



Consultation Response July 2009

MiNet's Response to the Mayor's Proposed Economic Development Strategy for Greater London

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 the GLA's economic development strategy.

Methodology for this Response

All research carried out and recommendations made by MiNet is 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. Southall Community Alliance has also contributed to this consultation.

About this Consultation

MiNet would like to thank the GLA for welcoming comments on the economic strategy for London, which we feel is immensely important at this particular juncture in time for London's BAME Third Sector. MiNet understands and acknowledges many of the challenges London must continue to overcome to remain a world city. As this response has been informed by recent research carried out into the recession on London's BAME Third Sector (to download this report www.rota.org.uk/pages/MiNet_News.aspx), the issues are current, and bring to the fore the valuable role of this sector. The economic situation is not only important for the significant number of people employed in the BAME Third Sector but also the communities they reach. Therefore the opportunity for these issues to inform planning at a strategic level is well received by the BAME Third Sector.

London: Business Capital of the World

Question 5: Are there specific market, government or other failures affecting sectors that should be highlighted? How could they be overcome?

Within London the Third Sector accounts for approximately seven percent of the working population. According to a ROTA report, London has between 15,300 and 17,460 BAME Third Sector organisations providing an array of services to London's ever increasing BAME population. Many of London's BAME Third Sector organisations when compared to their mainstream counterparts, are small, have had a shorter amount of time to develop, and do not have the same political influence. When we consider this against the background of the government's failure to accurately predict, or even approximately predict within time, the extent to which the current economic downturn would impact on the Third Sector, the ramifications have resulted in the BAME sector experiencing the recession disproportionately.

Further, as many BAME Third Sector organisations are small, with very few being medium sized, the consequences are felt more acutely than by mainstream organisations. This is the case as BAME organisations do not have the same economies of scale, or resources to fall back upon during turbulent times, and therefore risk losing expertise and the knowledge base of staff. It is not MiNet's argument that all BAME organisations should and need to be big, as often they



adequately meet the needs of the most disadvantaged communities without being large in scale. Rather it is MiNet's argument that despite being small in scale BAME groups should be entitled to the same representation and opportunity to influence and inform policy at a strategic level.

Recent research (ROTA, 2007, *The Economic Downturn and the Black, Asian and Minority ethnic BAME Third Sector*) carried out through MiNet indicates that current government measures to mitigate the recession, such as £42.5 million, have proven to be too little, poorly targeted and essentially too late. Also, the dire failure of the government and other funding bodies to invest adequately in specific BAME infrastructure has resulted in small BAME organisations not having appropriate channels for their needs to be represented, often at a local, and more so at a sub-regional and regional level.

Day by day the challenge for London to maintain its status as a leading world city will become increasingly difficult, whilst also meeting the needs of a growing and increasingly diverse population. The BAME Third Sector play a hugely significant role by reaching out to deliver services to those who are the most marginalised and discriminated against. For this to continue there needs to be investment in BAME voluntary sector, particularly towards strengthening sub-regional BAME infrastructure and local BAME services such as racial equality councils.

Improving London's Competitiveness

Question 3. What can be done to foster entrepreneurialism, innovation and business start ups? How can the Mayor support businesses, in particular Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SME's), most effectively?

There exists a fundamental lack of adequate infrastructure support for many of London's BAME Third Sector organisations, and also limited engagement by business start up programmes with BAME communities. This evidently creates a number of difficulties for BAME communities who attempt to create SME's and social enterprise projects.

Evidence collected by MiNet indicates that the difficulties for BAME communities and organisations are twofold:

Firstly, the capacity building activities that take place for BAME communities and organisations is very often inappropriate and does not meet the specific and desired needs of any particular organisation or individual. On occasions, capacity building has simply involved a tick box activity which effectively leaves an organisation or individual with a list of items they need, but no resources or newly acquired skills to move to the next level. Further, there has been a



complete failure within many capacity building activities to recognise that different BAME organisations are dealing with different BAME communities, and are at a different stage of development and therefore require different areas of their capacity to be developed. For example organisations which provide services to refugee and asylum seekers, or newly formed SME's that for instance that may deliver services to Ghurkha communities do not always require capacity building in the area of information technology, but rather in understanding necessary legislation required to run an SME or social enterprise. The essence of the problem lies with many BAME organisations receiving services which have been defined for them, rather than by them.

