

Black-self help in Britain has a long history. New immigrants in the 1950s had to look to themselves to develop social initiatives and this article highlights a broad range of self-help enterprises. The article goes on to discuss why Black self help has not attracted funding to develop an infrastructure to support it, before arguing that more strategies are needed based on funding good practice typified by surviving self-help groups; the strengthening of umbrella groups for the black and minority ethnic voluntary sector at all levels; an independent black think tank supplying reliable information about the grass roots and the developing of management structures within black groups to ensure high standards and accountability.

Developing the infrastructure of the black voluntary and community sector

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A brief history of black self-help in Britain

Most people of African and Asian heritage came to Britain in the 1950s–1980s as economic migrants, dependants, students, refugees and tourists. They came from British colonies and dependent territories, or from countries that had once been colonies and were now Commonwealth members; their places of origin included east and west Africa, the sub-continent of India, the Caribbean, Belize, Cyprus, Guyana,

Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, South Africa and Sri Lanka.

Between 1948 and 1971 there were two crucial pieces of legislation that allowed black people into Britain. The 1948 British Nationality Act created citizens of the United Kingdom and Colonies. The 1971 Commonwealth Immigration Act allowed automatic citizenship from the Commonwealth, but this was mostly restricted to people from the ‘white commonwealth’ – Canada,

New Zealand, Australia, Rhodesia and so on. The 1971 Act reduced black immigration into Britain substantially. Black immigrants to Britain were a serious political issue at the time.

A core of the new immigrants felt that they were not being given the welcome they deserved, nor were they appreciated for their contributions to regenerating Britain's war-torn economy. And so members of the black community challenged the 'bad old days'. Britain was without effective anti-racist legislation, so a multiracial/multicultural minority, including members of the Jewish community, worked tirelessly to persuade the British majority to change the status quo and put race and equal opportunities on the agenda. The rest is history.

In those early days, adequate core funding to help develop social initiatives was not available to immigrants, and so the black self-help movement was born. People from the black and ethnic minority communities donated their time and money to improve social conditions for other members of those communities.

Black voluntary community and youth workers were at the front line of meeting social need in Britain. From the outset, black-managed voluntary and community

groups provided culturally sensitive services to their socially excluded beneficiaries.

- The West African Students Union had been set up during the 1920s and continued to operate during the 1950–1970s. This Union, which had strong influence in places like Manchester, catered for African students, many of whom returned to colonial Africa after graduation and made historic changes on that continent.
- The West Indian Students' Union (WISU) based in Earls Court, west London, offered an effective forum for Caribbean students to express their views and provided voluntary support to the harassed working-class Caribbean immigrant community during the 1960s–1980s. Arif Ali (Guyanese) Gerry Burton (St Lucian) John La Rose, Horace Lashley, Chris LeMaitre and Andrew Salkey (all Trinidadian) were some of the leading lights of the WISU.
- The West Indian Standing Conference (WISC) was set up in 1958 as a response to racial attacks in Notting Hill Gate, west London, on members of the Caribbean immigrant community by so-called 'Teddy Boys', mostly misled white youths. One of the first street riots by disgruntled immigrants

happened at this time. For the next decade, the WISC was led by Glem Byfield (Jamaican) Jeff Crawford (Barbadian) Joseph A Hunte (St Kitts) and William Trant (Montserratian) although there were many other contributors as well. Today, WISC is still doing good work in Britain.

