



Consultation Response September 2009

MiNet's Response to CapacityBuilders draft Single Equality Scheme

MiNet

MiNet (Minority Network) is London's only Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) regional Third Sector infrastructure network set up to promote and support the effective engagement, contribution and influence of the Third Sector as partners in regional policy development and implementation for the benefit of the diverse communities across London. As a network whose core work involves the strategic coordination, support and advocacy of other pan London and sub-regional BAME networks, MiNet welcomes this opportunity for the interests and concerns of London's BAME Third Sector to be used to inform CapacityBuilders (CB hereafter) single equality scheme.

Methodology for this Response

Historically, all research carried out and recommendations made by MiNet has been evidence based, in the sense that everything we do is informed by the views and real life experiences of BAME communities, and the organisations that are set up to serve them. MiNet is a network of over 500 BAME organisations, including both frontline service delivery and infrastructure bodies. It is through these established networks that MiNet collects evidence and consequently takes forward this evidence to inform London's key stakeholders. This consultation has been informed by MiNet's standing Advisory Group who feed in their knowledge and expertise to ensure the work of MiNet is an accurate portrayal of the BAME Third Sector. MiNet consists of the following members who have invested their time into this consultation: (Bolaji Bank-Anthony) Black Neighbourhood, Renewal and Regeneration Network, Sharon Matthew (Community Matters), (Jennie McShannon) Federation of Irish Societies, (Sarah Crowther) Refugees in Effective Action Partnership, (Ibukun Olashore) Organisation of Blind Africans and Caribbean's, (Sona Mahtani) The Selby Trust, (Debbie Ariyo) Africans Unite Against Child Abuse, (Terrence Simmons) Croydon BME Forum, (Claire Andrews) Integration Media Project.



About this Consultation

MiNet welcomes CB recognition that mainstreaming equality strands within the structure and ethos of its all encompassing work may result in difficulties in its application throughout CB and ultimately the monitoring thereafter. MiNet believes this consultation is a positive measure from CB and is therefore very pleased to respond. MiNet encourages CB to conduct similar consultations to enable a race equality perspective within the wider remit of equality issues, such as this on an annual basis. This would allow an examination of the impact of policy regionally and locally, and ensure that CB obligations to promote racial equality and equality more generally are being met. MiNet is keen to play a role in helping to ensure that any commitment to achieving race equality and any cross-equality issues which are compounded due to race, within a broader remit of promoting equality overall is not lost. Therefore the opportunity for these issues to inform planning at a strategic level is well received by London's BAME Third Sector.

3. People: Fair and Open Recruitment

MiNet would like to see further clarification on how CB as an employer will serve its obligation to ensure policies and functions which affect staff, or prospective staff, are fair and equal regardless of people's circumstances and background. How this is managed is of crucial concern and the monitoring of such information and the use thereafter of this information is of particular interest. There is certainly a requirement for built-in confidential mechanisms for staff members to raise issues (such as confidential staff surveys) and clear channels for prospective staff to report what they believe to be subtle or severe discrimination. Research carried out by ROTA (Race on the Agenda (April 2008) *Addressing hate crime through Restorative Justice and cross sector partnerships: A London study*. London: ROTA) has highlighted that it is often the subtle forms of discrimination which occur more commonly and can be most damaging. How this is identified and thereafter challenged needs to be dynamic perhaps making use of alternative forms of resolution.

Additionally, any scheme which is initiated should make allowances for any implications of the Equality Bill to be integrated. This would for example endorse potential amendments such as positive action.

3.2 People: Representative Workforce



One main area of concern surrounding the representativeness of CB workforce relates to the clarity of the monitoring systems in place. We fully endorse the fact that with a workforce of 40 people it is not possible for CB to be entirely representative. However, there is still a need for specific monitoring criteria of employees to be in place.

MiNet have identified a number of shortfalls in ethnic monitoring forms which are used conventionally across public sector departments with many not capturing significant ethnic categories. An example of this is the Latin American population, numbering in excess of 800,000, which is not recognised. Additionally, Armenians, North Koreans, Kurds, Afghan, Sri-Lankan, Tamil, Sinhalese, Assyrians and even Roma people are normally excluded from ethnic categories. At a recording level without detailing specifically a person's identity there is a failure to target which groups need definite support.