The second problem arrives in that many BAME organisations and individuals when in need of specific services do not have the support from BAME infrastructure, who have an understanding of specific issues (rather than generic borough level Third Sector bodies who are largely familiar with dealing with already developed voluntary organisations). This results in BAME SME's, organisations and individuals with nobody to identify their capacity building requirement and thereafter advocate on their behalf.

To foster entrepreneurialism amongst BAME organisations and communities there needs to be a realisation that meaningful opportunities are tangible and that resources and/or support is available to meet their specific needs. However, it is not just about providing resources at the bottom and expecting a significant off-spin. The BAME voluntary sector has rapidly changing needs due to London's transient and diverse populations which they have to cater for. Therefore any investment at ground level needs to be combined with investment in infrastructure for BAME organisations to ensure representation at a strategic level.

Extending opportunity to all Londoners

Question 1: What fresh approaches are needed to improve London's performance in tackling worklessness?

It is the view of MiNet that the emphasis should not solely be about developing and looking to invest in fresh approaches, but rather make use of and reinforce many of the structures currently in place. Continuously, BAME Third Sector organisations meet the specialist needs of London's growing BAME population, providing specific services that mainstream providers are either unaware of, or find difficult to understand and often do not address. BAME specialist services not only strengthen community cohesion by building the confidence of marginalised groups such as refugees, but positively contribute to the London economy by assisting BAME communities, and particularly newly arriving



migrants, into the workforce and ultimately easing their integration into British society.

MiNet adhere to the view that frontline equality organisations are the only ones that can meaningfully engage isolated communities and bring them to a position where they can take part in, and shape wider public, social and economic life. The BAME Third Sector delivers a range of activities and often life-saving services including crises and longer-term accommodation, labour force skills, leadership programmes, counselling, advice and representation.

Bearing in mind the significant contribution the BAME third sector make in addressing worklessness, evidence collected through MiNet's networks suggests many BAME organisations have become further isolated in their work. Moreover, recent changes in the policy environment have been particularly inimical to the BAME third sector which has raised many questions over their sustainability. Evidence suggests some BAME organisations are increasingly more receptive to BAME led consortia which could provide basic training, skills and job brokerage functions. With technical support in bidding for commissioning contracts BAME organisations would then be able to play a greater role in local employment and regeneration work. This is only possible if dedicated resources are made available for the purpose of encouraging the formation of locally led BAME consortia delivering employment related outcomes.

Further, a report by the Learning and Skills Council, which indicates the Third Sector in general employs higher proportions of BAME people, women, disabled people and people with long-term illness, allows a further understanding of the role played by the Third Sector in tackling worklessness amongst the most marginalised communities. As identified in the 2008 HEAR report 'Gaps and Solutions: Supporting London's Equality Sectors' specialist equality organisations work in all fields such as sustainable development, health, culture, criminal justice, employment, education and transport, and therefore working across these fields the role played by the BAME Third Sector is undeniably crucial in addressing worklessness.

A key finding of MiNet's research into the impact of the recession on the BAME Third Sector showed that some BAME organisations were experiencing an increased demand for their services due to referrals from mainstream providers. It was felt by some BAME groups that their issues were being pushed aside as they were too complex compared to those brought in by the "newly anxious". For example, providing advice to a lady from Kosovo, who has housing and immigration concerns requires much more time than helping another person who has been made redundant and requires help simply structuring their CV. This has resulted in an increased workload for the BAME Third Sector without the resources to meet new and increasing demands. Taking into account this



environment, and the fact the 10 point action plan designed by each Local Authority to ease the recession, does not give any consideration to BAME organisations, there is without doubt a requirement for investment into BAME third sector service providers and infrastructure.

Question 2: What should be done to increase educational attainment and ambition in London, particularly in those geographical areas and communities where current outcomes are poor?

The picture of educational attainment amongst London's BAME communities is nuanced and therefore it is difficult to be prescriptive with blanket policies for dealing with this issue. For this reason MiNet adheres to the viewpoint that targeted and specific funding focused towards particularly BAME groups is a prerequisite to firstly understanding why inequalities exist and thereafter seeking to address those inequalities.

A 2007 MiNet report "Mapping Black Asian and Minority Ethnic Voluntary and Community Sector Engagement in Every Child Matters Developments in London" (to view visit <http://www.rota.org.uk/pages/MiNet.aspx>), also supports the view that more investment and planning is required in the delivery of services for young people, particularly in engaging the BAME Third Sector in the Every Child Matters agenda. As inequalities in educational attainment can develop prior to primary school enrolment the task of reversing any inequality thereafter, or preventing it from widening becomes increasingly more difficult.

