

Paper presented at the 10th European Urban Research Association Conference, The Vital City, University of Glasgow, September 2007.

Exploring gender in neighbourhood renewal: the role of women in neighbourhoods.

Lucy Grimshaw
Research Associate

Cities Research Centre
University of the West of England
Frenchay Campus
Coldharbour Lane
Bristol BS16 1QY

lucy.grimshaw@uwe.ac.uk

1. Introduction

In a recent chapter Beebeejaun and Grimshaw (2007) sought to address the idea of the neighbourhood as a site where the idea of the experience of diversity within everyday life is often placed (Amin, 2002). We sought to explore whether neighbourhood governance can be practiced in a meaningful and potentially non-oppressive way:

“How can governance draw upon the richness of knowledge and understanding available to people in different cultural worlds without oppressively omitting richness through the dominance of particular ideas and power relations?” (Healey, 1997, p 49)

A key issue within neighbourhood governance is the sensitivity of institutional structures to the local population. Commitment to partnership working at local level is one of the key principles underpinning Labour’s modernisation of local government (Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002; Stoker, 2004; Geddes, 2006). The Labour Government has also established a policy focus on social exclusion in neighbourhoods and in particular on the renewal of deprived neighbourhoods (SEU, 2001). A key strand in both policy areas has been the emphasis upon engagement of civil society and community organisations as the means to achieve responsive and effective governance. Such partnerships are conceived as collaborations between public, private and civil society (more usually referred to as ‘community’) sectors.

Labour policy has been criticised for paying little regard to a serious debate about gender issues and relations. This paper examines current policies relevant to urban regeneration from a gender perspective. It then provides data from two case studies of English neighbourhood partnerships to explore how gender influences involvement in regeneration, with a particular focus on how women are involved and what

opportunities they have to influence decisions. The paper concludes that although gender is now marginally higher on the Government's agenda neighbourhood governance organisations and processes are still gendered and there remain several challenges to overcome before gender received sufficient attention in neighbourhood regeneration and governance.

2. New Labour policy and gender

The transformation in the delivery of welfare has implications for women and their involvement in paid and unpaid work. Feminists have argued that welfare state has always been premised on the notion that women will carry out unpaid domestic work whilst the male breadwinner supports them financially (Lewis, 2002). In the UK the 'rolling back of the state' and transformation of the economy and welfare state throughout the 1980s led to an increased reliance of the state on women's paid work and voluntary work in the home and community (McDowell, 1999). This has continued post 1997 with the promotion of women's employment and employment enabling welfare policies (McDowell, 1999). This has led some commentators to highlight the contradictory situation where women are expected to work more but also get involved in welfare provision (Hague et al, 2001; Scourfield and Drakeford, 2002).

The Labour Government's approach to gender relations has been largely to avoid dealing directly with gender issues (Bradshaw et al, 2003; Brownill, 2004; Newman, 2001). Although some policies have been implemented to support the lives of women – a national minimum wage, childcare tax credits, paternity leave- some have argued that Labour, whilst acknowledging that gender roles have changed they have acted as if gender issues and difference have been resolved. As such there has been little recognition of the continued inequalities between men and women and particularly the disparity in incomes and participation in caring (Newman, 2001; Bradshaw et al, 2003). Thus the Government through its Women's and Equality Unit has produced reports demonstrating inequalities but it is unclear what impact these have had on policies, since discussion of gender in policy documents, for example, relating to poverty and social exclusion have been negligible (Bradshaw et al, 2003).

Many of Labour's social policies were presented in a gender neutral way but had a differential effect on women and men, for example, schooling, care of the elderly to Sure Start for young children (Newman, 2001). Newman states that these policies were carried out in "the name of the family rather than from an explicit of continued forms of gender inequality." (Newman, 2001: 155). As a result of Labour's turn to communitarianism (Imrie and Raco, 2003; Smith, 2001; Newman, 2001) the 'family' became fundamental, particularly to the renewal of community and society. Parents were meant to be active in preventing a series of social problems to getting involved in the running of schools and contributing to the revival of local communities, particularly in deprived neighbourhoods. As Newman states this was a deeply conservative view of civil society and one in which:

“The gendered division of labour, on which most of this activity was based was hardly compatible with the prospect of women competing equally with men in the waged economy.”(Newman, 2001: 156)

The changes in the welfare state combined with the turn to neighbourhood governance, and the involvement of civil society has focussed more pressure on the self-governance of individuals and communities to provide solutions rather than the state or other agencies.

