

Title: Negotiating Gender Equitable Change in Bangladesh: The Role of Informal Institutions

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In recent years, Bangladesh has made significant strides in advancing women's rights and improving women's conditions. The adoption of various gender equity policies and legal reforms is an important part of this change. How and why were the political actors motivated to promote such changes in a country where gender equity concerns have very little currency in mainstream politics and formal policy making institutions perceive women's needs in 'welfarist' terms? This paper investigates how informal institutions, particularly the personal relationships and networks, advance or block the way pro women policy coalitions promote gender equity concerns in Bangladesh. The paper is based on empirical evidence collected on the successful legal reform on violence against women in 2010 and processes of implementation after enactment.

Through investigating the role of the informal institutions the paper draws attention to some uncomfortable realities, and challenge how promotion of gender equity is understood in mainstream gender and development literature where much emphasis on getting the formal rules and procedures 'right'. It illustrates how the subversion of the formal rules may work to advance women's rights in policy spaces but may not facilitate change during implementation. It also raises uncomfortable questions about whether 'going with the grain' furthers women's rights in the long run and the difficulties that may arise for women's rights actors from being embedded within such informal practices.