- The first Caribbean street carnival was organised in Brixton, south London, in 1958 by Claudia Jones (Trinidadian) and Joseph A. Hunte. The Notting Hill Carnival movement was launched in Ladbroke Grove, west London, in 1963 by Leslie Palmer (Trinidadian). Today, this Caribbean initiative is described as 'Europe's largest street party' and is one of the main money-spinners for the British tourist industry.
 - The black supplementary Saturday school movement was started by the Caribbean Education and Community Workers Association (CECWA) which in 1970 gave way to the Caribbean Teachers Association (CTA). It was a response to the negative experience of black children in English schools; partly because of culturally biased IQ tests, they were often wrongly placed into schools for the educationally subnormal by the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA).
- Bernard Cord, a Jamaican educationalist working with the ILEA at the time, exposed the injustice being done to immigrant children. Saturday schools were developed to give a head start to these children, and have turned out to be very successful. (Today, fee-paying private schools are using the supplementary education idea to improve their position in the school league tables). Trevor Carter (Trinidadian) and Huwiew Andrew (Dominican) were leading contributors to the Saturday schools movement.
- The black sound system movement (mobile discothèque) was started in 1950 by Vincent Forbes (Jamaican). His sound system, called Duke Vine, was based in west London. The idea was adopted by other members of the black community to provide culturally sensitive entertainment for the many people who could not gain access to white-run social clubs at that time.
 - Members of Britain's Black Community pioneered Britain's Community Radio Movement during the 1980s, long before current local public and commercial radio came on air. One of the first community radio stations was started by a group of African immigrants from the Caribbean in 1979. The Station was

called "DBC" – Dread Broadcasting 'Co-operation' [Corporation] and broadcast on the FM band. The Station was founded and based in Neasden, the North London Borough of Brent and moved subsequently to Ladbroke Grove, in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, West London. Pre-recorded tape music and a low level transmitter were placed on high rise buildings and transmitted to Londoners over 10-20 mile radius. DBC audience consisted mostly of immigrants and settlers from the Caribbean. Jamaica's Reggae Music was very popular with DBC audience. DBC came about partly because main stream radio was not catering for the new immigrants and settlers. The station was founded and operated by volunteers. Today, some of DBC's founders and presenters moved on to broadcasting on public and commercial radio stations. Community radio, still operated by volunteers, continues to gain prominence.

- Britain's first grassroots credit union was formed by a Jamaican collective in 1950. Today, Britain's credit unions are flourishing.
- Britain's pioneers in self-help social housing began to target homeless youth and lone parents in the 1960s and 1970s. Initiatives

included: the Black House in Holloway, north London, run by the Racial Adjustment Society (RASS) and headed by Michael Defretas (Trinidadian); Dashiki in Notting Hill, west London, founded by Vince Hines and run by the Dashiki Council to provide temporary housing and educational support for homeless immigrant children in need; the Harambee Project in Islington, north London, set up by Herman Edwards (Montserratian) to provide temporary hostel accommodation for homeless youth; and the Rupert Morris Home for Boys in north London, which also supported homeless black youth. These services were used extensively by the local social services. Black self-help initiatives could also be found in Liverpool, Birmingham, Leicester, Leeds, Bristol, Wolverhampton, Northampton, Southampton, Ipswich, Luton, Bedford, Basingstoke, Huddersfield, Bedford, Derby, High Wycombe, Slough, Swindon, Bath, Gloucester, Sheffield, Nottingham, Manchester and Cardiff – all places where a significant number of immigrants had settled by that time.

- Churches, mosques and temples were among the community initiatives set up by the immigrant communities, and they grew rapidly during the 1960s-1980s.

Not being dependent upon state funding, they remain some of the most stable of immigrant institutions. The vast number of people who attend religious gatherings are often expected to give 'to God' at least a tenth of their yearly earnings, if they can afford it. As a result, some of these institutions have grown very rich.

- During the 1960s–1980s, black pressure groups helped to create the conditions for better police accountability by organising anti-racist campaigns, rallies and demonstrations. Their campaigning brought about the repeal of the Vagrancy Act 1824 – otherwise known as the 'sus law' – which was used by some police officers to harass members of the black and ethnic minority communities. The leading lights of the campaign included solicitor Paul Boateng (British born of Ghanaian heritage) now an MP and Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Mavis Clarke (Jamaican) now Mavis Best, and Rhodan Gordon (Grenadian) of the Black People's Information Centre (BPIC) in Notting Hill. The successes of this anti-racist campaigning created an historic momentum, which has led to the populating of today's parliamentary statute book with equality legislation covering race, gender, sex, disability and soon age.

There have been many more black self-help initiatives – in entertainment, the media, sport and race and community relations, for example – from which Britain has derived enormous benefit.