“By focusing on people and families and communities and sharing responsibility for social exclusion between different agencies, there has been a tendency to disregard the significance of wider social and economic forces and the inequalities they produce.” (Franklin, 2000:17 quoted in Newman, 2001:154)

Self-help, partnerships and community involvement are seen as the solution to run-down neighbourhoods. The discussion of poverty is neglected and discussions of social exclusion problematise groups (such as single mothers, anti-social youths) rather than wider social and economic issues. There has long been recognition that poverty impacts more on women than men (Bradshaw et al, 2003; Bennett, 2004; Brownill and Darke, 1998). However Bradshaw et al’s (2003) policy review found that government policies aimed at tackling poverty have an implicit and indirect gender dimension rather than an explicit and direct inclusion of gender. Their research report concludes that although there have been some improvements in the position of women relative to men, poverty is still much more of a female experience than a male one and although policies will be of benefit to women (particularly those with caring responsibilities). Some policies will impact upon women more than men or vice versa because they are experiencing the condition that is the focus of the policy (Bradshaw et al, 2003). Policies such as Sure Start explicitly aimed at the whole family but inevitably impact largely on women and their children because they are still the main carers within the family (Bradshaw et al, 2003). As Bradshaw et al suggest “many of the factors underlying child poverty and pensioner poverty, which are explicit Government targets, have their origins in the gendered nature of society.” (Bradshaw et al, 2003:37)

In terms of representation and decision-making at local level, early on in its first term Labour acknowledged the lack of women in positions of power, in its first White Paper on local government it highlighted that councillors, as a body, do not reflect the make-up of their community with women making up only a quarter and ethnic minorities seriously under-represented (DETR, 1998b). This was again recognised in the 2006 White Paper on Local Government where the percentage of women had risen slightly for 2004 to 29% (DCLG, 2006). Both documents state that more needs to be done to encourage the involvement of a wider cross section of the community.

3. Urban policy and neighbourhood regeneration

Since 1997 neighbourhoods and community have been central to urban policy in the UK (Lepine et al, 2007). The Government's response to social exclusion, in particular, brought neighbourhoods to the fore and was exemplified by the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (SEU, 2000). Neighbourhoods were seen as the site for tackling social exclusion and deprivation and latterly as a way of achieving community cohesion. The focus on neighbourhoods forms part of a general policy direction which encourages the involvement of local communities and voluntary and community groups in decision-making and service delivery at local level (DTLR, 2001; DCLG; 2006).

After a period of urban policy noted for its silence on gender issues Brownill (2004: 202) has acknowledged that for the first time in a major policy document there is reference to gender in the Urban White Paper (DETR, 2000). She quotes, the Urban White Paper:

“We want all who live in urban areas to have the opportunity to achieve their full potential – regardless of irrelevant factors such as race, age, gender, faith and disability. We also want all to have a say in policy development and implementation and to have equal access to services.” (DETR, 2000: 36)

Although this is the only mention to gender in the whole document and Brownill suggests that the word “irrelevant” in the quote above is used presumably “to imply that those formulating the policy do not think that the factors mentioned should be barriers to achieving opportunity, [but] it also gives the impression that these are not sufficient enough issues to be addressed by the policy.” (Brownill, 2004: 203) She also adds it implies a blindness in terms of gender relations within the urban environment.

Policies targeting neighbourhoods also display ambivalence to gender relations. The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (SEU, 2001) is based on 18 Policy Action Team reports and as Alsop et al (2001) note, only one of these reports, the Financial Services report, has a sub-section covering gender issues (albeit according to Alsop et al 2000 there could have been a more effective discussion of gender issues). Ethnic minority issues are included throughout the NSNR (SEU, 2001) but gender is only referred to in lists of ‘equalities groups’. As Alsop et al (2001) conclude, “*What is lacking throughout, however, is a systematic and detailed analysis of gendered disadvantage.*” (pp. 5)

The NDC programme is a major part of the Government's strategy to deal with disadvantaged neighbourhoods and also began by neglecting gender. In the first sets

of guidance on establishing and developing NDC Partnerships gender was not mentioned at all, race was mentioned with reference to the Race Equality Guidance developed especially for the programme (DETR, 2000a; 2000b) In guidance on measuring performance and progress there was only one example of disaggregated data for men and women and this referred the economically active and one further reference to women's dissatisfaction with childcare provision (note there is no equivalent data for men) (DETR, 2000b).

As a result of the previous neglect of race equality, since the late 1990s neighbourhood renewal policy, backed by new race equality legislation, has sought to emphasise the importance of including and supporting people from minority ethnic groups and specific race equality guidance was produced for the NDC programme (DETR, 2000c; ODPM, 2002; ODPM, 2004b). However, the national evaluation of NDC states that more is being done in relation to BME issues within NDC partnerships than with regard to gender and disability (CRESR, 2005). Unlike race, gender has often been ignored or sidelined within policy documents (May, 1997; Brownill and Darke, 1998).

Almost six years after the commencement of NDC Government guidance notes discussed the diversity and equality issues on the Board recognising a full range of categories including gender. It includes in its checklist the question – “*Do you have a strategy to work toward a race and gender balance appropriate to the area's profile?*” (ODPM, 2004a: 4). The guidance states that diversity of the neighbourhood should be reflected in the Board and to aim for a 40/60 split might be a realistic target but with the caveat that “sometimes it is impractical to be all inclusive.” (ODPM, 2004a: 31)

Unlike in the Urban White Paper, the guidance at least acknowledges that gender “has not been widely addressed in regeneration programmes and the gender composition of the Board is often overlooked.” (ODPM, 2004a: 31) Gender is mentioned with reference to both women and men and the diversity within BME groups is also acknowledged.

