

Shaping and Informing the Big Society:

The Involvement of BAME Forums in Formal Structures



ABOUT BTEG

BTEG is a national charity providing a voice to government for black and minority ethnic service providers. BTEG has a successful track record of advising government departments and non-departmental bodies. BTEG participates in a range of governmental advisory groups at the national and regional levels and has influenced policy and practice in central government, Jobcentre Plus and Learning and Skills Councils.

BTEG provides technical assistance support for voluntary and community organisations and public bodies.

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Forum Officials, including the volunteers, who gave up their time to talk to us and to be involved in the various local and national events that were arranged between January and December 2010.

Though the examples cited in this publication reflect some of the work of the five Forums chosen, there were many others we worked with that provided a strong base from which to

see the full work taking place. Without their willingness to be part of the process, this work would not have been so rich and informative. Our thanks are extended to everyone who contributed so willingly to the project.

In the final analysis, the interpretation and understanding reflected in this publication remains that of the authors and BTEG.

PREFACE

In 2009 the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) launched its Tackling Race Inequalities (TRI) Strategy, within which the point was made that:

“The Macpherson Report in 1999 was a wake-up call for all public services and has transformed the way they serve black and minority ethnic communities: no longer simply passively addressing individual racist incidents but actively promoting racial equality and better race relations. This has helped us to make substantial strides towards racial equality throughout our society – in the criminal justice system, in schools, and in the workplace.

However, there is still much to do. We know that there are still areas of concern, especially in school exclusions, the national DNA database, and stop and search.

we must recognise that we will not succeed in tackling racism without tackling all forms of discrimination, prejudice and inequality...we will continue to promote targeted approaches to address the specific obstacles and barriers which hold particular groups back – such

as the very successful REACH programme for black boys and young men. Today, we are a society more comfortable with diversity than ever before, more willing to embrace and celebrate the many benefits that diversity brings. But we cannot yet say that we are a society wholly free of prejudice, discrimination and inequality. The Government has an absolute commitment to eradicating racism and promoting race equality.”
(John Denham, July 2009)

Given the work of BTEG in supporting Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities (BAME) and infrastructure organisations, we have been working with thirteen (13) BAME Forums to support their developments mediated through a team funded under the Tackling Race Inequalities Fund (TRIF) programme (i.e. research, policy development and local engagement). This support has resulted in a range of local and national initiatives to provide the necessary support in relation to identified concerns.

The journey is by no means over; much more work still remains. We have therefore only begun the journey and have only tapped into a small

proportion of what is taking place across our chosen regions.

This particular publication reflect on some of the lessons that a selected number of BAME Forums have demonstrated as to the benefits and strength of having in place such bodies that advocate on behalf of the communities that they represent and reflect. We know that the current Coalition Government has made a commitment to transform the way local neighbourhoods perceive their situation by encouraging greater “community empowerment with oomph.” In short the creation of the ‘Big Society’.

It is our belief, based on our ongoing grass roots connectivity with BAME communities and organisations, through direct service and programme delivery to policy engagement at the national level, that makes us feel that the opportunity for BAME Forums to play a vital role in the development and creation of the Big Society could never be greater than now.

Furthermore, lessons learnt to date must be built upon rather than re-inventing the wheel. For this reason we have deliberately and consciously

entitled this publication
*'Shaping and informing the
Big Society: The involvement
of BAME Forums in formal
structures'*.

It must be the role of BAME
Forums to forge links and
opportunities so as to engage
with the formal decision
making processes – existing
as well as emerging. It is also
right and proper that they are

proactive, and take a dynamic
approach to engagement,
thus making it clear that
they are in touch with the
transformational agenda and
not just reactive. It is a
dynamic and proactive
publication that seeks to
challenge BAME Forums to be
movers, shakers and shapers
in that transformational journey
of community empowerment.
Change is never an easy thing,

and often there are more
opportunities than there are
threats. We want the BAME
communities to play their
right and just role in the Big
Society and we hope this
publication is a start in that
process.

