



“Ethnicity, networks and voice mechanisms in established and hard to reach BME communities: Capacity building and beyond”

An outline of the background and tentative findings of the
2007-2010 Economic and Social
Research Council Seminar Series

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Round table discussion 12th March

The British Library, London

The discussion will not be structured around formal presentations but will be organised around some key headings and a roundtable discussion:

- 10.00-10.30 Welcome and Coffee
- 10.30-10.45: Brief feedback on the seminar series and some salient themes
- 10.45-11.30: Discussion of issues related to participation and BME networks
- 11.30-12.15: The changing climate of BME issues and the challenge of the current ‘immigration’ debate
- 12.15-12.45: Futures and forums *both real and virtual*
- 12.45 – 1.15 Working lunch, discussion and networking opportunity

For further details visit the website:

<http://www.brad.ac.uk/management/research/esrcseminars/overview/>

Summary of discussions and debates within the series

1. The call for inclusion

There is a broad debate dealing with the organisational and social issues of exclusion and their economic outcomes. The main concern has been to focus on the use of legislation and policies such as training and housing programmes, for example. In terms of organisations there has also been increasing interest in the subject of managing diversity as a way of ‘selling’ the business benefits of social inclusion to employers. Hence, the increasing focus of the diversity and equality debate is on the way **established** institutions facilitate BME individuals in the labour market and organisations, and how they (should) ensure and regulate fairness. Be it the equality debate, with its focus on legislation and rights, or the diversity debate, with its obsession with marketing the gains of social inclusion to pre-established hierarchies, the focus has during past decades tended to be on ‘assistance’ and ‘support’.

There have also been academic attempt to broaden understanding of these dynamics through critical perspectives (e.g. Kirton and Greene, 2004): that aim has been to broaden our understanding of BME identity (Healy et al, 2004) and appreciate the role new capabilities (Gagnon and Cornelius, 1999; Cornelius, 2002). More recently, there is also a growing engagement with questions of representation and the development of voice in general within BME communities.

2. The steady but uneven focus of policy and research on BME groups

There has been a renewed focus in the past decade of policy on inclusion within established economic spaces and firms and, secondly, the development of broad inclusion networks through the Government Office as in the UK, for example, which have sought policy input from BME communities. Whilst there is an issue as to the understanding, support and strategic focus of policy makers and local public bodies in relation to the broader tapestry of BME community and social enterprise groups – with much of the problem relating to the inability to grasp the social and political dynamics and complexities of communities - this has not slowed down social and economic dialogues emerging in terms of such communities and their relations with policy makers at all levels.

At the heart of this growing interest has been the desire to dig deeper on the question of community and how it politically and organisationally structures itself. As Alleyne (2002:

608) argues the 'idea of community, which often connotes some form of small or mid-range collectivity, can come to present an ... obstacle ... which goes into building and sustaining human collectivities'. The broad nature of the term means it often acts a blunt instrument in the way communities and groups are approached. This is especially the case given the changing nature of BME and migrant groups and the increasing presence of new and 'hard to reach' groups. The idea that there is a standard template of immigrant participatory forms ignores the way these may emerge and acquire specific characteristics at specific times (Soysal, 1994; Vertovec, 1999).

Hence, many are increasingly interested in the gap between the rhetoric and reality of how BME informal networks contribute to the economic and employment activity of community members (for example, Budd and Parr, 2007 and Janjuha-Jivraj, 2003; 2004). We are seeing see more focused research on rethinking community (Stewart et al, 2009), on the policy frameworks and context of such communities and the realities and challenges they face in developing roles as networks and voice mechanisms.

3. Initial optimism regarding the emergent voice and networking features of BME communities

Whilst critical and detached many began to observe the emergence of politics and voice mechanisms in relation to BME networks - a new agenda and development that was moving from the level of society and protest into a new mainstream and even functional role. There was a sense that economic and political renewal could and would be spurred on a supported by BME, migration based dynamics. It would enrich civil society and the democratic role of the state. The role of new forms of democratic institutions within civil society in the form of social and organisational networks within BME communities was considered vital to the erosion of the democratic deficit in Britain. The steady emergence of a series of supportive institutions within BME communities and local social organisations that would, it was argued, help capacity-build the voice of such communities. With a new government since 1997 which had put new forms of social dialogue closer to the centre of its political discourse, in rhetorical terms anyway, a new climate and context of diversity was developed to underpin a renewed view of policy participation and local engagement. What is more a new generation of BME leaders within the state and within civil society would facilitate a broader set of dialogues and sensibilities.

4. The seminar series

The role of the seminar series was, therefore, to try and gauge the possibilities and realities of the new dynamics of BME networking. The ESRC sponsored seminar series co-ordinated by Nelarine Cornelius and Miguel Martinez Lucio and consisted of seminars based on the following themes:

- What is a community and network? What are the issues in terms of capacity needs and capacity building? (London School of Economics December 2007)
- The links to other, established bodies such as trade unions and employer organisations: understanding the gaps that exist and mutual considerations (Manchester University April 2008)
- The local labour market dynamics of such groups and their business and labour informal networks. (Leeds University June 2008)
- Networks beyond the community: their role in local economic dynamics and regulatory processes (Open University November 2008)
- The internal structures and politics of such networks: the gender dynamics of such networks (Glasgow University April 2009)
- The representative structures of local and national government in relation to BME networks and the role of regional policy (Aston University June 2009)
- Doctoral workshop (Bradford University School of Management February 2010)
- The role of BME networks in local economic dynamics and regulatory processes (Bradford University February 2010)

