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empowering people and communities to create networks
to find solutions that enhance social justice and support a healthy environment



g l o b a l

Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority Communities: Tackling Environmental and Social Inequalities

Introduction

From 21 April to 31 July 2004 the UK Government departments held countrywide consultations to review its sustainable development strategy 'A better quality of life'. The report is based on findings from seminars to identify and tackle social and environmental inequalities encountered by Black, Asian and ethnic minority (BAME) communities. Seminars were attended by community groups, non governmental organisation, agencies and government departments working for or with BME groups. Key points and recommendations from the seminars can be found in the last section of the report.

This report is based on an earlier report called 'BMEs tackling social and environmental justice' commissioned by DEFRA and other research on environmental equality by Capacity Global. The findings however are those of Capacity Global.

The original report we set out to look at the salient concerns of Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority communities and organisations relating to social inclusion and environmental equality. The aim was not only to feed into the UK Government consultation mentioned earlier but to create a platform for debating the issues amongst BAME's and mainstream environmental non governmental organisations, funders and policy makers.

Since the original report the UK Government's strategy for Sustainable Development and improving quality of life, 'Securing the Future' was published in March 2005. For the first time environmental equality been included as a pre cursor for attaining sustainable development and improving quality of life. Coming after the Katrina disaster and the very public image of the suffering of people, predominately poor and Black, the relaunch of this report has gained media interest and encouraged the debate around the issues raised.

For Capacity's part we continue to run our 'Black & Green', 'and 'Audience Development' programmes. The former proceeds to research, provide public platform and advocacy for developing initiatives and solutions to tackle environmental equality, inclusion and 'race' equality. The latter to assist organisations, agencies and government to tackle issues of diversity and ensure access to both the natural and the built environment.

To solve the issues relating to social and environmental equality it is important that diversity and equality are tackled. What is required is leadership and not division between BAME organisations, mainstream environmental organisations and policy makers. There needs to be honest reflections, a celebration of the work being done already and ultimately strategic partnerships that deliver on the ground changes and evidence based policy.

We hope this report helps to meet the challenges and opportunities facing everyone to create environmental equality in the UK.

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Director

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Context

In the US and other countries environmental equality or environmental justice has been discussed on issues based around ethnicity and the negative impacts of environmental policy, action and omissions. In the UK there is a growing debate relating to social and environmental equality. These discussions are often closely attached to the issues of 'liveability', 'environmental justice/equality' 'social inclusion' and 'neighbourhood renewal'.

The discussion on environmental equality in the UK has tended not to focus on ethnicity but on social and economic exclusion. However, there are issues that are specific to ethnicity in relation to environmental equality. For example:

- Deprived areas in England contain four times as many people from ethnic minority groups as other areas and people living those areas stated pollution, poor public transport, and appearance of the estate as a major issues about where they live
- UK research suggests that there are links between ethnicity and environment in regards to the siting of environmental hazard sites, air pollution, flooding and road traffic injuries

Methodology

The three seminars were run in two phases:

Phase 1: Two seminars were run with non governmental organisations (NGO's) and community groups projects working for or closely with black, Asian or other ethnic minority groups. Participants invited to the workshops had remits relating to environment and social justice: regeneration, social inclusion, environment, health, community development and housing. The aim of the workshops was to explore integrated social and environmental inequalities and provide recommendations to policy makers on tackling these issues.

Phase 2: One seminar was held with cross sector senior policy makers and experts at regional and national level whose organisations also had remits that relate to social and environmental justice.

The aim of the event was to discuss the thinking from Phase 1 workshops and gain further input from policy makers as to ways of tackling the main issues and reviewing future action plans.