Jeremy Crook, OBE
DIRECTOR

INTRODUCTION

BTEG, with funding from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), through its Tackling Race Inequalities Fund (TRIF), has been working with thirteen (13) BAME Forums to identify themes and concerns that would enable them to be influential within their respective regions and/or authority. BTEG has produced a range of Briefing papers and publications to show why there is a need for the BAME communities to be organised and to get involved at both the local level as well as at national policy making level.

This particular Briefing Paper reflects on some of the lessons that BAME Forums have learnt as a result of their engagement with the development of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) so as to inform engagement in with other formal structures that currently exist or are about to be established under the new Coalition Government (i.e. Local Enterprise Partnerships (or LEPs), for example).

We hope this publication inform the work of BAME Forums in supporting their engagement with service providers as well as assisting LSPs (or similar) and such other regional or national

policy forums . From the experiences of the case studies, it is clear that BAME Forums can, and in many cases, do influence LSPs in creating true partnerships with 'diverse' and under-represented communities. In the realisation of the aims of the Coalition Governments Big Society framework , it will be infrastructure support bodies, such as BAME Forums, where much of the driving force for transformation will be established. Understanding, therefore, how 'collaboratives' such as these can make a difference in shaping the agenda is to realise the potential that exist within communities for not only the galvanisation of expressed and unexpressed needs but to deliver and be at the forefront of social action.

If the Big Society is about anything it is about transformation; and not just any transformation, but transformation of communities and neighbourhoods. BAME Forums are organised and have been developed over the last decade precisely to help shape and inform community engagement so as to bring about a just and equitable society within and across neighbourhoods, and more specifically, to the development

of local policies and opportunities that could prevent and/or deter community involvement. These 'good practice' examples are what they are, 'examples' of what has been achieved by some Forums and therefore shining some light on what more could be achieved as we move together in meeting the new social policy agenda.

The five case studies examples presented in this publication demonstrate a range of different approaches to both the setting up of such Forums and in their influences at the local strategic level within their respective area (London, East Midlands and the North East). The practices and approaches included in this publication range from recently developed voluntary based arrangements to robust, mature and highly developed participatory planning and organisational bodies working across county, district and borough wide configurations (i.e. London).

SECTION 1: CONTEXT AND CHALLENGES

“...local Third Sector will be actively involved with all LSPs in helping to shape the local area.”

Research carried out by the Black Training and Enterprise Group (BTEG), found that BAME communities were under represented on LSPs and that few LSPs carried out equality impact assessments or monitored their representation (BTEG, 2009) . This was seen as undermining efforts to reduce inequality and thereby weakening the quality of decision making. Under the Duty to Involve , LSPs must involve all sections of their community and ensure that an equalities impact assessment is embedded in the decision making and community engagement process.

All public authorities are required to co-ordinate their local engagement activities with LSPs and they have a legal duty to promote racial equality both in service provision and in the employment of their staff. These are opportunities for BAME Forums to influence their LSP by connecting the LSP with the needs of the diverse BAME communities within their area. This will allow the diverse BAME voices to be heard, and bring to the LSP a wider range of experience and knowledge to bear on their decisions. In Strong and Prosperous Communities (2009), the then Government

had set out a “clear expectation that the local third sector will be actively involved with all LSPs in helping to shape the local area”. This therefore create an opportunity for BAME Forums to influence their LSPs.

What is a Local Strategic Partnership and why should it matter to BAME communities? DCLG defined LSPs as non-statutory bodies that bring together public, private, business, community and voluntary organisations on a local level. LSPs provide a single overarching co-ordination framework to ensure that different initiatives and services support each other and work together. They were set up as a result of the Local Government Act 2000 which required each local area to produce a Statutory Community Strategy (SCS), delivered through the Local Area Agreement (LAA) . It is ultimately the SCS, which in turn informs the LAAs, that BAME Forums need to influence in addressing race equality issues.