Furthermore, evidence collected by MiNet suggests greater levels of support should be diverted to the development of the supplementary schools sector. Increasingly such schools are emerging to support the educational, social and cultural needs of children from very diverse communities and this is a sector that needs to be developed further. There is also evidence that BAME children who underachieve can be supported through programmes that involve mentoring, pastoral support and involvement from positive role models and therefore tailored support that provides these services has proven to be progressive.

To contribute to addressing such inequalities, further concerted efforts are needed to raise the ECM knowledge and awareness levels of BAME Third Sector organisations to ensure such levels are more consistent across the sector. MiNet's evidence base also suggests that increased work is required with faith based groups as they remain an under-utilised resource of engagement of BAME communities by the Third Sector and local authorities. To achieve these aims greater support is in much need at infrastructure level to assist with the coordination of BAME third sector organisations.

Question 3: What more should be done to ensure London's economic opportunities are genuinely available to all, to remove the barriers that stand in the way of this, and to motivate individuals to help themselves?

Evidently, one of the common factors which has led to economic opportunities not being available to all in London, and particularly within the Third Sector, has been the unequal distribution of funds, goods and services to the BAME sector and as a consequence the communities they serve. As answers to the above questions have identified, the BAME Third Sector is crucial in engaging London's most marginalised communities and plays a vital role in ensuring they receive some of the economic opportunities on offer. However, without this BAME infrastructure, and without strengthening and supporting the present BAME infrastructure, such opportunities will not be realised and effectively risk being lost.

As many BAME organisations work in isolation very often they find it difficult, do not have the opportunity or are unaware they can be involved in decision making and consultation processes which are accessed by more mainstream organisations. Once again, there is a need to ensure that there is a strategic and co-ordinated way to bring these issues to the attention of London funders and key decision makers for the betterment of the London economy. The BAME Third Sector needs support to adopt a more strategic and sustained approach to co-operative working and sharing resources to ensure that as a sector it continues to provide specialised and adequate services to BAME communities.

Infrastructure support to the BAME sector needs to be improved by being more creative in order that it meets the needs of the sector. At present due to the recession BAME organisations are calling for direct support for the core running of their work such as internal and financial administration, through shared and coordinated resources and staff, rather than undertaking training days that they didn't have the capacity to attend or put into practice.

With funding cuts being widespread resulting in some charity's losing up to one fifth of their annual income, the recession is impacting on many levels in relation to London's BAME Third Sector, particularly in terms of their ability, resources, trust and confidence to deliver services to their respective communities. If current trends prevail London faces losing many of the vital services it provides to the resident BAME population. With little or no investment in Racial Equality Councils, regional and sub-regional BAME infrastructure network, at a time of economic depression, the picture is somewhat lugubrious, and attempting to provide opportunities for all will remain a very distant reality.

Question 4: How should the GLA group monitor the achievement of greater equality for all Londoners?



Without engagement with the BAME Third Sector and other equalities groups, any attempt to monitor equality for ALL Londoners will not be achieved. This engagement must not only be restricted to “one-off” once a year consultations where the BAME Third Sector fail to see how their informed guidance has led to any informed decisions, but rather a more regular flow of communication, which will go some way to ensure that the GLA are abreast of issues within a rapidly changing environment.

Moreover, it is not about reinventing any wheel or devising any new approach to monitoring achievement pertaining to equality. The emphasis should be driven towards utilising the systems and effective structures currently in place. This for example, may involve using member of MiNet’s Advisory Group, such as the Black, Neighbourhood, Regeneration and Renewal Network (BNRRN). By using a London based network such as MiNet or BNRRN, there is no new requirement for a body like to the GLA to navigate and attempt to establish mechanisms to monitor equality at the grassroots level.

Furthermore, Racial Equality Councils across London have traditionally been a vital asset to monitoring and also addressing discrimination on issues of inequality for BAME Londoners. Therefore, this is a resource that should not be underestimated as without urgent support to London’s Racial Equality Councils this vital asset will effectively be lost. To gain a more comprehensive picture of any achievements made within equality it is necessary for the GLA to work more closely and appreciate the role of the equalities groups in the Third Sector. Whilst there will also be a growing requirement to work collaboratively with the Equality and Human Rights Commission and make use of the benefits that will be brought about as a result of the introduction of the Single Equality Bill.



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.

targeting social policy

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