Objectives

The four main objectives were to:

1. to provide national and regional dialogue between Black, Asian, Minority and Ethnic community (BME) organisations, community groups, agencies and senior policy makers on environment and social justice, and to facilitate a stronger BME voice in the area of sustainable development policy.
2. to identify the main barriers to community action on social and environment issues
3. to create structured dialogues to identify integrated solutions and action plans for tackling social and environmental inequalities (see also Appendix I)

4. to facilitate dialogue with policymakers on issues relating to BME perspectives on environment and social inequality within the national sustainable development strategy

Phase 1: NGO/Community events

All the participants taking part were sent information on the purpose and theme of the seminars prior to the event. The seminars were opened up with a short introduction and followed by each organisation presenting their work and how it related to social exclusion and environment equality (see Table 1 below). Participants reviewed current issues and discussed required action plans at national organisational and group level.

- Environment and cultural knowledge exchange
- Tree planting at local cultural community centres or green spaces
- School or youth projects relating to landscaping, planting, access to the countryside
- Sponsored excursions green spaces, parks or rural areas
- Environmental and social research
- Provision of environmental advice on: environmental law, renewable energy
- Network to increase access and opportunities to the environment and heritage sector
- Improving access to public transport and safety in deprived area

Examples of initiatives been taken by relating to BME groups
Table 1

Current Issues

In discussing relevant current issues a number of needs were identified. They were:

- Better access to public transport
- Improved housing standards and energy efficiency
- Creating environmentally related jobs
- Improving run down areas and instigating neighbourhood pride by tackling:
 - anti social behaviour
 - racial harassment
 - graffiti, litter, fly tipping and dog fouling
- Improved access to green spaces, specifically for children
- Communication of environmental issues that not only culturally specific but also in relation to income, age, locality etc

- Faith groups to prioritise environmental and social and influence community action and government
- A need for environmental NGO's to work more closely with BME organisations

Three further points were made:

- It was unlikely that at present there would be a BME 'environmental justice/equality campaign' in the UK as seen in the US
- There is a strong connection between ethnicity and poverty and between poverty, environment and health
- A gap exists between the work being done by BME organisations/groups and their ability to influence national and regional decision making arena

Summary of discussion

The discussion at the seminar raised a number of common issues. The first of these was that the environment was widely understood by BME groups to be related to social issues. The general assumption that BME groups were not concerned about the environment was a myth. However, it was articulated that there were two environmental agendas, the traditional environmental agenda concerned predominantly with natural environment (plants and animals) and the modern agenda which was concerned predominantly with improving the built environment (humans and quality of life). The former agenda were perceived as the main focus of mainstream environmental NGO's. The later agenda was, however, closely linked to social issues such as health, public transport, racism, housing, crime reduction and access to green spaces and economic regeneration. These were seen as the main areas in which many BME groups already worked in.

The modern environmental agenda was perceived as a fundamental concern of many BME communities. Although BME groups were concerned with traditional environmental issues quality of life aspects were seen as a priority. It was acknowledged that a number of these 'social-environmental' concerns were not solely connected to ethnicity but also to economic exclusion. The social framework for environmental issues for many BME NGO's or community groups was seen as an opportunity to deliver social integrated environmental projects or work and vice versa.

Findings

Opinions voiced during the seminars suggest that there were a number of barriers to and opportunities for future policies and initiatives. These were summarised in the following findings:

Barriers:

- little support from the environment sector NGO's
- lack of time given by government, agencies and large organisations to allow for meaningful community involvement
- 'tick box mentality' often means that when BME groups are consulted as part of a project requirement or government directive there is little real consultation and often no tangible benefits for the communities involved

- insufficient funding for small community projects and information on funding opportunities relating to BME groups and environmental issues.
- BME groups when asked to be part of consultations were often asked to do so without any extra resources been offered financial or otherwise
- environmental projects often have insufficient consideration of economic and quality of life dimensions of the project.
- some BME and economically excluded communities living in deprived neighbourhoods often lack the opportunities or resources to live in or visit healthy environments and therefore the ability to change there environmental terms of reference
- difficulties in identifying the right government departments, agencies or organisations who might provide advice and assistance, especially where there were overlapping responsibilities.
- relevant government departments, agencies or mainstream NGO's did not provide services or projects sympathetic to BME concerns
- a lack of information/research or access to research/information relating to BME and environmental social inequality
- a lack of diversity and BME employees within the environment sector workforce