However, this is not always as straightforward as would be expected. Research conducted by Chahal and Ullah (2004) and Butt (2005) have both identified concerns around

BAME representation and engagement within formal decision making processes. BAME communities, they maintain, are less likely to participate in service provision; due, in part, to a lack of knowledge about their existence or negative perceptions, and in part, arising from unsatisfactory experiences for a range of reasons of which culture and language barriers are prominent. Further, Maguire and Truscott (2006) found that lack of respect for community representatives was a key barrier to participation by BAME groups in formal processes. For instance, they found that committee papers were often too complex and long, that very little account was taken of the voluntary nature of many representatives with much time demanded of them and thus leaving community representatives overburdened and meetings taking place at awkward and inconvenient times.

Despite some of these concerns, working through formal structures such as the LSP, is taking place and where they have been strongly represented, they have proven to be beneficial in ensuring that critical concerns, such as the promotion of the economic,

social and environmental wellbeing of their area, do indeed get addressed.

On the horizon there are further challenges that BAME Forums will need to consider if they are to truly influence strategic policy thinkers and decision makers at both the local level and the national policy development level. Without a doubt national policy trends have a profound influence on local opportunities and community aspirations. These greatly influence how LSPs and other public sector partnerships perceive not only their vision for the local area but how they perceive the roles of community representative bodies such as local BAME Forums. These policy trends, as they are emerging, include the following:

- The emergence of the Coalition Government's Big Society agenda, where great emphasis is being placed on what has been termed 'localism' and 'social action'. This is perceived as a policy shift away from the 'centre' to divest greater power and decision making to the local level – however defined. The aim is to empower communities to 'play their part' in the local decision making, including the

“BAME communities are less likely to participate in service provisions...”

allocation of some resources, by enhancing the roles of local authorities such as with the responsibility for economic and enterprise development being the responsibility of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs); the encouragement in the sphere of education for communities coming together to establish 'Free Schools' and 'academies' and most recently, the Ministry of Justice's Green Paper, signals new approaches to the criminal justice system, especially around the commissioning of services (i.e. 'Payment by result' considerations). All of which have profound implications for how communities develop and are able to inform and shape the new 'cultural imperatives' of the day (i.e. the 'we are all in this together' perspective or 'local empowerment').

- The reduction of the role of the state as a provider of services and the outsourcing of public services, which will require BAME forums working on strengthening the capacity of other BAME organisations to better deliver services.
- The UK is facing very real challenges in the wake of the Coalition Government's announcement to tackle the economic downturn we are

currently facing. In the light of the proposed £6bn reduction to public sector spending over the next year, these measures will have a profound impact on the voluntary, community and social enterprise sectors. One of the challenges that BAME Forums will need to address will be how to access employment opportunities, whether public or private, especially in the light of recently published labour market survey showing the increase in unemployment from 7.7% to 7.9% while BAME unemployment rate is in excess of 13.3%. As the ONS report goes on to show, of the 35,000 jobs lost at the end of the last quarter (July to October 2010), 33,000 were in the public sector alone. The work of BAME forums and similar infrastructure organisations that represent communities will need to be focused and fully engaged in the processes that will inform the economic change agenda if the communities they reflect are to play a real part in the transformation process.

- A straw poll carried out by BTEG in November 2010 with 13 BAME Forums with regards their awareness of LEPs, showed that the majority of those who were contacted were unaware of LEPs, or had

ever heard of the Regional Growth Fund (RGF). Their experience shows that firstly, information is not getting through and as such greater efforts by all involved, including support bodies like BTEG, have a role to play in disseminating information so that BAME organisations become aware of the ever changing environment and in building capacities in order to take advantage of opportunities. This Briefing paper is an attempt to highlight and raise some of those concerns to enable BAME Forums to be better positioned to take advantage of emerging and developing opportunities that could affect local communities. Our examples provide vivid and 'real' glimpses of what can be achieved when the full force of the 'collaborative' arrangements is brought to bear on key issues of common interest and aspirations.

SECTION 2: WHAT CAN LOCAL BAME FORUMS LEARN FROM ENGAGING WITH LSPs?

The case studies identified in this briefing paper have contributed considerably to our understanding of local BAME Forums, the result of which has enabled us to identify some important steps and actions that BAME Forums can embrace in developing relationships with formal structures, whether LSPs or successor arrangements envisaged as part of the Big Society agenda.

