

## Briefing Paper 130

### Title “Black people don’t drink tea...” The experience of rural Black and Minority Community Groups in England

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#### Introduction

*‘You go to a [rural] tea room, I’m sure they think black people don’t drink tea.’*

This paper builds on the Third Sector Research Centre (TSRC)’s Research Paper 103, “Very small, very quiet, a whisper...” Black and Minority Ethnic groups: voice and influence’. That report explored the experiences of urban BAME (Black and Minority Ethnic) community groups in relation to their ability to exert voice and influence. This paper seeks to examine the under-researched position of the rural BAME VCS (Voluntary and Community Sector) and BAME communities in rural and less, but increasingly, diverse areas of England.

BAME is defined to include people not born in the UK and therefore to include recent white European migrants. The previous paper specifically focused on BME communities, and did not address those communities that would fit the ‘Any Other White’ census category.

The research aimed to address: -

1. The effects of the recession from 2008 onwards
2. The impact of the Equality Act 2010
3. The specific challenges for BAME groups in rural/predominantly white regions in terms of organising and influencing policy, practice and services.

#### Methods

The findings drew on the available body of practitioner and academic literature on the current position of the BAME VCS in the UK, and semi-structured interviews with 30 people involved in 26 organisations. 18 of the interviews were undertaken with community groups and eight were with individuals working for strategic agencies in the voluntary and statutory sectors. Interviews were carried out in rural sub-regions of the North West, the West Midlands and the South West. Of the 26 organisations interviewed; 21 were conducted face-to-face and five were undertaken by telephone. All primary research material was gathered between January and July 2014.

The interviewees were involved in a broad range of activities including education, advocacy and advice for individuals, and social and recreational activity.

The small sample size and limited resources meant that it was not possible to undertake research in the more remote areas of the regions studied.

#### Context

Diversity is perceived as being an urban phenomenon in England as traditionally migrant communities have settled in metropolitan areas where there have been more employment opportunities. Census figures illustrate that this is still the case, but that the situation – in terms of rural demographics – has been changing rapidly..

The exception to this pattern is the North East which has a high proportion of population living in urban areas, but the lowest BAME population in 2011.

The 2011 census figures also demonstrate that some BAME communities, Pakistani for example have a comparatively smaller percentage of their population living in rural areas. All three regions researched could be identified as increasingly superdiverse.

There are a number of issues that impact on all rural community groups, including access to transport, services and broadband. These factors affect BAME communities more due to sparser populations and consequently greater isolation. It has been argued that rural BAME communities experience covert and overt racism to an extent which may not be experienced in superdiverse urban areas.

It has also been asserted that these factors combine to make the experience of rural living more challenging for many BAME communities. This paper examined these factors using the experience of the BAME groups interviewed.

## Findings

The findings of the paper reveal a complex and heavily nuanced range of opinions on all issues researched. However a common theme for all participants was that the rural BAME VCS voice was not strong. There were similarities with the urban experience, but with even less voice and also opportunity to organise. Racism, isolation and lack of organisational experience were identified as key factors in this.

### 1. Strategies

Five strategies adopted by the BAME groups to maintain their existence and/or develop their advocacy role were identified: -

- Politicisation/political lobbying – only three organisations, all strategic, identified that they used this strategy. They all said that community organisations did not have sufficient capacity to operate at a strategic

level, particularly in the present funding context.

- Education and capacity building – these were seen as a key roles for six groups. It was identified that it was important to use these strategies to raise awareness with members of other groups, including those in the statutory sector, as well as developing their own members.
- Social/cultural activities – nine groups identified this as a strategy they used to develop their own community group, and to bring members of different communities together. This was seen as a non-threatening approach to community integration.
- Partnerships – eight organisations were actively involved in partnership work, but it was argued that partnerships were manipulated by those in a position of power. Groups also identified positive relationships and benefits, although it was argued that BAME groups often were used for 'ticking boxes'.

Faith was identified as a way of coming together by six respondents, but it was also said that residents having a faith other than Christian could be insufficiently numerous to convene locally and travelled to urban centres to worship.

### 2. Levels of Influence

17 interviewees said that they were able to exert influence at individual level. 15 said that said that they were able to exert an influence on their own and other communities. However it was also said that the wide range of communities could hinder joint working. It was argued that statutory agencies tended to 'lump' all BAME communities together in ways that were unhelpful and relied on stereotypical assumptions.

17 interviewees said that they worked with other voluntary organisations. There were positive responses, but almost one third pointed to a lack of cooperation and influence at a strategic level, and that, as with the urban BAME groups, their voice was 'very quiet'.

