



UBUNTU

BULLETIN

Black Perspectives in Community Development Learning and Training

WINTER 2004

CONNECTING BLACK AND MINORITY ETHNIC PEOPLE IN RURAL AREAS: ARE WE DOING ENOUGH?

During October just over 100 people came together in Birmingham to find out more about how racism and discrimination in rural areas are currently being tackled, and how they can contribute towards improving service provision and delivery to isolated Black and minority ethnic (BME) households and communities.

Since the publication 10 years ago of the ground-breaking report 'Keep them in Birmingham' the experiences and concerns of BME people living in rural areas has, albeit piecemeal, begun to receive the attention it desperately needs.

However efforts continue to be frustrated by priority

being given to the urban agenda. The outcome has been policy based on numbers rather than need.

This point was made most forcibly by Philomena De Lima, a keynote speaker, who gave a presentation on current research into the needs of Black and Minority Ethnic people in rural areas.

In addition to the points raised earlier, research also revealed that whilst BME communities and households are very visible as evidenced by their experience of racism, in terms of access to appropriate services they are frequently invisible.

Mohamed Dhalech also gave a keynote presentation and focussed on the

Welcome to the **UBUNTU Bulletin**, a newsletter on Black perspectives in community development learning and training.

UBUNTU Bulletin is a regular feature of **Federation News** but is also sent to all members of **UBUNTU**, the interest group of the **Federation for Community Development Learning, for Black and Minority Ethnic community workers and activists**.

If you would like more information about joining UBUNTU please contact Carol Jones, Development Officer Black Perspectives, at the Federation for Community Development Learning on

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experience of BME children in rural areas, and the initiatives



that have been developed in response to these. Examples include the South West Islamic Centre and Barrow Asylum Seekers Group, both of whom create access to the countryside for young people.

WHITENESS AS AN ETHNIC SIGNIFIER

The experience of BME people living in rural and semi-rural areas is further compounded by the invisibility of whiteness as an ethnic signifier. The result is the needs and perspectives of the ethnic majority are redefined as the norm.

Meanwhile the experiences and needs of other groups are defined as 'special' or problematic. The dominance of whiteness in the countryside has acted to mask the relevance of race as a political or social policy issue.

WORKSHOP SUMMARIES

The numbers of delegates who opted to participate in the Sharing Good Practice workshop demonstrated an ongoing need to create opportunities for more learning and skills sharing. The facilitator, Jasmin Shah, shared her experience of using a multi-agency approach to tackling racism in North Derbyshire. Similarly the workshop on collaborative working focussed on inter-agency working but from a

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regional perspective, and the lessons learned from this.

Other themes covered in the workshops included current community development practice and approaches to working with marginalised and isolated communities and developing anti-oppressive practice.

One workshop in particular focussed on developing strategies for working with Black and minority ethnic people. Interestingly, the concerns mostly centred on fears of being misunderstood, or worse, causing offence. For many participants the conclusion was very much a case of 'feel the fear and do it anyway'.

It was also interesting to note that many of the issues mirrored the reality for many BME people living in urban areas.

WAYS FORWARD

Recommendations of ways forward included offering practical support to BME households and communities to combat the effects of organisational and individual racist targeting, and working with policy and decision-makers to identify ways of making the services available

more inclusive. This could be achieved by:

- Agencies with responsibility for rural affairs proactively mainstreaming equality issues.
- More research and training for the ethnic majority communities on the importance of community development in challenging oppressive and discriminatory practice.

AND FINALLY...

Dr. Roi Kwabana, a cultural anthropologist, provided an alternative perspective on the issues raised and discussed using his skills as an inspirational storyteller. He drew parallels between our experience and understanding of oppression and the importance of developing a shared perspective if there is to be any meaningful and sustainable change.

The Federation, in partnership with NACVS and CDX, are planning to host a follow-up event during 2004. A conference report will be available from the end of February 2004. If you would like a copy please contact Carol@fcdl.org.uk



THE REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER

DIVERSITY: THE POWER OF LANGUAGE

The roots of diversity can be found in the language of Human Resource Management. The objective was to maximise profits, not to bring harmony and equity to a troubled world. Just how much does the theory of diversity, i.e. celebration of difference, contribute to challenging discrimination? Are we any closer to being part of the mainstream, or are we as 'Black' people (now a contested term in itself) still defined as 'other'?