“The diversity of the BME population needs to be considered in terms of ethnicity, religion, culture, age, disability and gender, and if appropriate reflected in the composition of the Board.” (ODPM, 2004a: 32)

The guidance recognises that gender is “central to many of the major issues prevalent in NDCs” (ODPM, 2004c: 34). However despite highlighting some of the issues facing women such as their lower incomes, their caring roles, their role as the majority of lone parents, as Brownill found in the Urban White Paper (Brownill, 2004) the guidance gives no examples of nor mechanisms to address these issues.

The experience of Sure Start, another neighbourhood initiative, also provides an example of the lack of gendered analysis of Labour's policies. Sure Start aimed to support children under 4 years and their families and includes pre and post natal support. It is part of Labour's attempt to tackle childhood poverty. Sure Start is a clear example of a programme which was presented in a gender neutral way but had a differential effect on women and men (Newman, 2001). Sure Start is explicitly aimed at the whole family but inevitably impacts largely on women and their children because they are still the main carers within the family (Bradshaw et al, 2003). As Bradshaw et al suggest "many of the factors underlying child poverty... which are explicit Government targets have their origins in the gendered nature of society." (Bradshaw et al, 2003:37). Sure Start is one of the most generous of family policy developments however it has been criticised since although making specific mention of fathers the "*initiative overall is arguably focussed on mothers and children.*" (Scourfield and Drakeford, 2002: 625).

The original guidance for Sure Start fails to address gender issues and remains largely silent preferring to talk about involving 'parents and families' throughout. The guidance only once refers specifically to "*mothers and fathers and grandparents and other carers*" (DfEE, 1999a: 6) and once again to fathers with reference to measuring outputs and "*more involvement of fathers in activities with their children.*" (pp. 24). Guidance for the second tranche of Sure Start Partnerships set out specific targets and again it is overwhelming gender neutral with no targets set for involving men and women except a need to care for and support mothers with post-natal depression. The guidance mentions the need to be inclusive, to include all families, take into consideration special needs and be culturally sensitive but there is little mention of race, gender, disability or different types of families. Interestingly the sections 'Special services for teenage parents' and 'Sure Start Plus' (DfEE, 1999b: 21) is where the need for support for both men and women is made clear. Areas with the highest rates of teenage pregnancy were to be targeted first by Sure Start reinforcing the idea of women as a 'problem' in deprived areas. Towards the end of the guidance reference is made to the need to address equal opportunities ensuring that "Sure Start services reach young children and their parents regardless of race, culture, religion, disability, sex or sexual orientation." (DfEE, 1999b: 23). When discussing governance and managing programmes the guidance states that partnerships should reflect the local community, including ethnic minority groups. Again, as with the NDC special guidance on addressing minority needs was issued (DfEE, 1999c). Overall in both programmes it was not seen to be important to monitor the involvement of men and women. In the national evaluation it was found that under half of the first and second round of Sure Start Partnerships had one male parent on the Management Board (DfES, 2002) and there are few male staff (DfES, 2003).

Sure Start has benefited many women in supporting families and enabling them to access childcare and other valuable social provision (Hey and Bradford, 2006); mothers are much more likely to get involved than fathers (NESS, 2005a). The national evaluation of Sure Start actually found that the majority of users of Sure Start are women who are not working and consequently Sure Start is not designed to reach working parents (both men and women) (NESS, 2005a). As long as mothers and

fathers are in paid work they have limited access to the support Sure Start offers, they are seen as no longer 'excluded'.

As we have seen most policy documents and guidance now refer (albeit in a limited way) to the different groups such as gender, race, disability, faith, sexual orientation. Where detailed guidance is given on race equality and how to monitor race equality (DfEE, 1999; DETR, 2000; ODPM, 2004b) there is still a lack of serious discussion about what it means to focus on gender, why it should be done and how to assess impact. For some commentators in the fields of regeneration and public policy, gender mainstreaming is seen as a coherent strategy to introduce and address gender relations and issues (Brownill, 2004; Bennett, 2004; Beveridge et al, 2000; Squires and Wickham-Jones, 2004; Booth and Gilroy, 2001; Greed, 2005)

The principle of gender mainstreaming and the need for its international promotion was established at the UN Conference on women in Beijing in 1995. Since then it has been incorporated into the Treaty of Amsterdam 1997 of the European Union and this requires the mainstreaming of gender into all aspects of policy-making (Greed, 2005; Squires and Wickham-Jones, 2004; Beveridge et al, 2000).

In 1997 Labour's commitment to mainstreaming was formalised in 'Policy Appraisal for equal treatment' guidance (PAET). In addition some departments have their own guidance in place (WEU, 2003). The guidelines were to offer civil servants a way of carrying out impact assessment and to challenge gender neutrality within policies (Squires and Wickham-Jones, 2004; Beveridge et al., 2000). However the PAET was a highly centralised, bureaucratic process and there was inconsistency of implementation across government departments with some never carrying out gender impact assessments (Beveridge et al., 2000).

