Challenges to democracy vary widely across countries in East and South East Asia, as does CIPE’s approach. In new, struggling, and transition democracies, CIPE projects target the institutional weaknesses that underlie political instability, such as corruption, governance, rule of law, and opaque policymaking processes. In countries making democratic progress, CIPE helps democracy deliver by improving government performance, thereby making deviations from their positive trajectories less likely. In closed political systems, CIPE facilitates the spread of the marketplace of ideas, creates space and opportunities for free association, and empowers at-risk populations with knowledge of their legal rights and protections.

Throughout the region, CIPE works to promote democratic societies and private sector led economies, to strengthen civil society, and to cultivate public demand for good governance and political accountability.
CIPE is partnering with the Papua New Guinea Women’s Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PNGWCCI) to establish a Women’s Business Center that provides an array of practical services to businesswomen and to aspiring entrepreneurs of all backgrounds in Port Moresby. The goal of the project is to create an entrepreneurial ecosystem for women in Papua New Guinea to enable women’s economic empowerment.

CIPE is also working with local universities in Papua New Guinea to develop new academic curriculum on entrepreneurship instruction, and to help universities begin to deliver this new instruction to their students. The long-term impact is expected to be an increase in entrepreneurial activity on the part of these students.

To improve the conditions in which women entrepreneurs operate and to create a more level economic playing field, there needs to be a supporting ecosystem of intertwined institutions that incentivize entrepreneurial activity, empower aspiring entrepreneurs, increase their likelihood of success, and improve the policy and regulatory environment that they face. In order to contribute to building this supportive ecosystem, CIPE conducts capacity building workshops in Port Moresby for the leaders, staff and key members of PNGWCCI. Through technical training, CIPE strengthens the chamber’s governance, member services, financial management, and advocacy skills. These skills are being put to use through advocacy activities, through engagement with the government, and through coalition building with other business associations. The aim is for PNGWCCI to be better able to sustain its operations and member services and be engaged in systematic policy advocacy.

Photos: CIPE training in Papua New Guinea focuses on vocational education, strategic networking, and business planning to empower local women business owners. Training participants attend the training programs and proudly display their products.

Papua New Guinea: CIPE helped to establish the first Women’s Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PNGWCCI) in Papua New Guinea. PNGWCCI reached a major milestone as an organization and as a chamber of commerce when the chamber held a successful policy roundtable event focusing on the government’s draft small business development plan. The chamber also published a policy white paper in response to the government’s draft Small and Medium Enterprise Master Plan, which included recommendations to address the challenges faced by women-run and women-owned small businesses in PNG.

Thailand: The Thai Insitute of Directors (IOD), with CIPE support, has provided anti-corruption and anti-bribery training to more than 500
The institutional dynamics that underlie the politics, economy, and society of Thailand must change if democratic norms and practices are to take root in the country. These challenges are numerous and complex, and no single initiative will solve them all. Corruption, however, is paramount among these challenges. In Thailand, public perceptions and allegations of corruption undermine public faith in the institutions of democracy to such an extent that democratically-elected governments lose legitimacy in the eyes of competing segments of Thai society. Combating corruption is CIPE’s principal strategic focus in Thailand because CIPE believes that addressing corruption is the best way to address Thailand’s democratic deficiencies.

CIPE and its partner the Thai Institute of Directors (IOD) have launched a collective action campaign since 2010 to fight corruption in Thailand through a movement initiated within the business community. Over the past few years, CIPE and IOD galvanized a coalition of companies and business associations and established best practices in the area of anti-corruption to which coalition members must adhere. The companies that are part of IOD’s anti-corruption coalition include the largest and most prominent Thai and multinational firms in the country. CIPE and IOD estimate that the coalition companies (not including the business associations) represent nearly 20 percent of Thai GDP and more than 1 million employees. During this ongoing project, the coalition has continued to grow, and a variety of other activities have broadened and deepened the impact of this initiative.

Cambodia: CIPE partnered with Silaka, a local NGO, to improve transparency in the public procurement process at the local level, specifically by assembling a coalition of local NGOs, businesses, and village representatives as independent procurement observers. The project has empowered citizens locally to participate in and help oversee the bidding process to improve accountability in procurement and advocate for good governance. The Deputy Governor of Kampong Thom province has concluded that the project not only improved transparency but also encouraged citizen participation in public affairs, as demonstrated by higher rates of attendance at public dialogues. Moreover, provincial officials compiled data showing that competitive contract awards today are 50 percent cheaper compared to before the start of project due to improved competition and reduced opportunities for collusion and corruption. This was confirmed by the Commune Chief of San Kor, who noted that the resulting savings enable his community to conduct more public work projects for the same amount of money as previously spent.

Photos (top to bottom): Thanakit Pempoonkantisuk of the Thailand Development Research Institute introduces a self-evaluation tool for countering bribery in Thailand; IOD participants learn how to develop anti-corruption policy and assess corruption risk; Dr. Bandid Nijathaworn, President and CEO of IOD, led a delegation of 20 to CIPE to learn about CIPE’s work in the region.
The Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE) strengthens democracy around the globe through private enterprise and market-oriented reform. CIPE is one of the four core institutes of the National Endowment for Democracy and an affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. Since 1983, CIPE has worked with business leaders, policymakers, and civil society to build the institutions vital to a democratic society. CIPE’s key program areas include enterprise ecosystems, business advocacy, democratic governance, and anti-corruption & ethics.

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