15 groups said that they were working with statutory organisations, including the local authority, police and health service. Experience was varied in relation to all three of the above sectors, and could depend on a champion within the organisation rather than policies or structures.

In summary it was clear that influence reduced at higher levels and, in particular, in terms of shaping regional and national policy

## Barriers and Challenges

There were examples of successes achieved by groups in all three study areas. These included fighting the closure of a Race Equality Council by developing a new project, and a volunteer project undertaking practical tasks to meet unrecognised needs in the community. However a range of barriers were also identified:-

Rural factors which specifically impacted on BAME communities included: -

- **The lack of population density** made it difficult to achieve a critical mass both through lack of numbers and the superdiversity found in BAME communities, e.g. 34 nationalities in one area with a population of only 5,000. This negatively impacted on the opportunity to bring together groups with similar needs and interests.
- **Distances and transport** - 13 groups said that the distances to meet with similar/cultural groups were a barrier to their development, and that it had been exacerbated by rural transport cuts.
- **Isolation** – 10 respondents replied that isolation and racial abuse were important barriers. The indifference of

the 'host' community led to depression and mental health issues, which meant that groups had to develop strategies for dealing with racism.

- **Employment patterns** – long hours, seasonal working, farm work and lack of amenities all contributed to the lack of potential to organise in rural areas.
- **The Equality Act 2010** was seen as a barrier, given that race was 'off the agenda'. This impacted on progress that might have been made with local authorities if race had been a higher policy priority.
- **Lack of resources** – 22 of the 26 groups identified this as limiting their development, even in supporting volunteers. Two organisations said that they were looking at new funding models, such as sponsorship.
- **Language** was identified as a barrier by 12 respondents and as a contributory factor to the lack of capacity to organise and develop partnerships.
- Despite the fact that there was no prompt in the interview schedule, racism was identified as a barrier by 19 groups. The nature of the racism experienced included racial attacks, verbal abuse bullying in schools and institutional racism.

All of these individual and collective barriers combined to constrain opportunities for BAME community groups to operate and develop in rural areas.

## Conclusions

There is currently little or no debate in rural England to parallel that of the 1970s about the growing settlement of BAME communities in urban areas of England. The existence of rural BAME communities is still largely invisible, both to regional and national policy makers, urban BAME organisations and strategic bodies.

As noted the key purpose of the current research was to explore whether the experiences of rural BAME community groups was qualitatively different to those operating in urban/metropolitan areas.

In conducting the literature review one key difference which became apparent was that, despite growth in the last decade, little has been written about the organisation of BAME communities in rural and other largely white areas of the UK. Much of the available writing focused on the issue of racism in such communities, rather than BAME community groups per se or how they organise. There was also consideration of the nature of these areas in relation to the notion of the 'rural idyll' (Dhalech, 1999) and the traditional views of the English countryside as being for white communities which, Chakroborti and Garland (2012) argued, excluded BAME groups from the discourse.

Further BAME umbrella and strategic organisations have (largely through necessity) given priority to racial issues in urban areas, further weakening rural BAME issues and perspectives. Traditionally, communities and policy makers in rural and predominantly white areas have tended to ignore, or 'turn a blind eye', to issues for minority communities and declare 'no problem here'. This ignored the need for members of BAME communities to devise strategies to overcome racism. Increasingly the approach was seen as only focusing on the perceived problems associated with an increase in incoming BAME communities, rather than acknowledging the underlying issues of poverty, isolation and racism.

One aspect of work with BAME communities in the areas researched was that much of the ability to develop organisational capacity and to exert influence was substantially more dependent on key individuals and champions than in urban areas where, despite the cuts, representative structures still existed.

In order to survive, particularly in the current hostile funding and policy climate, it will be necessary for rural BAME groups and communities to form alliances with others in the VCS as a whole. There were examples of partnership working and the potential to increase it. However racism remained a significant barrier to this and, as with urban areas, there were examples of it within the mainstream voluntary sector.

The overall BAME population in rural areas is 5%, but is regionally varied in relation to patterns of settlement and speed of immigration. This figure gives an indication that the population is significant and needs to be considered in relation to social policy and to be provided for as part of civil 'society'. This rural BAME population is increasing and will become a permanent and significant proportion of the overall community. This is a key, and as yet largely unrecognised, challenge in terms of rural policy and services. These changes occurred in urban settlements in England in the 1970s and led to the rise of the far right during that period. This could now be repeated with the rise of the United Kingdom Independence Party in the prior to and during the 2015 election.



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