Critics have said that the Government's policy towards gender mainstreaming been as "haphazard" (Squires and Wickham-Jones, 2004). As Bradshaw et al (2003) state the Women and Equality Unit has published reports on the incomes of women and men which demonstrate that inequalities exist. However it is not clear what impact these reports have had on Government policies to tackle poverty and social exclusion since discussion of gender within these policies remains negligible. We will return to the issue of gender mainstreaming at the end of the paper.

5. A gendered analysis of community involvement

As we have seen for the Labour government community involvement is central to neighbourhood renewal. The rationale being that without communities' involvement in delivering and planning regeneration projects and programmes then they are not sustainable and often fail (SEU, 2000).

“The most powerful resource in turning around neighbourhoods should be the community itself. Community involvement can take many forms: formal volunteering; helping a neighbour; taking part in a community organisation. It can have the triple benefit of getting things done that need to be, fostering community links and building the skills, self-esteem and networks of those who give their time.” (Social Exclusion Unit 1998: 68)

Community governance implied empowerment of individuals within their communities and a devolution of power but in reality regeneration programmes are still regulated and guided by central government guidance, monitoring requirements and review (Imrie and Raco, 2003; etc). There is also a concern that public involvement in governance may simply reproduce dominant understandings of race and gender by replicating biological and essentialist categorisations (Newman, 2001; Lewis, 2000; Beebeejaun and Grimshaw, 2007). Brownill (2004) argues:

“Community corresponds to the world of the home, the private sphere where relations are caring and attention is paid to those areas of life, such as housing, open space and collective activity linked to this. Community therefore comes to rest on the naturalization of the roles of men and women within society and becomes part of its spatial manifestation.” (pp206)

Newman (2001) argues that a sharp separation between ‘public’ and ‘private’ spheres means that issues significant for women may be marginalized or excluded from the public realm and (along with Lowndes 2000) she argues that women’s “disproportionate contribution to the informal political domain of community and social action may remain unrecognised” (Newman, 2001). Certainly, as is outlined in this paper, within policy documents there is no recognition that gender might be an influencing factor in community involvement.

Brownill and Darke’s (1998) research demonstrated that regeneration partnerships based in local communities present barriers to inclusion along the lines of gender and race but can also offer opportunities for the inclusion and incorporation of different interests which might otherwise be excluded from regeneration processes. In particular as the organisations involved in welfare provision change there is some optimism about the role of women. As the bureaucratic welfare state changes and begins decentralising and privatising there is the belief that this may open up ‘non-bureaucratic niches’ which allow women’s groups and individual women to increase their power and influence (Clarke et al, 1995; Goss, 2001). Women’s links with the state through non-profit organisations may provide greater potential for challenging the organisation of the state than direct political incorporation (Clarke et al, 1995). The conflicting result is that whilst restructuring of the welfare state and governance organisations on the one hand has added to a reliance on women’s unpaid work on the other it may have opened up new opportunities for involvement, power and influence.

However, research has consistently pointed to the imbalance of power between community representatives and paid professionals (Hastings et al, 1996; Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002; etc).

Men and women are said to participate differently in governance processes (Newman, 2005); women tend to participate in more informal processes whereas men prefer more formal methods of organising (Alsop et al., 2001; Lowndes, 2004; Furbey et al., 2006). Research suggests that women tend to get involved at the community or 'grassroots' level in specific campaigns rather than in the formal decision making processes (Furbey et al., 2006; Lowndes, 2004; Appleton, 1999). This idea is described by Donnison (quoted in McCulloch, 1997) who makes the link between ways of participating and organisational structures:

“... women often play leading roles in the early heroic days of the community projects, but then hierarchies, formality and bureaucracy reassert themselves and the men take over.”

Women are often said to get involved in their communities as an extension of their domestic work and as a result often do not identify themselves as 'active in the community' (Smith 2001; Lowndes, 2004). Research has shown that whilst women see themselves as community managers men see themselves as politicians (Moser, 1993; McCulloch, 1997; Smith, 2001). In community development women are often said to be concerned with 'softer issues' such as caring and the daily routines whilst men are seen as 'natural leaders' and able to deal with 'hard issues' such as managing projects (Dominelli, 2006). These different ways of participating are the result of the gendered division of labour and roles within the public and private spheres. However there is a danger of using gender stereotypes for men and women:

“... the very idea of distinct styles and concerns for women's and men's community organising essentializes the contributions of women and men into dichotomies of 'masculine' – confrontational and competitive – and 'feminine' – nurturing and empowering.” (Martin, 2002; 334)

Community involvement in regeneration is limited in general and the literature highlights several barriers to involvement including barriers specifically relevant to women. Women are said to lack time to participate in community activities and are described as 'time poor' because of their commitments to their families and paid work (Alsop et al, 2001; Appleton, 1999). Women's activities in the private sphere are said to restrict their involvement in the public sphere and yet, conversely, women are able to take part in community activities because of the elasticity of their time (Gilbert, 2000). Women are also said to lack confidence and therefore power within organisations. May (1997) states that although men and women may lack self-esteem and confidence when dealing with officials, it is women who are especially affected. McCulloch (1997) found that men in the middle age group were given a status role while women's proposals were not taken seriously. Some studies have found that the

format and language in local groups put women off joining or seeking management positions. Studies show that once women have overcome barriers to get involved in activities they still face barriers to accessing power because of unfamiliarity with formal procedures, the failure of paid staff to recognise the potential contribution of women and the women's own lack of confidence in their ability (Lowndes, 2004; Sullivan and Skelcher: 2002). Razzaque (2000) confirms the extent to which language and behaviour of 'men in suits' can create a lack of confidence if, not fear, in women in regeneration partnerships and particularly women from BME groups.