Also at the front line in working for social change in Britain were various Asian voluntary initiatives, such as the Indian Workers' Association, the Bangladeshi Education and Welfare Association, the Pakistani Welfare Organisation, the Chinese Information and Advice Centre and many other groups that set out to respond to their communities' needs.

The Community Relations Council (CRC) later the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) provided modest pump-priming funding to some of these self-help groups. Trust and foundations and the Churches Funds also gave small grants of up to £5000, which helped groups to survive for a while.

Metropolitan authorities, such as the former Greater London Council (GLC) under the leadership of Ken Livingstone, led the way in funding black groups during the 1980s, but this support was short lived partly because of rate capping by the Thatcher government. Local authorities could not, or would not, provide the core funding required by local black and ethnic minority

groups to build capacity and develop infrastructure.

The decline of black self-help groups

The social needs generated by black and ethnic minority communities – which included youth unemployment, crime, educational under-achievement and teenage pregnancies – seriously overstretched the fledgling black-led voluntary and community sector. Many beneficiaries had unrealistic expectations of the services they could expect from their black community groups.

Black groups needed to adopt new approaches to service delivery. They needed to upgrade their management structures for greater effectiveness when dealing with the growing amount of complex casework. Where they had once been entirely voluntary, they were now being forced to take on full-time or part-time paid staff in order to sustain development.

Many funders and potential funders now expected grassroots organisations to meet set targets. To compete effectively, these organisations would have to be assessed on a 'value for money' basis, in addition to finding partners for match funding or to provide solid working relationships.

Grant culture was replaced by contract culture. Black and ethnic minority self-help groups were expected to become 'professional' overnight, in order to compete at the same level as other, more traditional voluntary and community organisations, many of which were well resourced, with developed infrastructures, full-time workers and consultants to help them sophisticated funding bids.

Thus the new funding regimes expected black-led voluntary groups to restructure themselves, but would not give them the extra resources they needed to build capacity and infrastructure. Nor were they being offered retraining or upgrading of skills so that the current voluntary workers, who had invested years in developing their groups, could compete on a level playing field.

These developments posed major challenges for black-led groups, which needed to strengthen their leadership to enable better governance and more effective management of scarce resources, to improve their fundraising and to develop better monitoring and evaluation systems. Other requirements included improving the availability and use of strategic information, ensuring efficient co-operation between different community groups, and working

within local, regional and national umbrella community organisations for collective support.

What appears to have been forgotten was that, while these administrative changes were being made, the beneficiaries of black self-help groups were increasing in number month by month, as individuals drifted into social exclusion and anti-social behaviour and became harder to reach.

Many black-led groups have folded over the past twenty years, owing to lack of adequate core funding. Some groups have survived only as paper organisations. Former CRE chair Sir Herman Ouseley (now Lord Ouseley) told the 1998 NCVO Conference that when he was chief executive of the London Borough of Lambeth, there was a thriving black voluntary sector of more than a thousand organisations. As of 1998, 'there was only a handful remaining'.

The seeds of exclusion for black and ethnic minority community initiatives were planted during the 1970s and 1980s by policy makers who, seemingly indifferent to the consequences for posterity and an equitable Britain, ignored the calls from black and ethnic minority leaderships for help with capacity building and infrastructural support. So in spite of the billions of pounds

given by the National Lottery Funds, the European Social Fund and other bodies, black regeneration is seen as relatively inactive today.

Because it is marginalised and excluded, the black self-help movement continues to decline, yet it is well placed to identify and respond to community needs. Beneficiaries have confidence in the work of initiatives delivered by their own community. Britain's social history also shows that black and ethnic minority voluntary initiatives are productive, and bring benefit to the wider society. There is strength and staying power in the black self-help movement, but today it is afflicted by uncertainty and decline.

Local Strategic Partnerships and marginalisation

The current government has set up a mechanism for encouraging Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) in various socially deprived areas of England where there are significant black and ethnic minority communities. The black self-help movement welcomes this invitation to help provide regeneration ideas and activities. The work is necessary, because if minorities feel that their cultural sensitivities are being ignored by policy makers and legislators, this can create an obstacle to social cohesion.

