

# Gender and Neighbourhood Renewal in England

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## ABSTRACT

This paper is a 'work in progress' based on research carried out in preparation of a doctoral thesis. Neighbourhood renewal and regeneration has often been said to be a gender-neutral policy area in the UK and despite attempts to highlight the need for a gendered analysis of deprivation there is little evidence of this in practice (Alsop et al, 2001; Brownill and Darke 1998; May 1997; Riseborough, 1998; Shah, 2005).

This paper will begin with a gendered analysis of policies in England that aim to tackle social exclusion within neighbourhoods and highlight issues connected to governance, partnership working and community involvement. Brownill and Darke (1998) were amongst the first to highlight the contradictions in UK regeneration partnerships. Their research demonstrated that partnerships present barriers to inclusion along the lines of race *and* gender but can also offer opportunities for the inclusion and incorporation of different interests which might otherwise be excluded from regeneration processes.

This doctoral research aims to build on previous research and examine the role of women in regeneration. There are contradictory messages in the academic literature regarding the role of women in neighbourhood regeneration. It is often said that it is women who are shouldering the responsibility of poverty and community participation in regeneration schemes rather than men (Bruegel, 2000; May, 1997; Brownill and Darke, 1998) and yet it is also said that whilst women's domestic role often brings them into community activities it also restricts their involvement since women are often time poor as a result of their commitments to their families and work (Alsop et al, 2001; Appleton, 1999). Women are said to get involved in informal, community activities whilst men take formal roles in decision making bodies (Lowndes, 2004). Furthermore research has identified a trend for men to take up paid work whilst women continue in unpaid community roles (McCulloch, 1997; Geddes, 2000; Harris 1999).

This paper is focused on empirical material gathered in two case study neighbourhood regeneration partnerships in England – Sure Start and New Deal for Communities. It will explore the views of women working in regeneration and focus on some of the opportunities for and barriers to their involvement in both paid and unpaid work and their experiences of participation in decision-making processes.

The argument presented is that consideration of gender at all levels from policy development, to local partnership creation and implementation, is necessary to achieve effective

neighbourhood renewal. The paper will conclude with some thoughts on some of the key challenges to incorporating gender equality into neighbourhood renewal.

**Keywords: gender, neighbourhood partnerships and community involvement**