First and foremost, the steps identified should be treated as guiding principles as each local area and neighbourhood is different and therefore, approaches will depend as much on historical relationships as well as the quality of interaction between key players. The examples highlighted in this publication are selected because they reflect differences across the three regions we have been working in, they have different resource base - and hence capacity - and engagement with the LSPs in their respective areas highlight some of the barriers and challenges that BAME communities, specifically, need to overcome. The detailed case studies are attached as Appendix 1.

Arising from the case studies,

“BAME forums will need... to ensure they do not ‘bite off more than they can deliver’.”

five primary characteristics of an effective Forum engagement with formal structures can be identified. They are:

VISION AND PURPOSE

BAME Forums need to have a clear understanding of their purpose for engaging with the formal structures such as the LSPs and need to ensure they have the capacity to maintain their involvement. BAME Forums will need, on one hand, to ensure they do not ‘bite off more than they can deliver’ and that some areas of work may require additional support to help them to navigate the complexity of public services in their areas as well as support to help them tackle some of the barriers that are known to exist (e.g. racism, discrimination and exclusion).

BAME Forums must get themselves recognised as ‘legitimate voices’ in order to inform the communities they represent as well as influence service providers in how services are shaped and delivered to tackle discrimination and race inequality. The Merton Unity Network (MUN) and Croydon Black and Minority Ethnic Forum (CBMEF) case studies shows that BAME Forums can

be effective in obtaining results directly as a consequence of their engagement on the LSPs.

MAKING CONTACT

An important starting point is that every local authority will have someone responsible for the day to day running of the LSP (or similar arrangement) and they should be your first point of contact. Also, the voluntary sector is often represented on formal strategic partnerships through the local Council for Voluntary Service (CVS). The local CVS often has influence at various levels of the arrangements and it may be possible to get nominated by the CVS to participate in some of the meetings.

Some areas have Community Empowerment Networks (CEN) instead of CVS and/or in addition. CENs are funded to help voluntary and community organisations to play a more active role in influencing the local decision making structures.

It is therefore important that BAME Forums plug in very early into such networks as CVS and CENs, where they exist; this is another route for making first contact.

“BAME forums need to plug in very early into networks... this is another route for making contact.”

COMMUNICATION AND CONSULTATION

BAME Forums need to ensure they cascade and follow through in their support to local dialogue about priorities and needs with due regard to building social cohesion among all communities. A forum should not be representative of any one community if it is to be effective. A starting point in this process must include creating strong sustainable and credible local networks that also bring together, where possible, faith and other community organisations for joint work.

Based on our case study examples, the total number of organisations that are members of these Forums is in excess of 370. This means that an effective system and process will need to be in place if good and effective communication flow is to be realised. While Forums cannot represent a single community interest, it will need to articulate to the reflected communities that their needs are being considered and, where their voices and views are sought, they will be promoted fully and feedback (i.e. Stockton BAME Forum provides a useful insight into providing feedback). (i.e. the Northamptonshire BAME Forum case study provides a good example of engagement through a ‘conferencing’ approach)

SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT

BAME Forums should not focus on the needs of large organisations but seek to support, within capacity, those smaller organisations where representation will be difficult to nurture. It is a ‘collaborative’ of diverse and, at times, needing to balance contradictory and complicated contexts (i.e. helping to counteract racist and negative stereotypes of

BAME communities by promoting trust and understanding between all communities). The Strategic Plan of the Merton BAME Forum provides us with an insight into the support that BAME organisations can expect.

FEEDBACK

Building trust, respect and confidence between communities and service providers in the shaping of local provision should be one of the key purposes for the establishment of BAME Forums. Critical to this is the extent to which there is feedback to the communities reflected in the membership of the Forum as well as to those who need to hear the messages. Feedback is critical in securing legitimacy and in galvanising support for development. If the Forum is to be meaningful, meeting the expectations of the membership is vital and to secure this, in part, confidence must be apparent and how this is achieved will enhance the respect that such members have of the organisation and thereby lend their support in its endeavours.