LSPs are supposed to place members of the local community at their core. But the reality is that black and ethnic minority grassroots groups are still being excluded. 'Partnership' may be the new buzzword, but to the black self-help groups still struggling to survive and provide services, it is not at all clear what many local authorities and regeneration agencies mean when they use the term. If it does not demonstrate vision, values and leadership, if it does not lead to mutually fruitful working relationships, partnership is meaningless to people at the sharp end of social exclusion.

The policies of LSPs should therefore be proactive and needs-led, culturally sensitive and inclusive. Any policy or legislation that seeks to create order, justice and reciprocity within a civilised society must be mindful of the potential pitfalls of racial and cultural marginalisation.

For example, young people of Black African, Asian, Caribbean and shared heritage, the majority of whom were born in Britain, continued to be excluded from schools and sucked into the criminal justice system at a higher rate than other young people in Britain. A CRE investigation into racial discrimination at three English prisons found that, in 2002, more black Britons were sent to prison in England and Wales (over 11,500)

than went to UK universities (8,000). 'For every [black] male on campus, there were two in jail,' said CRE chair Trevor Phillips in the foreword of the report. He continued: 'even taking all ethnic minority communities into account, the average non-white Briton was almost three times more likely than a white Briton to enter jail rather than higher education' (CRE/HM Prison Service 2003).

The prison population in England and Wales currently stands at 72,000. The CRE investigation found that, between 1999 and 2002, the total prison population grew by 12 per cent, but the number of black inmates grew by 51 per cent, even though black people represent just two per cent of the UK population of 59 million. Trevor Phillips has said that the issue of racial discrimination is one that British society 'cannot afford to ignore'.

Is this not a crisis? Who is responsible? Unfortunately, there is no immediately obvious solution to the situation. The remedy is certainly not, as has been suggested in certain political quarters, to build more prisons and to encourage the courts to give longer sentences. A strong call for 'law and order' must be accompanied by an equally strong call for 'social equity'. One without the other is unlikely to bear civilised fruits.

Trust the black self-help movement

The black-led community and voluntary sector must be trusted and given an equitable share of the available resources based on need.

There is no evidence to show that this equal sharing of resources took place in the past or indeed is taking place at the present. 'Invisible hands', as it were, are constructing unnecessary barriers – real or imagined – which are imposing artificial social and economic handicaps on members of the black and ethnic minority communities and their self-help initiatives.

Managers of public funds who have the task of interpreting community needs also have a special responsibility to listen to and help those who are ready to help themselves in building social and economic structures. The government's public sector reforms offer an important window of opportunity for managers to change the way black and ethnic minority groups are funded so that they can bring about real community regeneration.

As the above brief account of black self-help in the 1960s–1980s shows, creative activities by black and ethnic minority communities have a long history in Britain. They are part of a cultural tradition that may derive from the customs of extended

families in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. The black community led the way in 'active citizenship' in Britain, even before the term became fashionable.

So it is unfortunate that, after forty years of parliamentary legislation against racism and inequality of opportunity, members of the black community and their institutions are still being covertly excluded by our 'shepherds' of fair play. Is it not time for change?

Some conclusions

The black and ethnic minority voluntary and community sector has been deprived of sustainable capacity building and infrastructural development over the past twenty years. Instead, it has experienced widespread struggle, leading to survival by the relatively few.

Managers of funds are still failing to provide black and ethnic minority communities with the resources they need. Members of these communities have made regular grant applications but these have fallen on deaf ears. Some black and ethnic minority groups have been given small grants of £5000–£10,000, usually one-off, while others have even managed to obtain funding for medium-sized projects over three years, at an average of £30,000 per year. Core funding is hardly ever offered.

Funders should put more trust in black and ethnic minority community initiatives. Like all good managers, they should be prepared to take risks for the wider good.

Funders need to be proactive when funding black and ethnic minority groups. Managers should approach such groups and discuss their funding requirements. Funding policies should be re-interpreted, where necessary, to accommodate the group's approach.