NGO and Community Participants at the Manchester Seminar

Opportunities:

- the need to improve the natural and built environment and the higher unemployment rate of many BME groups could be linked to training schemes, apprenticeships or placements within the environment sector
- the connection between social and environmental concerns for BME groups could be used as a source of expertise to assist and influence national, regional or local environmental projects or policy
- the remit of many BME groups to work with Black, Asian and ethnic minorities means that with funding and resources they are often best able to deliver initiatives and best practice with groups who mainstream government departments, agencies or NGO's often find 'hard to reach'.

Required Action

The action required for tackling social and environmental would need to be supported at national level by amongst others, the Government's sustainable development strategy:

- A pro forma evaluation and measurement process by which all projects look at issues of diversity i.e. impact of environmental policy or projects on BME groups
- Use related consultation processes to lobby decision makers and raise the profile of BME concerns on environmental issues and work already being done by BME groups and organisations in this area
- Establish a national network or committee, working on environmental and social inequality that could take part in consultations and influence relevant policy
- Establish a permanent government cross department post/posts with the remit to work on BME and diversity issues relating to environmental and social inequality
- Increase funding for integrated social and environmental projects for existing BME organisations or groups
- Consult BME groups before, at the start, middle and end of a project
- Improve diversity policies relating not only to projects but staff of environmental organisations and government departments
- Improve the delivery of environmental advice of organisations by mainstream advisory organisations such as Citizen Advice Bureaux
- Implement a cross sector campaign to raise awareness of integrated issues of ethnicity, social inclusion and the environment
- Improve transparency of projects and organisations presently working on related projects
- Raise the role of the Department of Health, and the Commission for Racial Equality in environment, regeneration and social policy
- Improve access to environmental information at post offices, places of worship and local libraries

Phase 2: Policy maker seminar

As with the seminars held in Phase1 policy makers were selected on the basis of their remit being relevant to the environment and social inclusion, and their work on BME issues. The participants were however from government, NGO's and independent agencies. The seminar was opened up with a short introduction and followed by each participant briefly presenting their work and how it related to social exclusion and environment equality. Feedback from the Phase 1 NGO and Community seminars were then presented. Participants discussed the feedback and reviewed required action plans at national level and within their own organisations.

Summary of discussion

The need to learn from BME community and NGO's was seen as an important way to deliver effective policy for social and environmental equality. Similarly it was recognised that policy makers also need to share their experience and evidence to gain a fuller picture of the agenda and deliver effective action. It was acknowledged that directives requiring set targets and deadlines for projects and programmes often left little time or no room to properly engage with community groups or NGOs working at ground level. As such BME organisations were often left feeling used having responded to consultations and having no feedback or benefits from it. There was also a need to discuss environmental and social equality within the 'liveability'

agenda as well as gain leverage from the present cultural climate to support social justice and inclusion.

Similar to the concerns voiced in the community and NGO seminars it was suggested that there was a lack of funding for related projects and also a lack of leadership at government level to act as champions in this area. It was also accepted that there was a need to improve diversity within the environment sector not only in NGO's but also across relevant government departments. In order to tackle these issues it was suggested that there was a need for policy makers to pool together cross sector evidence. This would facilitate the development of a standard evaluation framework that would also measure and evaluate social and environmental inequalities as they relate to BME and socially or economically excluded groups. Part of the pooling of evidence would be to 'celebrate' and raise awareness of what was already been done in the area by NGO's, government, agencies and communities.