Other key barriers to involvement include institutional factors such as the rules, culture and orientation of the organisation and its programme in terms of citizen participation. The ability of citizens to participate is also influenced by structural inequalities in society such as age, class, gender, disability, sexuality and the ability of organisations to address these (Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002). The location of meetings and timing, the provision of childcare and interpretation services as well as the rules around behaviour and meetings (for example, rules to prevent the use of racist/sexist language) all have an impact on participation.

6. Case studies and research methods

The research is based on two partnerships involving the public, private and community sector. The organisations are all based in the same geographical area, a local authority borough which is ethnically diverse with approximately 15% of the population being from black and minority ethnic communities. The organisations are based in different neighbourhoods where 30% and 51% of the population are from BME communities. The borough is said to be one of the most deprived in England and each organisation aims to regenerate their target areas and improve the lives of those living there. The case study organisations are good examples of new governance organisations since they are multi-agency and expect members of the community to take part on a voluntary basis. Each organisation comprises a staff team and a Partnership Board. The Board is usually made up of representatives from local public sector agencies, the private sector and the voluntary and community sectors. The organisations have been established to run different regeneration programmes established by the Labour Government in England since 1997.

The first is a Sure Start (SS) which focuses on families and children under 4 years old within the 'SS neighbourhood area' (population about 8,600) and has developed a range of services around health, education, training and employment. It is based on community consultation and expects participation of the community as decision-makers on the Board and the 'Parents' Panel', as users of services and as volunteers supporting the running of those services. It began in 2002. The second is a New Deal for Communities Partnership (NDC) which is a neighbourhood-based regeneration (population about 11,500) which aims to improve housing, employment, education, community safety, the environment, health and community empowerment within the 'NDC neighbourhood'. It is based on extensive community consultation and

community involvement is expected at Board and on Thematic Sub-groups which develop and approve projects as well as users of projects delivered. It began in 1999.

The data is based on twenty-one interviews with female members of paid staff and unpaid volunteers in the three organisations in 2005. Semi-structured interviews were carried out covering the women's experiences of working in the three organisations including their views about their involvement in neighbourhood regeneration, the role of gender and their involvement in decision-making. Women at all levels within the organisations were interviewed where possible.

7. Women working in the neighbourhood

7.1 How are women involved?

In the SS the staff team of eighteen is predominantly made up of women from BME communities and mainly of Indian or Pakistani origin. The manager is female. In previous years men have worked at the SS, primarily in monitoring and administration positions but also as a father's worker. A male Finance Officer started at the end of data collection. The Management Board is also predominantly female with four men (from the public sector and voluntary and community sectors). The Chair is a parent representative. There are eight parent representatives on the Board and all are women, eight from BME communities and one White British. The formal process for membership is by nomination. Forms are sent to every family in the area and potential reps are nominated and then elected at a Parent Forum meeting.

In the NDC there are 30 staff two thirds of the staff are women and one third men and about two thirds are White British and one third are from BME communities. There is a female manager and the management team of ten has six women and four men. Most of the management team are White British with only one Asian joint theme manager. Women dominate administration and community development posts. There are twenty-nine Board members in total, twelve women (nine are community representatives) and seventeen men (seven are community representatives). The Board is made up of eight elected community reps representing eight neighbourhoods in the area (six women and two men), six BME reps elected or nominated through their organisations (four men and two women), four private sector reps from local businesses (both men), two youth reps (one male one female), one voluntary sector rep (female), seven public sector agency reps including 2 councillors (six men and one woman) and an independent Chair (male). There are eleven representatives from BME groups and ten of these are community representatives (five men and five women).

Regardless of whether questions about gender were explicitly addressed by the interviewees the differences between men and women and the ways they participate

did arise. Most interviews began by saying that there were no differences between the way men and women worked in the community or the impact they had on the organisation. However through the stories they told about their experiences of working regeneration views about gendered differences were apparent.

Women and men are said to have different ways of participating in the organisations. First because women are more 'caring and maternal' with good 'people skills'. Second they are more likely to be involved due to traditional and cultural views of women's role in the family and this was thought to be particularly true of women from BME communities. Third both paid and unpaid female staff are said to relate more easily to women within the community. Fourth women are said to be keen to 'get things done', are more passionate about things, want to 'get their hands dirty' and are more 'active' in the community than men. Only a small minority of women discussed gender roles as complex for example, men could be equally as caring as women and some highlighted the differences between women along the lines of race, age and having children.