The reverse is equally true and for this reason ensuring

“Feedback is critical in securing legitimacy and galvanising support.”

there is a ‘feedback loop’ to the membership and the constituency is paramount (e.g. BAME Forums can learn from Croydon BAME Network experience as well as Stockton, Northamptonshire and MUN case studies in organising events where different communities, service providers and LSP officials come together to work through race equality issues. This allowed perceptions about BAME communities to be challenged and generated new ideas and projects for promoting race equality).

Having got involved with LSPs, our case study organisations

very clearly showed that the adage, ‘*being there is half the battle*’, does have strong merits. They showed that LSPs, in particular, and the communities that the Forums reflected, benefited as a result of their involvement (i.e. being there). Some examples include:

(a) BAME Forums and Networks succeeded in securing support from LSPs by offering their distinctive knowledge about BAME communities based on their own experiences and their insight into the needs of local BAME communities.

Their work complemented the professional knowledge of LSP stakeholders which made it possible to influence the LSP about the needs of minority ethnic communities, for instance, as well as to ensure that race equality issues are incorporated in the work of LSPs and their partners (i.e. reflecting the voices of BAME communities and service users and other statutory stakeholders).

(b) Developing partnerships and building alliances between BAME organisations and others interested in supporting BAME organisations in addressing issues of common concern (e.g. Northampton BAME

Forum; Croydon BAME Forum);

(c) Lobbying alongside the LSP to support LSP bids for funding to engage with the hard to reach among BAME communities as a result of being closer to the ground, so to speak, in understanding the issues affecting communities (e.g. CEBAE)

(d) Researching and generating evidence to demonstrate to the LSP the particular challenges that BAME communities are facing and therefore some of the key areas for development that policies and strategies will have to consider if they are hoping to meet the needs of the whole community (e.g. the Strategic Plan produced by the Merton Unity Network; Stockton BAME Forum).

While the case studies highlighted some important characteristics of what an effective Forum could look like and benefits derived as a result of involvement with formal strategy and policy shaping arrangements, they also illustrated some of the key barriers that will need to be overcome. Broadly, they are:

(a) The difficulty of engaging with LSPs where resource is

“Slowly, we started to have influence over statutory partners and how they did their work. The outcome was more relevant services that were accessible to the needs of BAME communities.”

limited was clearly illustrated by the case studies of Council of Enfield Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (CEBAE).

BAME Forums often start out as the coming together of ‘partners’ wanting to make a difference across common concerns and is at the same time dependent upon the ‘charisma’ and leadership qualities of an individual willing to drive through the agenda. This is often voluntary in the first instance and without much financial or additional infrastructure

support. Without this, many forums struggle to be sustainable and often fade or cease operating. The lack of sufficient resources therefore can (and does) hamper progress and the effectiveness of the Forum. Where either the LSP or the local authority provided core funding support, the Forum was able to provide support for a wider range of needs (e.g. CEMC, CBMEF and MUN)

(b) The common feature of all of the case studies has been the desire to bring together the diverse membership of their respective BAME communities to collectively develop and implement a participatory approach which then made it easier for LSPs to engage with BAME communities and the Forum’s issues. As the Chief Executive of the Croydon BAME Forum says *“slowly we started to have influence over statutory partners and how they did their work. The outcome was more relevant services that were accessible to the needs of BAME communities.”*

However, the journey to get the Forum to the position where they were listened to was not without its problems of ‘engagement’ with those to

whom the Forum represent. The Stockton BAME Forum, for instance, found that the dynamics between BAME groups in Stockton made it difficult for the Network to keep the different BAME organisations together and to represent their diverse views and experiences effectively to the LSP.

(c) Linked to the previous area of concern is the problem of ‘representation’ versus ‘reflectiveness’. All of the case studies presented were clear that they do not claim to speak for the entire BAME sector within their respective areas.