Findings

The barriers and opportunities to developing future action plans were seen as:

Barriers:

- A general lack of capacity within organisations and government to take on and deal with social and environmental inequality
- The lack of sustained funding to support projects or policy in the area
- Little evidence of an appropriate evaluation process that measures the impact of environmental and social policy or project impacts on BME groups
- No visible leadership to champion actions or build bridges between community and policy makers
- The lack of an informed debate on diversity and race is not yet been had led within the environment sector at large
- Few or no forums to share knowledge to enable learning

Opportunities:

- Present policy climate for social inclusion, environmental justice could provide a supportive background for further policy action
- There are now a number of policy makers in all sectors working on similar issues that could share experience and evidence based data
- The seminar could be used as a launched pad to organise further capacity building forums
- To use the 2005 the year of the volunteer and other media to celebrate work already been done

- To use the Race Relations Amendment Act as a guideline for promoting equality

Required Action

- Build capacity and partnerships with BME communities and policy makers via secondments, work placements and training opportunities
- Debate diversity, environmental and social justice with BME communities under the issue of 'liveability' and quality of life'
- Widen the debate and evidence sharing between the environment, heritage sectors and BME organisations
- Support initiatives for volunteering in environmental projects within BME communities
- Improve the diversity of the workforce within the environment sector by creating internal debates on issues of equality and racism
- support the recruitment of under represented groups at all levels within an organisation
- Explore the possibility of establishing and sponsoring an ad hoc or permanent steering committee between policy makers/and or community groups to influence relevant policy
- Improve funding for consultation or work with communities, for example ensure projects provide financial and or other benefits to BME groups
- Support work in this area via long term (longer than three years) sustainable funding

and

work with funders public or private to improve and support projects tackling environmental and social inequality impact on BME groups

- Draft, lobby for and share evaluation framework/s that will encourage tackling the impact of social and environmental inequality projects and policy on BME communities
- Celebrate and promote successful projects and policy already been done in the area

Key Action Points and Recommendations

1. Break the myth and raise awareness:

There are many BME organisations working on issues of social inequality are closely connected to environmental issues: regeneration, health, housing and green space improvement, community clean ups. There is a need to break the myth specifically within mainstream environmental NGO's that BME groups are not concerned with

environmental issues and instead raise awareness of the impact on environmental inequality on BME communities.

Recommendation 1: Raise awareness of the work been done on environment and social equality by organisations and communities working for or with BME groups and the impact of environmental inequality on BME communities

2. Forums for sharing information and influence policy:

There is as yet no real opportunity to share best practice and evidence for the delivery of social and environmental inequality as it relates to BME communities. The forums or committee could influence and develop policy in this area as well as give an opportunity for policy makers to work with groups on the ground. It could also act as a catalyst for partnership projects and initiatives.

Recommendation 2: Establish and support further forums or a permanent /ad hoc committee

3. Improve funding:

Funding sources from government, charities and private sector need to gain a better understanding of the issues of environmental inequality and the links to social inclusion. Projects and organisation working in this area should be supported with sustainable funds or resources by government and charitable funders.

Recommendation 3: Develop better sustainable funding sources for organisations and communities working to tackle environmental and social inequality and the impact on BME communities

4. Employment and Economic benefits:

Economic benefits such as training, employment and secondment schemes could be linked to environmental projects. These benefits should be accessible to BME groups.

Recommendation 4: Government and NGO's with relevant remits should establish training, placements and secondments schemes for BME and economically excluded groups

5. Improve the diversity within the environment workforce:

The environment sector needs to diversify its workforce. Unlike other sectors it still is perceived as 'white and middle class'. At present the sector is not perceived as diverse and this impacts on its ability to be trusted to take on issues related to diversity and BME concerns.

Recommendation 5: Environmental organisations need to review and implement diversity policies as well as tackle barriers to inclusion of BME groups as Trustees, employees, volunteers or members.

and

Training on cultural diversity and environmental inequality should be taken on by environmental organisations

6. Evaluation Framework

At present there seems to be no shared framework within the environment sector which tackles the impact of environmental and social equality of environmental projects, specifically on economically excluded or BME communities.

Recommendation 6: BME groups , environmental organisations and government departments working around the areas of social and environmental inequality need to review, draft and develop a shared evaluation framework.

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