7.2 Community participation and the impact of gender

The women had various reasons for becoming involved in community activity for those in the NDC most unpaid reps had a history of volunteering in similar organisations. In the NDC and SS women are involved as volunteers because they have been approached or 'talked into it' by female paid workers. For BME women it is particularly true that others within their ethnic group had encouraged them to join, for example, in SS a 'snowballing effect' was described to explain why there was a preponderance of Indian and Pakistani women. In the NDC one woman got involved because after a male rep resigned there was no one else (capable, educated or willing) within her community to do it. In SS there is also a sense that the women saw other women like them who were mums with young children and thought they could also do the job. Some, particularly in SS, wanted to 'escape from the house'. Some joined because they were keen to have 'their say' and 'be the voice of their community' where they had lived for a number of years. Most reps referred to their improved confidence as a result of their involvement.

The lack of men's involvement in the community was often discussed as opposed to their involvement. Men were thought to be isolated from community networks. In the SS there was a feeling amongst interviewees that SS was seen as a 'mums and toddlers group' and men did not get involved because childcare was not seen as a man's job (either paid or unpaid). This is attributed partly to the domestic division of labour but also to the 'societal' perception of men in childcare as one interviewee explained: "*they're thought of as 'well they must be weird or something, they must be perverts'.*" The recruitment of men in SS is thought to be difficult because they do not have the right skills and attributes or because some of the issues addressed by paid workers in the community, for example, working with vulnerable women suffering domestic violence or post natal depression were thought best dealt with by women. There was also the suggestion that when a male fathers' worker was appointed he was

isolated and not taken seriously by other members of the team. Although it was thought in some circumstances it might be good to have more men involved (as role models for children as to organise activities for fathers). In the NDC in general the lack of young men was seen as problematic but so too was the lack of females from BME organisations. In the NDC at the outset the Board was dominated by male community reps but once community elections were held women became the majority and there was some disappointment that these original men failed to continue to participate in other parts of the organisation.

7.3 Involvement in decision-making and influence

In the two organisations involvement of the community in decision making differed. In the SS mums involved in the Board were all positive about their experience and felt able to have their say. There is extensive training for the community Board members and as the Manger explained this is to enable them to “*take their thinking to another level of influencing decision making.*” The Chair is always one of the parent volunteers. The primary goal seems to be to improve the mums’ confidence and this appears to be working given that the mums interviewed referred to how they were shy at the beginning but now felt that they could say what they wanted. Also a previous Chair has gone on to get qualifications, speak at conferences and has paid employment working as a Learning Mentor. Despite the positive views about their involvement there were some indications that the parent volunteers were at a disadvantage in the Board meetings. They did not always know who everybody was on the Board and which organisation they came from. Furthermore for the paid staff and the public sector Board members the Board did not appear to be a very important part of their job. The female public sector reps did not attend the Board on a regular basis, preferring to influence the programme via other people or through other meeting spaces. Some of the paid staff did not know what role the Board played or whether the parents had a vote.

In the SS most interviewees said the relationship between unpaid and paid workers was very good and that over time trust has been built up and there is now an understanding between the two groups. The involvement of parents was said to be an essential part of the programme. The relationship between paid staff and volunteers appears to be symbiotic, “*without the parents there wouldn’t be a programme and without the staff parents would not understand how the programme works.*” However parents have to understand the rules of the SS programme tension can arise because of this. The relationship was described as “*tricky*” at times and two paid staff said of the volunteers “*they have a go at me and I have a go back*” and “*they hated the sight of me*”. Rule changes in SS services can create a difficult relationship between the paid and unpaid staff. At times this is partly because although unpaid staff might not like the rule change and some still have relay the message to the other mums who used the service because they are able to speak the same language. Eventually the unpaid staff and service users get used to new rules and the relationship improves again, however, this is with the caveat that the parents have to go along with the staff because of the nature of the area and that “*there is nowhere else for them to go*”. This example also illustrates how some paid staff are reliant on unpaid volunteers to speak languages

other than English. The volunteers therefore play an invaluable role in an area which has several groups from refugee and BME communities. Parents also play a role in advertising SS through word of mouth and encouraging other (women) to come along. These community networks of women are seen as essential and interaction between female volunteers and female service users from the same area was thought to make users “feel at ease” and encourage them to join in.

In the NDC although paid staff and the community reps themselves said that they had grown in confidence through their involvement in the Board, in contrast to the SS the NDC community reps felt disenchanted with the Board decision-making process. They felt they were not listened to and had not particularly influenced decisions. One referred to not being told “*the exact truth*”. Another said that the public sector Board members had more influence despite or perhaps because of being “*highly paid people who live in... detached houses.*” One community rep had been told that if she wanted to have more influence she should get involved in other parts of the organisation where decisions were made about project development. The Chair played a part in disempowering the community (and particularly the women) and even one of the managers said she had found him intimidating.

As in SS the volunteer community reps sometimes have to face the community to explain and be held responsible for unpopular decisions, for example the demolition of local houses. Some interviewees acknowledged how difficult it was for community reps to deal with their multiple roles as residents, community reps and Board members but it is unclear how this can be resolved.