This is a common source of confusion and debate, where there is the assumption that BAME groups are homogeneous and that the Forum can speak on behalf of all the ‘communities’. It is a feature of ‘collective’ association, as reflected in trade unionism and democracies with unencumbered electoral processes. The confusion is in recognising the legitimacy of the ‘collective’ voice(s) as mandated by the groups or communities from whom the representation comes.

Because many Forums are under-resourced and stem

from the drive of a few, who are only able to reflect the voices of a small proportion of the communities they represent (often those they are able to make contact with), they are therefore reluctant to be seen as the ‘spokesperson’ for the whole community. This can bring about frustration within formal arrangements, where there is the expectation and understanding that representatives do indeed engage with a ‘mandate’ by the constituencies reflected around the discussion table.

Under these sets of conditions, the best that many Forums could achieve is to be a reflection of some of the views of the ‘constituents’ they represent, which is not to be confused with having a mandated democratic representation defined as a result of a formal election process, which is how we have come to understand ‘representativeness’. All of the case studies exhibited issues and concerns with regards to how they are perceived both within the communities they reflected and the expectations as a member of the LSP and other formal structures.

“...an assumption that BAME groups are homogeneous and that the Forum speaks on behalf of all the ‘communities’.”

SECTION 3: CONCLUSIONS

It is easy to underestimate the leadership that is required to successfully engage with an LSP and the five case studies highlighted in this publication demonstrated the leadership capabilities of the individuals involved in working with their LSPs.

This guide attempted to identify approaches that can help local BAME Forums to engage with formal strategic structures in the light of Coalition Government's Big Society agenda. We sought to do this by looking at the lessons learnt through case studies of five BAME Forums working with their respective Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs).

The aim is to determine in the development and delivery of the Big Society, the role that BAME Forums could conceivably play in the transformation of communities as indicated through languages of 'localism' and 'social action'.

What we have learnt, and we feel BAME Forums need to consider, are considerations about purpose and vision, being clear about how to get engaged and who to make first contact with, effective communication and dissemination processes and feedback to the communities. Above all, and implicit within the key messages of the case studies is that BAME Forums need to address the following areas to be sustainable:

- BAME Forums need to develop good and effective leadership and adaptive

capacities to cope with the diverse range of interests represented on LSPs (e.g. Police, Health, Housing etc).

It is easy to underestimate the leadership that is required to successfully engage with an LSP and the five case studies highlighted in this publication demonstrated the leadership capabilities of the individuals involved in working with their LSPs (e.g. having to cope with barriers such as culture, language, organisational structures, management and lack of information).

- The need for effective networking opportunities for BAME Forums and their representative organisations to learn and to reflect on their own practice as well as sharing with others their unique approaches to service delivery (e.g. development and creation of tools and service materials such as robust databases, libraries and websites, publications, toolkits, best practice case studies and guides on engaging and working with diverse BAME communities and much more).

- Nurturing and developing the internal 'BAME market' through development of information sharing processes

and systems, customised training or on-line courses on issues of concern for both BAME communities and public sector decision makers that promotes joint work on tackling common problems.

Enabling a process of reflection and review as well as feedback and ongoing 'contact' with those for whom the Forum was established is critical if confidence and legitimacy is to have relevance (e.g. consultations on local and national policy implications, providing expert advice, evaluating consultations and undertaking research in order to ensure that the many diverse voices of the different BAME communities in the local area are considered).

Finally, we wish to express our thanks to the case study organisations for widening and deepening our understanding of their experience of engaging with LSPs so that we may learn as we move to engage in the new agenda that now presents itself under the guise of the Big Society. Much has been achieved by BAME Forums and the lessons learnt must be built upon if they are to be sustainable during this uncertain period of social policy development.

We welcome your thoughts and observations on any of the points raised in this publication.

“We need to nurture and develop information sharing processes and systems...”