Involved in organising a range of these seminars alongside the two seminar leaders were David Cox, Pauline Gleadle, Robert MacKenzie, Robert Perrett, and Fiona Wilson. Over 40 presentations were made. The aim has been to evaluate formulaic understandings of networks that fail to consider internal network dynamics, inter-network relations, and the manner in which a new tapestry of BME politics has been emerging. We needed to locate the dynamics of networking and social capital in terms of the real structure and levels of policy and social action, and not just its rhetoric. The seminars aimed to contribute to this debate, in a systematic and concerted manner, the role of BME networks and collective voice mechanisms. Out of debates on *cultural and social capital* respectively (e.g. Bourdieu, 1986, Lin, 2002) and on networks (Castells, 2000) came inspiration on how we can understand the role of networking more generally. Social inclusion is based not solely on the distribution of economic assets but on the way in which people network and develop supportive and representative mechanisms in social, cultural and political terms.

Moreover, there was a push towards new forms of governance and state intervention based on transferring the role of regulation and service delivery to agents within civil society themselves (see Guy Peters and Pierre, 1998; Rhodes, 2000; Kooimans, 2005)

and concerns about the effectiveness and coherence of such developments (Davies, 2002). In relation to the policies of social inclusion and traditional public and civil society agencies, there has been a concern with the tensions and contradictions between the social and economic inclusion policies that are developed as they do not necessarily empower groups in their delivery and planning (see Martinez Lucio and Perrett, 2009). The institutional and economic possibilities of BME networking has therefore been a live political issue as the boundaries in terms of service delivery on social issues become blurred.

5. A Selection of Themes Regarding BME Networking

The seminars consisted of contributions and discussions that raised a range of issues: these can be clustered around specific themes based on 'Image, Actors and Policy':

Image and Understanding

- Questions of visibility have emerged throughout the discussion on BME networks and representation: the lack of visibility of BME networks and groups remains a challenge as traditional organisations and key aspects of the state remain unclear as to their role
- Organisations such as trade unions and employers organisations are still unclear or unaware of the dynamics of BME representation and new forms of BME networking – engagement by the former appears to be changing but it is focused on particular high profile campaigns and internal representation within trade unions. Anti-racist or equality based activity is very much project or internally organised with very little by the way of external coalition building except for exceptions around London Citizens.
- Within public policy circles there has been some progress in terms of BME networks at the level of RDAs but these have had a chequered history and have been constrained in their development by the overall constraints placed on RDAs along with the policy failure in regional democracy
- There is also concern with internal transparency and internal governance structures – the universe of small BME groups are limited by resources and lack of support and many groups are challenged by having to privilege external action at the expense sometimes of internal deliberation.
- Recent developments in terms of anti-immigration discourses, the mainstreaming of the far right by parts of the media, the development of the notion of the 'silent majority', and the nature of anti-Islamic sentiment has meant that a greater amount of stigma has been attached to developments such as BME networking.

Evidence of communities feeling less confident in publicly expressing concerns and demonstrating is a major issue.

Actors and Strategy

- Externally there is an emergent dynamic of representation through co-ordinating institutions such as Voice4Change England and others which have started a process of unifying the representative voice of BME groups around specific concerns in relation to government
- The internal dynamics of representation within BME communities are more complex and variable given questions of heritage, historical presence, and social structures. Dialogue between BME communities is variable and the emphasis given to external lobbying and policy work varies with some communities more internally focused compared to others.
- BME networks at the regional and national level are beginning to play a role but they face resourcing issues and dilemmas in terms of representative mechanisms and internal BME diversity – the term BME is sometimes questioned due to the different experiences of different racial minorities
- The role of micro and small employers is a significant issue within BME dynamics which has been ignored in terms of its positive features (the resources, networks and ‘organisational know how’ such entrepreneurs provide) and negative features (the lack of engagement with regulation and bad employment practices in terms of particular issues such as health and safety)
- The commercialisation of BME politics and the emergence of social enterprise represents a major dynamic and opportunity to develop more focused and effectively managed social representation and service delivery – yet it leads to the possible managerialisation and commercialisation of such organisations, disconnecting them from their original objectives
- The funding imperative and the costs related to securing funding is a common challenge which consumes energy and undermines focus within BME groups - this has in part spawned a supportive consultancy industry which provides advice and a ‘community of practice’ which in positive terms is supportive and acts as an underpinning network but which in turn has its own bureaucratic inertia

Policy Frameworks and Support

- There has been a major increase in dialogue between BME networks and government/public agencies – but this has not been as clearly structured as would at first appear and is driven from above of diversity/equality proofing policy initiatives
- The main challenge in this regard has been the unclear data and information gathering related to the mapping of BME networks and resources within the state leading to tokenistic relations and a lack of institutional durability
- The use of BME networks has been increasingly harnessed as a source of policy advice but there has been a tendency to use it as part of a risk management system for new policies and procedures appear to be *ad hoc*
- The interest in enhancing the capacity and abilities of BME groups and networks have been led by a managerial logic of performance management and internal auditing (e.g. the Compact) and funding has become more opaque wasting a lot of administrative resources in organisations that apply for funding
- The changing framework of the debates on equality – ‘one size fits all’ – is seen to push BME concerns into a small dimension of the overall politics of equality; there is a genuine concern with disappearance of racism related issues
- Changes to future funding due to political factors may heighten debates on BME funding and undermine the work being done.
- In addition, there are issues that have emerged throughout the seminar series in terms of the heightening xenophobia towards migration issues and the stigmatising of social policy in this field within society which have been used to undermine public funding for the work of BME networks