Despite references by interviewees to all of the community reps being disempowered within the Board process there were some indications that women are more disadvantaged than men. Interviewees suggested that the female community reps are not always taken as seriously as the men and that age also played a part. Reflecting this one community rep referred to herself and another community rep as “*the old fuddy duddies they call us don't they?*” One interviewee suggested that in the decision making process older female community reps deferred to the male agency reps with an “*old style of 'you men folk know better'*”. The BME female reps were also talked about as being ‘different’ to other female reps because of their paid employment and education (the younger BME reps are highly educated professionals) which led some to question their ability to adequately represent the wider community. This combined with their ethnic group was thought to lead to their ‘separation’ from the other women on the Board partly because of their differences in background (education and culture) and partly because of racism. Friendships between female community reps tend to be according to race and age. Despite these issues all of the community reps regardless of age, race or education said that they felt disempowered at times by the Board process.

There was also some concern expressed by interviewees from BME communities about the ethnic make up of the NDC and how this failed to reflect the population of the area. This is thought to make a difference in terms of understanding the local

community and the different needs of people and their and cultural backgrounds. As a result of this the two Bangladeshi female reps saw themselves as key links between the community and the NDC's paid staff as a result of their ability to communicate with women excluded as a result of their lack of English but also for their ability to be seen as role models to other Asian women.

8. Conclusions and challenges to incorporating gender equality into neighbourhood renewal

The role of women in neighbourhood governance

Regeneration organisations open up opportunities for women in terms of paid and unpaid employment. In one organisation the staff team is all female except one male, in the other women make up two thirds of the staff and in the third women account for half of the staff team. Despite the presence of two female managers women tend to dominate administration and community development posts. Men are generally said to take finance, monitoring and programme management roles. The structure of the organisation thus reproduces gendered divisions. Women workers continue to be “defined by domesticity” (Cockburn, 1991) and provide emotional labour which deals with ‘softer’ issues such as caring and attempting to empower others, smoothing out relationships (Newman, 2005; Forseth, 2005; Ollilainen and Calasanti, 2007).

In unpaid community work women also dominate in organisations which place an emphasis on community involvement. Again gendered divisions and women's roles in the private sphere are used to account for their domination in the community or neighbourhood sphere (Martin, 2002). Men are missing from this community sphere, also as result of their gendered role, in SS they are not active in childcare or if they are they do not have the community networks or confidence to become involved. In the NDC when community elections were held women replaced men on the Board perhaps reversing the idea that women are not interested in being part of formal aspects of regeneration although all had to be ‘convinced’ to join and once at the table found that they might be in the wrong place, at the wrong time to influence decisions.

Urban policy and regeneration

Central policy is key to neighbourhood organisations since many are not operating in isolation nor are they autonomous. They are mandated to follow central government guidance. A greater emphasis on the need to incorporate a gender analysis is being seen at policy level but is a diluted version of what is required to ensure that policy is better implemented and has a more equitable impact on men and women.

“Within the policy discourse we can see a progression from the silence on gender that has characterized most previous urban policies to the tentative introduction of gender to the regeneration agenda. However the failure to

follow up lip service to gender, and specifically the role of women in urban communities with detailed policy requirements and mechanisms ultimately undermines the inclusive rhetoric of renaissance.” (Brownill, 2004: 209)

Gender mainstreaming is transformative and has the potential to challenge existing assumptions and stereotypes about women’s and men’s roles in society and create non-traditional opportunities (Bennett, 2004; Greed, 2005). Beveridge et al (2000) state that it must address certain issues: First it must increase and improve the inclusion and participation of women in decision-making processes and eliminate or at least reduce gendered barriers to participation and the “aim may not necessarily be to encourage women to participate in previously male-dominated spheres, but to rethink the institutional configurations which support the present division of power, the sites and modes of decision-making, and the public/private divide which perpetuates exclusion. (Beveridge et al, 2000). Of course increased representation of women does not always mean that greater prominence is given to gender issues or represent all types of women (Beveridge et al., 2000: etc refs). To ensure women’s concerns are adequately addressed governments should open up lines of communication with women’s organizations (Beveridge et al, 2000). Second, information should be gathered about women and this means gender-disaggregated data. Without this information it is difficult to assess whether policies are appropriate for men and women. Third mainstreaming strategies need to include practical requirements for implementation and the development of appropriate tools. These may include experts or specialists being used in an ‘expert-bureaucratic model’ such as that utilised by the Labour Government (Beveridge et al, 2000) or a more ‘participatory-democratic model’ involving a range of individuals and organisations as promoted by Oxfam’s toolkit (Oxfam, 2005). This latter model promotes participation, access to the policy-making process and the accountability of experts and officials (Beveridge et al, 2000). Whichever approach to mainstreaming there needs to be clear lines of accountability and this requires “effective monitoring, with targets being set, data being generated and analysed and, and periodic reviews of policy to be carried out and needs to be adequately resourced in terms of money and personnel.” (Beveridge et al, 2000: 391).