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APPENDIX 1: GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDIES

COUNCIL FOR ETHNIC MINORITY COMMUNITIES (NORTHAMPTONSHIRE)

The Northamptonshire Council for Ethnic Minority Communities (CEMC) is a voluntary and community sector infrastructure body supporting 102 BAME voluntary groups across the county. The county comprises seven LSP areas with 41 per cent of the population identified as BAME (i.e. largely from Somalia, Afghanistan, Nigeria, Poland, Caribbean, India, Bangladesh and Pakistan). CEMC is funded by Northamptonshire County Council and is a strategic partner with many of the public bodies in the county

Laney Holland, the Business Manager for CEMC, explains the origin and vision directing CEMC:

"...CEMC emerged out of a number of campaigns from BME communities in Northampton in the early 1990s. Its aims were focussed on supporting BME communities to advocate their views to local public bodies and to help strengthen the infrastructure of local BME organisations. The partnership with Northampton College was crucial as it provided support and premises for CEMC and enabled the

reputation of the organisation to be built as CEMC helped the college to bring in students from BME communities to meet its targets. This demonstrated how BME organisations could work effectively together with local public bodies."

In July 1993, a series of meetings between Black and Asian community representatives and Health and Social Services officers in Northampton resulted in the establishment of the Ethnic Minorities Open Forum. This umbrella community forum facilitated discussions based on community needs. Meetings of the Open Forum culminated in 1995 with the week-end seminar 'Fair Shares-empowering communities'.

CEMC emerged out of this process, and following a period of support through Northampton College, it has managed to secure funding from Northamptonshire Third Sector Office to work with BAME communities across the whole county as part of the Local Area Agreement (LAA).

The experiences of CEMC demonstrate that:

- Building effective participation

in two-tier counties (i.e. county and district councils) is challenging because of the different, but equally legitimate, democratic mandates applying to both and therefore straddling the 'politics' and the multiplicity of partnerships that applies to the two structures can be frustrating.

- BAME communities in Northampton were both unusually diverse and disparate. Through the conferences with BAME communities, it was possible to gauge the areas of concerns across the communities and so provided a useful starting point to develop a vision and purpose for the Forum.

- There is a need to keep the focus of BAME needs through 'impact' analysis by highlighting, as they have done for example, in regards to the impact of BAME population movement, immigration laws and arrival of new communities from Eastern Europe in to Northamptonshire. Through representation on the LSPs, they have ensured that stakeholders take into account a range of issues in developing support approaches that build trust and social solidarity among the different communities. Their presence has reduced

some misunderstandings between communities and generated awareness amongst policy makers and statutory service providers.

CROYDON BLACK AND MINORITY ETHNIC FORUM (CBMEF)

The Croydon Black and Minority Ethnic Forum (CBMEF) is an infrastructure organisation formed in 2002 supporting 130 voluntary and community organisations in the London Borough of Croydon. CBMEF receives funding from the LSP and the local authority as a key strategic partner on a number of local partnership arrangements. CBMEF is currently leading a sub regional partnership funded by Capacity Builders to support the development of Forums across four South London boroughs.

Nero Ughwujabo, the CEO of CBMEF, explains:

'The key issue that really galvanized local BAME organisations and set about the train of events that culminated in the formation of CBMEF was the creation of the borough's Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) in 2002 and BAME representation on

the board and its sub group structures. Up until this point consultation with BAME communities had been fragmented and often focused on individual organisations.

CBMEF was formed as a response to the lack of wider representation of previous approaches but also to meet the needs of the LSP to consult effectively with BAME organisations and communities.

In order to achieve this they needed a representative body to fulfil this crucial function in a borough with a 30 per cent and growing BAME population. The LSP supported the production of a feasibility study, supported its recommendations and CBMEF was formed in 2002.'

As a result of the experience the following key points are worth noting:

The importance of being clear about the aims and purpose of the Forum and how working in partnership with BAME communities can influence the LSP (i.e. improved design and responsiveness of local services which has led to better outcomes for BAME communities such as improvement to the quality

of services that are responsive to the needs of the communities).

Greater links made between and within BAME communities and with service providers which has led to improved understanding and co-operation which in has reflected in improved community cohesion within the Borough.

Involvement had demonstrably improved the quality of LSP decision making and the accountability of LSP stakeholders to BAME communities. This has resulted in greater civic participation among BAME communities which has resulted in some improved provision.

