunteer communities across Asia expanded the number of children's books available in local languages through virtual translation events.



Let's  Read  
The Asia Foundation



**5,937**  
Books



**42**  
Languages



**1,689**  
Reading  
Ambassadors



**594**  
Book  
Creators



**2,954**  
Translators



**349,123**  
Books Printed

# Sri Lanka

Asia Foundation programs strengthen subnational governance; increase access to justice; build community security; facilitate post-trauma mental health support; and foster localized inter-ethnic social cohesion through values education and strengthening economic linkages among different ethnic groups.

More than a decade after the end of Sri Lanka's 30-year ethnic civil war, the people of Sri Lanka continue to suffer from unresolved grief and the trauma of loss. The war was still raging when a tsunami struck in 2004, resulting in 30,000 deaths. The terrorist bombings that traumatized the capital on Easter Sunday, 2019, were followed in less than a year by Covid-19 lockdowns. The far-reaching impact of these events, compounded by layer upon layer of stress and trauma, has led to increased incidences

of substance abuse and domestic violence, catapulting the need for psychosocial support to the top of the country's critical concerns. The Foundation's Mental Health and Psychosocial Support program, in partnership with the government health sector and nongovernment organizations, provided support to 7,725 survivors of trauma and trained 231 mental health and psychosocial care providers. The Foundation also funded longstanding local partner, Women in Need, through its Gender and Justice program, to remotely carry out services during the Covid-19 lockdown to reach victims of domestic violence online and via mobile phones. This support reached nearly 4,200 victims with counseling support, 3,308 with legal advice, and 1,435 with legal representation, and its awareness campaigns reached over two million online users.





## Thailand

With the second-largest economy in ASEAN, Thailand is one of the most dynamic countries in Southeast Asia. But over the past decade, despite reaching upper middle-income status, Thailand has faced slowing economic growth, stagnating foreign investment, and political instability. The Foundation supports efforts by the Royal Thai Government on major reform initiatives, government programs, and new investments. We are also supporting Thai-led efforts in the region on sustainable development and Mekong cooperation, and working to strengthen U.S.-Thai relations.

With school closures, the pandemic disrupted learning opportunities for Thai students and heightened the educational divide in Thailand between urban centers and rural areas.

In 2020 The Asia Foundation launched **[Thailandlearning.org](https://thailandlearning.org)**, an online learning portal for Thai students and educators cut off by the Covid-19 crisis, providing access to quality educational tools and resources from across Thailand and around the world in a single site.

While Thailand was largely successful in stemming the tide of Covid-19 infections in 2020, the economic impact could outlast the pandemic. *Enduring the Pandemic: Surveys of the Impact of Covid-19 on Thai Small Businesses* revealed that 70 percent of the national workforce watched their monthly income fall by an average of 47 percent, and 11 percent of small businesses are at risk of closing permanently. The survey was the first in a series of three; initial findings were presented to relevant Thai Government agencies.



### Information for businesses in Timor-Leste

This website serves as a central resource with the latest news, updates and advice for Timor-Leste's private sector.

Due to the challenges posed by coronavirus (COVID-19) this site's current focus is to centralize information that informs businesses about government support, guide workplace operations, employment obligations as well as travel and visas.

Please refer to the [Ministry of Health](#) and the [World Health Organization in Timor-Leste](#) for health-related information.



# Timor-Leste

Addressing reform and inefficiencies in the country's new institutions, increasing citizens' understanding of the role of government, diversifying an oil-based economy, and ensuring safety for all, especially women, are key focus areas of the Foundation in Timor-Leste.