Evaluating the differential impact of mainstreaming initiatives on different groups of men and women is important (Beveridge et al, 2000). Indeed this is what makes mainstreaming attractive to both policy-makers and those seeking to improve the position of women. For women mainstreaming shifts the attention from equality as equal treatment to differential gender impact and for policy makers perceive mainstreaming as ‘equality as equal treatment’ because policy is assessed for adverse effects on men as well as women. Beveridge et al (2000) thus conclude because of this that the mainstreaming strategy has met with little resistance “from those who would find positive discrimination unpalatable. Yet mainstreaming has the potential to deliver far more radical change... and therefore be a more constructive approach as far as women are concerned.” (Beveridge et al, 2000: 391). Although there are some examples of mainstreaming in regeneration practice they are limited (Bennett, 2004; Shah, 2005).

The experience of implementing gender mainstreaming does not offer a great deal of optimism but it does offer some guidance on what could be done better. At local authority level Greed (2005) studied the impact of mainstreaming in planning departments. She found that overall there is a lack of mainstreaming in local authorities due to lack of national government guidance (Greed, 2005). However at regional level there were more examples of mainstreaming due to European programmes which since 2000 require gender-proofing, for example in South Yorkshire's Objective 1 programme the Gender Measure was a discrete funding stream (Bennett, 2004). Local authorities' experiences of these European programmes have impacted on how they view and implement gender mainstreaming (Greed, 2005). Overall Greed (2005) found that there were few examples of gender mainstreaming taking place within local planning authorities and this was attributed to several factors including: the feeling that the agenda had been imposed upon them by personnel; the reaction that focusing 'just on women' had already been done, was a 'thing of the past' and unnecessary; ignorance and lack of understanding; equalities issues seen as diverting attention from 'real work'; an excessive amount of targets and auditing procedures; the difficulty of dealing with more than one diversity issue at once.

There is already a myriad of targets and need to collate data in regeneration projects and combined with a need to 'deal with' diversity issues. However the key to successful regeneration is a clear analysis of data on which to base projects and programmes. Bradshaw et al (2003) suggest that until the gendered nature of poverty and indeed society is addressed or at least the impact of policies upon men and women alike is monitored, it is possible that policies to address poverty and social exclusion will only meet with partial success and this is also so for neighbourhood regeneration. Within the case studies paid staff were sometimes not aware of who is using their services – community development workers particularly expressed a desire to understand their participants one said "*It might be worth finding out the ethnic breakdown of families*" another said that although they found out about BME groups that "*I don't think we monitor for gender, we just monitor for BME, not male female, I think [the monitoring officer is] trying to now but we never ask if a projects, how many men or women attending.*" Without this information it is difficult therefore to assess the impact of regeneration on men and women or address the issues of concern.

Representation and influence

International and European bodies have called for more equality in decision-making and the UN Conference on Women in 1995 called for a 50-50 men and women split in decision-making as essential for achieving democracy and equality (Gudnadottir et al, 2007). The number of women involved does not necessarily translate into power. If all or most of the women on the Board are community reps (as in the NDC and SS) then the gender balance is almost irrelevant since they still lack less power and influence within the Partnership Board. Numbers are important but not sufficient. Those women working in the community as paid development workers or unpaid community reps and volunteers tended to be the ones most dissatisfied with their ability to influence decision making.

The data also highlights differences between groups of women working in the community and indicates complex power relationships. For example in the NDC some community reps are highly educated professionals and their ability to adequately represent the community is called into question because they do not fit a certain stereotype of 'women in the community' in an area targeted by regeneration (Beebeejaun and Grimshaw, 2007). However these BME reps represent a certain community – Bangladeshi in this case- and are able to provide language skills and communicate with other Asian women and also provide a role model and link to an otherwise neglected part of the community which paid staff are not always able to reach. In SS unpaid BME women are also filling gaps and networking with other women in the community whilst having paid staff from BME communities is also encouraging women to use services and consequently the majority of paid and unpaid staff are Asian women. In SS there seems to be a genuine attempt to support and improve the confidence of the community reps and this may be as a result of being an all-female environment. However in the NDC a seat at the table does not seem to translate into power for community reps regardless of race, education or age. There are therefore contradictory messages about the role of women in the community and in regeneration organisations. Women are given more opportunities to participate in paid and unpaid employment in community-based organisations and do reach management positions however, the production and reproduction of gendered assumptions and gendered processes within these organisations mean that they do not always have the ability to influence decisions about the way regeneration is delivered.

There are a number of challenges facing neighbourhood governance and regeneration, not least the need to produce better programmes and policies for all and this could be done by focussing on gender. Neighbourhood governance and regeneration should challenge gender relations at neighbourhood level and this should be combined at with national government policies which do not just pay lip service to gender but actually discuss how gender equality might be achieved. There is a need to improve the position of community reps and particularly female reps on decision-making bodies; more should be done to demonstrate how equal opportunities policies and equalities legislation is taken into account in the development of projects and strategies; and finally there is a need to develop a strategy to ensure neighbourhood organisations improve their governance by considering gender (and by association diversity).

It may be that there is some room for optimism since at least gender is now being mentioned. As of April 2007 a Gender Equality Duty has been implemented, it requires all public bodies to promote equality of opportunity between men and women and eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment. It is seen as a key opportunity to promote and remove gender discrimination (Gudnadottir et al., 2007) since public bodies will have to be pro-active in promoting gender equality. How this impacts on regeneration at neighbourhood level remains to be seen.

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