COUNCIL OF ENFIELD BLACK ASIAN AND MINORITY ETHNIC (CEBAME)

The Council of Enfield Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (CEBAME) have built up an alliance with local organisations and other network forums, explicitly aimed at promoting civic activism and creating civic responsibility. CEBAME has 66 members and is totally reliant on volunteers. The CEBAME Co-ordinator, Ade Adeshina, makes the point that "CEBAME currently runs on members' resources to

support the group forum and the delivery of its work, from staffing to volunteers, premises, grants and bids preparations to secretarial support etc.”

The aim of CEBAME is to involve as many people from BAME communities as possible in local formal structures and discussions on resource allocations through formal structures such as the LSP. The key learning points arising from CEBAME’s experience to date is that:

It has developed strong links with the different neighbourhood networks and BAME communities;

It has developed a volunteering approach to involving BAME communities in decision making processes.

MERTON UNITY NETWORK (MUN)

The Merton Unity Network (MUN) was established in December 1994 to provide a “collective voice” and support for Merton’s Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) organisations and communities. MUN has a membership of just over 75 members in a borough of 28 per cent BAME population.

In 1999 MUN commissioned its first research study into some of the obstacles facing the development of Merton’s BAME voluntary and community sector, which provided a series of recommendations for improvement. This has enabled MUN to provide vital space for people from all sectors involved in local engagement to share ideas, practices, resources and challenges.

Patricia Anderson, the Director of MUN, explains the vision, development and achievements of MUN:

“The Network understands the complex and continuously changing environment in which the BAME sector has to operate and sees the need to develop stronger working relationships with key stakeholders. In 2003/4 MUN became a member of Merton’s LSP and subsequently Merton’s Compact Board.”

In October 2005, MUN [formally launched as] Merton’s BME Forum...This independent body provides a democratic voice with which the BAME sector would fully interact with key partners within the policy making environment.

This gave rise to the Forum’s development and implementation of its first BAME Strategic Plan for Merton (2006-09). This evidence based research approach not only highlighted the needs, challenges and priorities of the BAME sector, but also outlined key actions which has brought about the sharing of skills and knowledge; the pooling of resources and have helped to galvanised some support towards maximising and sustaining meaningful and positive service impact for a number of BAME organisations and communities (e.g. through the leveraging of funds into the borough of Merton).

The BAME Strategic Plan, as highlighted within Merton’s Community Plan 2009-19, was refreshed and was launched in December 2010.

Through the pro-activity of Merton’s BAME Forum, the new BAME Strategic Plan (2010-13) will now be fully incorporated in the local LSP plan with a more focussed alignment with the varying LSP structures and LAA processes.

STOCKTON BAME NETWORK (SBMEN)

Stockton BAME Network

was established in 2005 with support from the LSP. The LSP had identified a gap in the engagement of BAME communities and subsequently provided funding to support the development of BAME Network. Originally there were two networks, and following a process of consultations across the communities of the local area, it was agreed to establish a single Network. The support of the LSP meant they were able to secure representation on the LSP Board.

The Network is still in its infancy having an active membership of 30 groups with support coming via the Stockton Residents and Community Groups Association (SRCGA), which has seconded the Network Co-ordinator.

The current work programme for the Network reflects some key areas of learning and opportunities for BAME communities within the area:

To establish the evidence base for their work, a mapping and research audit of BME community needs is in place. The consultation process, which forms a feature of the approach, will be undertaken in the light of the findings

to ensure feedback to the communities.

The LSP has been very supportive of the Network and has benefited from their involvement on BAME issues and concerns through recognition and awareness of the needs of the communities in the area (i.e. access to information and experiences of BAME service users in respect to the lack of access for some communities in statutory provisions).

Providing support to the BAME community through formal structures such as the LSP has not been easy because of the difficulties of engaging across the diverse and varied groups as well as 'managing' the interface on the LSP, which can be problematic due to lack of capacity and poor information (e.g. the changing dynamics between BAME groups in Stockton has meant it is difficult for the Network to keep the different BAME organisations together and to represent their diverse views and experiences effectively to the LSP).



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