Where necessary, funders should provide the resources to enable black and ethnic minority groups to improve their governance, for example by retraining and upgrading the skills of trustees, management, staff, volunteers and trainees.

Black and ethnic minority groups should not be mere appendages to local strategic partnerships and sustainable development policies. Members of the black and ethnic minority communities are Britain's assets, not her liabilities. They have a great deal to offer to society, providing cultural and economic enrichment. The dedication and almost sacrificial commitment of black self-help groups working at the grassroots cannot be overstated and ought to be recognised by all concerned. Black initiatives should be encouraged to grow and contribute to the nation's wealth, as has been demonstrated time and time again

by the black contribution to sport, entertainment and business. Britain needs her black and ethnic minority communities because her wider population is ageing. Britain needs to compete effectively with the rest of the world, so it would be foolish to allow a significant proportion of her young population to remain untrained, unskilled and relatively angry, just because some funding managers lack the vision and commitment to try to get the very best from multi-cultural Britain – which is here to stay.

The Black European Community Development Federation (BECDF) is determined to be at the front line in helping to create opportunities for well-resourced, multi-cultural voluntary and community infrastructures that can help to reverse the social and economic rot in modern society – a rot that is currently creating an underclass in our squalid inner cities, whose members are beginning to overcrowd Britain's penal and psychiatric institutions.

The government's move to support the community and voluntary sector is a welcome recognition of current needs, but the black and ethnic minority business sector also needs capacity building and infrastructural regeneration.

The way forward

1. Strategies for the way forward would ideally be based on the successes and good practice of surviving black and ethnic minority self-help groups. There are some groups with over thirty years' experience of working at the grassroots. They have not only survived but are still producing good work. This calls for encouragement and, perhaps more importantly, emulation.
2. National, regional and local umbrella organisations for the black and ethnic minority voluntary sector need to be strengthened, as they are essential for the effective development of initiatives. A national perspective helps strategic planning and capacity building, and takes into account cultural sensitivities; it also helps to set standards and encourage good practice. Networking is essential to avoid unnecessary duplications of tasks. The lack of adequate core resources is the single biggest obstacle to the development of black and ethnic minority voluntary and community initiatives and effective networking. Sustainable core resources, including realistic funding, technical assistance and training, are urgently needed.
3. There needs to be an independent black think tank that could supply government and other relevant bodies with reliable information about current needs at the grassroots and how these needs are affecting members of the community. Its tasks could include monitoring the effectiveness of the Compacts between the public and voluntary sectors and the public funding targeted at black and ethnic minority communities, as well as the effects of government policies on members of those communities.
4. Voluntary and community groups must be accountable to the community, which includes the group's members and users. They should demonstrate this accountability by delivering high-quality services. Groups should also be accountable to funders and sponsors, by keeping records which show that funds were expended for the purpose for which they were given, and by producing a report within a reasonable period showing the level of service delivery to beneficiaries.
5. Voluntary and community groups, from the black and white communities alike, must continue to aim for high standards in their work and service delivery. This includes a management structure

that enables professionals, lay people, users and staff representatives to take part in developing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating the organisation's policies.

6. Successful development of Britain's black and ethnic minority communities is in the nation's interest. Well-trained and well-motivated citizens, whatever their ethnicity, can see off damaging world competition in trade and commerce and contribute to the wealth of the nation. It is a simple equation:

Racism is bad for the nation. Equal opportunity is good.

The role of the Black European Community Development Federation

The Black European Community Development Federation (BECDF) incorporating the National Federation of Self-Help Organisations (NFSHO) was formed by ordinary members of the black community in 1975, in order to create an effective and collective voice for Federation members and associates.

The Federation has developed a national network of black and ethnic minority self-help and community groups over the past twenty-nine years. The Federation's

objects are charitable, and are implemented through local grassroots organisations.

These organisations work in a variety of fields: community, youth, sports and leisure, education, training, racial equality, multi-faith groups, housing, health, community business and the arts. The Federation is a membership organisation, and accepts only groups as members.

References

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