Timor-Leste's economy is almost solely dependent on oil, and the Government of Timor-Leste recognizes tourism as a priority area for economic diversification. In 2020 the Foundation's Tourism Development Program developed a web portal—[www.empreza.tl](http://www.empreza.tl)—to provide information to businesses in real time about the implications of current government laws and the state of emergency during Covid-19. We also conducted an economic impact assessment of Covid-19 and the State of Emergency on Businesses in Timor-Leste, generating data used by the Office of the Prime Minister's Economic Recovery Team and Ministry of Tourism, Trade, and Industry to inform the country's economic response. Working towards improving air connectivity to Timor-Leste as part of its tourism recovery, we published *Covid-19 and the Alignment of Timor-Leste's Aviation and Tourism Strategies*; and in order to strengthen the country's tourism sector and promote coffee-tourism as a niche, we supported the country's National Coffee Association to provide training to 11 coffee businesses and promote Timor-Leste coffee in Australia and the U.S. through online publications and videos.





## Vietnam

Our office in Hanoi is promoting fair, inclusive, and transparent governance; increasing resilience and readiness in the Vietnamese economy; reducing the causes and managing the impacts of climate change; supporting learning and educational achievement; empowering women; and fostering peace and prosperity through regional and international cooperation.

In 2020, we collaborated with the Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry to conduct the most comprehensive survey of the impacts of climate change and natural disasters on businesses ever conducted in Vietnam. The 10,356 domestic and foreign-invested enterprises surveyed across all 63 provinces provided a comprehensive picture of the difficulties businesses face, the opportunities they perceive, and the effectiveness of local government.

Blockchain technology offers a means of protecting workers in the gig economy, including domestic workers, from exploitation while also providing them with a verifiable record of employment and earnings so they can open bank accounts, enroll children in school, and apply for urban residence. We collaborate with Infinity Blockchain Labs and HMC House Cleaning Services Development JSC to pilot a blockchain platform that creates digital personal identities for domestic workers, connects them with potential clients, and builds a rating system for service providers and clients.



# Technology Programs

As access to technology expands, we are applying new tools to increase our impact and help Asia's policymakers, civic reformers, and small business leaders leverage data and analytics, collaborative social media tools, and smartphone technology to connect citizens with a global ecosystem of information and services.

Last year, the Foundation hosted the 2020 APEC App Challenge, highlighting the vast human capital potential in the region and a booming digital economy: 15 teams comprised of 91 local software developers worked virtually and created 15 apps to help small businesses active in the tourism sector address Covid-related challenges and help support recovery. Also in 2020, our partnership with google.org, Go Digital ASEAN is equipping 200,000 people throughout the region with new digital tools and skills, including micro and small enterprises and underemployed youth, particularly in rural and isolated areas. When Covid-19 hit, it served to underscore the need for programs like this one to expand economic opportunities across ASEAN.

# OUR PROGRAMS



- 176 Strengthen Good Governance
- 95 Advance Women’s Empowerment and Gender Equality
- 67 Expand Inclusive Economic Growth
- 27 Increase Environment and Climate Action
- 57 Promote Regional and International Relations

## 2020 FINANCIAL CONDENSED HIGHLIGHTS (IN THOUSANDS)

### REVENUE, SUPPORT, & INCOME

Government: Bilateral & Multilateral Institutions	86,962
Foundations, Corporations, and Individuals	14,206
	101,168

### EXPENDITURES

Programs, Grants, and Related Services	78,612
General Administration	12,534
Fundraising	841
	91,987

Change in Net Assets from Operations	9,181
Non-operating Income	996

### BOOKS IN-KIND

Donated Books and Related Services	4,903
Distribution of Books and Materials	4,986
Inventory Decrease	-83

### ALLOCATION OF EXPENSES

<span style="color: yellow;">■</span> Programs	85%
<span style="color: purple;">■</span> Administration	15%

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Donations made during 2020

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Artist Jas Charanjiva in front of Don't Mess With Me. Her work and activism was featured in a collaborative event between The Asia Foundation and Asian Art Museum, hosted by 2020 Asia Foundation Margaret F. Williams Memorial Fellow Thuy Tran. Photograph © Asian Art Museum. Don't Mess With Me, 2013/2020, by Jas Charanjiva (Indian and American, b. United Kingdom, 1972). Acrylic and latex on marine plywood. Commissioned by the Asian Art Museum, courtesy of the artist.