



When and Why do States Respond to Women's Claims?

UNDERSTANDING GENDER-EGALITARIAN POLICY CHANGE IN ASIA

Despite progress towards gender equality in some areas of policy, advances have been limited in others. With a better understanding of why some issues gain policy traction while others are neglected or obstructed, advocates for women's rights will be better equipped to articulate their demands and strategize for gender-egalitarian change.

Research Issue in Context

The past couple of decades have seen the rise of gender-equality policies on different issues and at different levels, from legislation on domestic violence at national and regional levels, to quotas and reserved seats for women in national parliaments and local councils. These outcomes are frequently seen as part of a broader democratization of gender relations.

Nevertheless, a number of issues and concerns remain.

Complex causal influences

Progressive social change, including changes in gender relations and structures, are the result of complex processes, with diverse and multi-directional causal influences.

Actors' autonomy

The positioning of different actors, and their degree of autonomy from or dependence on the state, can influence the kinds of issues that are included in or excluded from the policy domain.

Uneven progress

Progress on gender equality policy has been uneven across issue areas, even within the same country.

Poor implementation

Policy decisions may not be implemented, resulting in few meaningful improvements in women's status and ability to realize their rights.

Domestic filtering

The translation of global gender equality norms has been uneven across countries: global trends are filtered through different domestic contexts to produce varying outcomes.

Research Objectives and Questions

This comparative research project seeks to understand how policy change to strengthen women's rights occurs. When and why do states respond to women's claims-making? What are the factors and conditions under which non-state actors can effectively trigger and influence policy

change? What mechanisms are necessary to ensure that issues get on the policy agenda?

The project aims to improve understanding and contribute insights in the following areas.

- The complex processes through which advocates for women's rights articulate their demands, and strategize with other actors both within and outside the state realm, and transnationally, to bring about policy change.
- The "blind spots" or issues on which there has been little advocacy, despite being central to women's lives and well-being.
- The proactive role of other actors such as First Ladies, progressive states and social movements, both nationally and transnationally, in triggering policy change.

China, India and Indonesia

To capture diversity in both governance systems and sociopolitical contexts, the research is being conducted in three of Asia's largest and most diverse countries: China, India and Indonesia. With their different size; political systems (central or federal); degrees of democratization and decentralization; levels of regional and local autonomy; and ethnic, religious and geographic diversity, what happens in these countries has potentially huge significance for understanding gender equality policies and obstacles to change elsewhere.

Entry Points

The research is concerned with gender-egalitarian policy change in two broad areas: physical/bodily integrity, and economic and social rights. Within these areas, two specific issues are the focus of in-depth comparative analysis across the three countries: violence against women, and the rights of migrant women/domestic workers. These are issues around which women's rights advocates have mobilized in recent decades, and serve as entry points to deepen the understanding of processes of claims-making.

Why is it that some claims for gender-egalitarian change gain acceptance in policy and may even be implemented, while others remain stubbornly intractable?



Issue areas

	In-Depth Comparative Analysis		Overview Research	
	Bodily integrity	Economic and structural issues	Care	Land and inheritance rights
China	Violence against women	Domestic workers	Care-related claims	Land rights
India	Violence against women	Migrant domestic workers	Care-related claims	Land rights
Indonesia	Violence against women	Migrant domestic workers	Care-related claims	Marital property and Inheritance rights

Additionally, attention will be paid throughout the research to two sets of issues where advocacy and claims-making have been either less visible (care work), or more difficult (family law and inheritance).

Key questions

- Under what structural configurations, and in response to what kinds of actors or coalitions, are states more likely to respond positively to demands for gender-egalitarian policy change?
- How do structural configurations, actors and strategies differ across issue areas within the same country?
- What role do transnational actors play in the process of policy change?
- Once policies or laws have been formulated or inscribed in constitutions, what determines the extent to which they are implemented?

Methodology

In order to do justice to the complexities of change processes, the research uses “process-tracing” and “analytical narratives” to reconstruct the evolution of a particular set of claims over time, and unpack the reasons why certain claims gain acceptance in policy and may even be implemented, while others remain stubbornly intractable. The research primarily uses qualitative methods, including archival research (parliamentary debates, policy documents, judicial reports, speeches, media coverage) and interviews with key informants such as policy makers, movement actors, bureaucrats.

About Project Briefs

UNRISD Project Briefs pose questions, flag ideas and contribute knowledge that can improve the quality of development debates, policy and practice. They provide a concise summary of an UNRISD research project, situating it within wider social development debates; outlining its focus, objectives and methodology; and highlighting interim findings.

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Beneficiaries

The research has the potential to inform policy debates at the local, national and global levels. It should help advocates to better strategize and articulate their demands for progressive policy change within the state realm – and beyond it, for example, in the framing of the post-2015 development agenda. Beneficiaries include: rights advocates, nationally and globally, within civil society and the non-governmental sector; policy actors at national, regional and global levels; and researchers working on equitable and inclusive policy change.

Outputs/Activities

- In-depth country reports tracing policy change around the two focus topics: violence against women, and the rights of migrant women/domestic workers.
- Country overview papers on women’s claims-making in relation to land and inheritance rights.
- Cross-country comparative paper on claims-making around care issues.
- Cross-country, cross-issue comparative paper.
- Policy briefs on research findings.
- The project methodology workshop took place on 22-24 August 2013 in New Delhi.
- Opportunities for dissemination and outreach will be identified as the project progresses.

Further Information

Duration: 2013–2015

Funding: This project is funded by the Ford Foundation Regional Offices in New Delhi, Beijing and Jakarta.

Research Team

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Through our work, we aim to ensure that social equity, inclusion and justice are central to development thinking, policy and practice.

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