Equal opportunities is a product of the eighties, anti-discrimination and anti-oppressive practice products of the nineties. This was also the decade in which we saw the rise of diversity, when it was picked up by the public and voluntary sectors. In this context it has come to be seen as a catch all word that provides the solution to problems related to those issues which concern us most in terms of identity of self and group: race, gender, disability, religion, age, sexual identity, nationality or the region in which we live.

This leads us to question what are the distinct or specific experiences of societies in terms of diversity?

An issue that has received significant attention in recent times is inter-group relations; how we define ourselves and how we define those we consider other. In this context the demise of Black as a unifying concept has been replaced by the fragmentation of communities.

Part of this can be explained by the rise of Islamophobia, but undeniably the effects of internalised oppression also play a central role in how we see ourselves in relation to others. This also raises questions about power, and the use of words that can empower or disempower.

How can communities who have been at the receiving end of language that disempowers, redefine or assert the use of language that more accurately reflects and speaks to their collective experience, without running the risk of becoming overshadowed by individualistic notions of diversity?

Whilst diversity may suggest celebration of difference what it undermines is the commonality of history and experience that has proved to be a force for change.

Community development aims to bring people together to identify common issues and identify strategies and action

leading to a desired change or outcome. How if at all does notions of diversity support this objective?

For some it is debateable whether diversity will bring us any closer to social justice and equity of access.

When we talk of diversity, exactly what rights do individuals and groups actually have? For example there has been a steady rise in what has been termed 'new racism' which is based on culture as evidenced by the current debates on the wearing of the hijab by Muslim women and girls for example, rather than on biological or intellectual assumptions. It is debateable as to how far diversity can help to address the long-term implications of this shift. What is clear however is diversity in its current form may serve to contribute less than is commonly believed to social and economic justice for those groups that continue to experience discrimination and oppressive practice.

This article is based on a workshop on diversity and language held as part of a conference: Power and Influence in Diverse Communities, 23–25 January, hosted by Northern College.



BUILDING CIVIL RENEWAL: A REVIEW OF GOVERNMENT SUPPORT OF COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING AND PROPOSALS FOR CHANGE

A CONSULTATION PAPER FROM THE CIVIL RENEWAL UNIT

A couple of weeks ago all Ubuntu contacts were sent a copy of this consultation document. This article is a summary of the key points set out in the paper.

In his introduction David Blunkett set out the rationale and purpose behind community capacity building (CCB). The main aim of government proposals is to help create the conditions whereby citizens are 'inspired' to make a positive difference to their communities.

This would be achieved in part by identifying ways in which government can better support CCB initiatives at community and neighbourhood level, in particular through better use of existing resources.

The paper puts forward four possible ways of managing community capacity building locally. This could take place through:

- At least one network
- At least one physical base
- Access to community development workers
- Access to small grants.

In addition the paper suggests three approaches government could adopt to support planning and delivery of community capacity building locally:

- A. Neighbourhood action planning – this would involve developing a shared plan that reflected diverse needs, resource requirements and support needed to build community capacity over time.
- B. Replication of tested approaches through one or more regional agencies – using existing national voluntary and community sector organisations as channels through which to direct any central resources.
- C. Investment in key local 'anchor' organisations – who can provide a means of co-ordinating local infrastructure needs in terms of community capacity building.

Government is keen to receive comments and views from Black and Minority Ethnic individuals and organisations on the key components, and examples of where neighbourhood structures can demonstrate high levels of inclusiveness.

Examples of good practice (or examples of where there have been problems) in the context of options A, B and C are also invited; and whether the government should give priority to any of the options.

They would also like to hear about other approaches you think may be more effective.

The deadline for responses to the document is 26th March 2004.

If you prefer, you can contribute to producing a joint response from Ubuntu members. All contributions will be acknowledged.