Moreover, this also has a major impact regarding the identification of various needs especially when it comes to accessing statutory services – which should be of key interest to those working within grant making division and commissioning services. This has resulted in a negative impact for some of London's BAME organisations in commissioning processes due to the invisibility of certain groups. The question is raised therefore as to what apparatus will be put in place to ensure ethnic monitoring is more comprehensive and precise of staff internally, and those in receipt of grants and commissioning, and how often will this be reviewed.

3.4 People: Developing our employees

The draft Single Equality Scheme stresses that a key aim for CB will be to nurture and develop CB workforce by making resources available for training, increasing engagement between line manager and employee and monitoring data on the take up of training.

Although each of these mechanisms may be instituted within CB this will by no means ensure staff are well equipped for the work they may carry out. Greater steps need to be taken to ensure the acquisition of knowledge and the development of equality awareness is fulfilled. Even if appraisals are in place from line managers, there needs to be assurance that line managers have an awareness of equalities issues personally to identify knowledge gaps. Moreover, it is good that employees can take a pro-active role in setting their training agenda. However, if they are not aware of training needs relating to equality then this is problematic. Systems should be in place which identify shortfalls in knowledge, and thereafter positively encourage staff to undertake training in areas they are weak or have little understanding. An option is to use robust mechanisms to test knowledge on equalities issues, especially when working in



an environment which can have direct ramifications for the general public. Equality training and cultural awareness training may also prove beneficial.

The above point is raised as it appears quite apparent staff knowledge on race equality is dramatically inconsistent amongst CB staff. This assertion is based on the sharing of information amongst BAME regional networks when discussing engagement with CB.

4.1 Business: Targeted support for marginalised communities

The Single Equality Scheme suggests that CB will consider developing further targeted investment programmes in the future, provided there is evidence around specific needs or gaps in services provision.

If evidence is required to accentuate the specific needs or gaps in service provision in London for BAME communities MiNet is happy to offer its support in providing such information. It is fundamentally transparent that BAME communities and BAME third sector organisations suffer disproportionately through a shortage of appropriate services or inadequate capacity building and representation, respectfully. Within many boroughs across London generic infrastructure networks have consistently and continuously failed to meet the needs of the BAME third sector. More is required to target the needs of equality organisations and ensure their needs are being met. For instance, across various London boroughs concerns are present about the limited, or absence of BAME infrastructure, or infrastructure which is inclusive, despite some boroughs with BAME populations in excess of 50%.

Research by MiNet (MiNet (October 2007) *Mapping Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Engagement in Every Child Matters (ECM) Developments in London*: London: ROTA) looking at the engagement of London's BAME third sector in the Every Child Matters Agenda clearly highlights the extreme and urgent need for specialist infrastructure. Similar specialist infrastructure is also a necessity to ensure representation for BAME organisations in areas of employment, children and young people, housing, health, criminal justice and education. The progressive developments currently underway developing sub-regional BAME infrastructure in the south sub-region of London led by Croydon BME Forum emphasises this specific need. Therefore further attention needs to be diverted to improving reach across other sub-regions of London.



There is a need to support the work of BAME third sector organisations who both offer services to meet local need, and who offer policy and infrastructure support to the sector, bridging the gap between service provision and policy. Without this third sector provision and expertise, the needs of BAME communities will not be met. It is not possible for mainstream services to meet the needs of everybody, especially those which are very specialist from the most isolated communities.

We acknowledge that BAME groups and those from the wider community should make efforts toward developing positive “bridging” activity. Bridging activity which allows relationships between individuals and organisations from different communities to be developed for stronger more cohesive communities. However the ability and importance of race relations is compromised by the lack of importance and political will, and inadequate resource allocation to this pursuit. CB need to ensure that its policies are fully appreciative of this and not mystified by any guidance to the contrary.

