

In search of strategic partners: Japan's campaign for equal opportunity

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Abstrak

Although advocates of equal opportunity in Japan have recently achieved significant policy-making gains, including the strengthening of the Equal Employment Opportunity Law in 1997, progress toward greater workplace gender equality remains hampered by the weakness of 'strategic partnerships' among actors such as national bureaucrats and women's rights activists. Using interviews with participants and expert observers, this paper explores Japan's recent equal opportunity initiatives, noting the leading role of national labor bureaucrats in formal policy-making, the lack of support for activists fighting discrimination in the courts, and divisions among union officials. The actors have sometimes used international norms to considerable effect, but public policies often undermine their efforts, notably by encouraging the use of women as low-paid non-regular workers.