Any decision to fund specialist infrastructure also needs to be sensitive to the demographics in the various regions of England. For example, according to GLA 2008 statistics (Greater London Authority: *Focus on London Borough Statistics*, 2008) with over 7.5 million residents, London has the second largest population of any British region - only exceeded by the South East - and accounts for 12.4 per cent of the UK population. In addition, London is home to over 40 per cent of the national ethnic minority population, and 40 per cent of the national migrant population (population born outside the UK). London's ethnic minority population is expected to increase from 33 per cent (2006) to 39 per cent by 2026. With these demographics and forecasted trends in mind any plans to distribute funding needs to take full account of regional ethnic characteristics.

4.2 Business: Mainstream grant programmes and equality

With the closure of the Commission for Racial Equality, the creation of the Equality and Human Rights Commission and the development of the Single Equality Bill, an environment has been created in which any acknowledgement of racial inequality can be threatened, as well as one where cross equality concerns and multiple-disadvantage are not recognised. Also, any move towards the mainstreaming of services can potentially manifest itself in a downsizing of capacity resulting in limited services for the most marginalised communities. CB staff need to be fully aware that these processes are underway. Additionally, mainstream service providers should be entirely accountable if they have a duty to provide services across the range of equality groups and this should be the buttress of any monitoring and evaluation process for funding provided by CB.

MiNet maintains the argument that inequalities experienced by BAME communities and other equality groups, will not be addressed simply through



mainstream services across the sectors. There is a duty, both legal and moral, for statutory agents to improve both their services and policies to meet needs of BAME communities and a measurement for assessing such should be embedded within CB funding assessments.

Any single equality scheme implemented by CB should run parallel to the duty placed within the Single Equality Bill, which states that in practice public bodies and non-departmental public bodies need to consider how their policies, programmes and services affect different disadvantaged groups in the community. This is significant in keeping race equality as distinct and is welcomed by the BAME Third Sector given the disproportionate negative impact that some policies, programmes and services have on the BAME groups that they serve. Under this new duty, there will need to be a consideration of the potential detrimental impact that some services may have on BAME communities as well as to assess whether they meet the needs of BAME communities.

The promotion of racial equality should be placed central to CB programmes which attempt to address multiple disadvantage not least because it is BAME communities that face some of the greatest disadvantage. Therefore, the protection of policies is needed to guarantee greater racial equality to enable these communities to be adequately supported and empowered to overcome disadvantage.

Finally, and once again, it needs to be stressed continuously that the knowledge of staff within CB needs to be tantamount to the issues which impact people on the ground. For example, the lack of knowledge amongst mainstream organisations about the nuanced needs of different ethnicities is problematic. Many mainstream organisations lack knowledge on people's ethnicity which results in Armenians being categorised as Iranian, or more recently Russian, because of their nationality (as opposed to their ethnicity) when their needs are completely different. This is something CB needs to consider when funding mainstream organisations to ensure specialist needs are recognised.

4.4 Business: Positive stakeholder experience

It seems quite clear that the service provided by CB staff and the knowledge of each different staff member, though working on the same tasks, is inconsistent. MiNet has had a good relationship with London's senior regional manager, but I am fully aware this experience is not shared with other generic and BAME regional networks. There is also an issue of receiving information on issues promptly and effectively. MiNet has had a number of bad recent experiences which has meant receiving workplan templates at a delayed stage without the deadline for returning them being extended. It is clear some CB staff are



passionate about their work but evidently at the same time many are overstretched.

5.1 Governance: Diverse board and membership

It is quite easy to be entangled in a debate about the diversity of employment within an organisation, and focus on quantity, when the quality of the position held is also vitally important. Notwithstanding the need to have a diverse workforce within all ranks matching locality demographics, and more pertinently diversity within the governance of an organisation can be overshadowed, a focus must be placed on the ethos and culture created irrespective of what type of person holds any certain position. The whole working structure of an organisation needs to be framed to ensure that if a person leaves an organisation, another person can enter the same position and understand and adopt the customs of an organisation, whether that individual is Chinese, blind, white British or lesbian.

Race on the Agenda (ROTA), is the accountable body for MiNet and is one of Britain's leading social policy think-tanks focusing on issues that affect BAME communities. Originally set up in 1984, ROTA aims to increase the capacity of BAME organisations and strengthen the voice of BAME communities through increased civic engagement and participation in society.

Race on the Agenda

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