



Third Sector Research Centre

Working Paper 130

**‘Black People don’t drink tea...’ The experience of  
Rural Black and Minority Ethnic Community  
Groups in England**

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## Abstract

This paper seeks to examine the experiences of rural Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups and communities in rural and less diverse areas and regions of England. As such it is a companion piece to The Third Sector Research Centre (TSRC)'s working paper 103, [“Very small, very quiet, a whisper...”](#) Black and Ethnic Minority groups: voice and influence' which explored the experiences of urban BME groups.

The contexts in which rural BAME groups operate include many of the factors encountered by urban BAME Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) such as reduced funding opportunities due to the economic downturn and recession, the Equality Act 2010 and the changed political environment. However, the existing, if limited, rural focused literature in this field has identified additional factors that can impact on rural BAME communities, such as the dispersed population and lengthy travel distances to access facilities by groups of similar faith and/or ethnic background. Additionally the literature identified that racism may be more prevalent in rural areas given that they had less exposure to diversity. A further factor was that rural BAME populations had risen substantially from 2001 – 2011, which had not been addressed in the available research about rural areas. The aim of this project was to examine some of these claims by interviewing community activists and those with a strategic responsibility in three rural areas in England. Specifically the research, through interviews with community groups and policy makers, set out to critically reflect on and update the existing literature in the light of changing rural demographics and the growth of BAME communities beyond key metropolitan areas.

### Keywords

Black and Minority Ethnic, Voluntary and Community Groups, Racism, Rural, Organising.

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## Background

This paper builds on the Third Sector Research Centre (TSRC)'s Working Paper 103, "Very small, very quiet, a whisper..." Black and Minority Ethnic groups: voice and influence' which explored the experiences of urban BME community groups in relation to their ability to exert voice and influence on local, regional and national policy and Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) development. The current paper seeks to examine the position of the rural Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) VCS and BAME communities in rural and less diverse areas of England.

The main aim of the research was to examine the possibility for BAME communities in rural and less diverse areas and regions of England to organise around issues of mutual concern. This is an under researched area of the voluntary and community sector and was particularly relevant given the BAME population increases in such areas between the 2001 and 2011 census.

The term BAME relates herein to people not born in the UK and therefore includes white Europeans, including in particular people that were born in Eastern Europe and have migrated to the UK following the A8 accession to the EU in 2004. The previous paper focused on BME communities and their VCS, and did not specifically address those communities that would fit the Any Other White census category.

BAME communities in rural areas of England and Wales are argued to have had a different experience to those in superdiverse urban parts of the country (Chakroborti and Garland, 2012). Statistically rural BAME populations are generally a considerably smaller than in urban areas, although there is evidence that this is changing. Figures from the 2011 census indicate that the BAME population of rural areas, although increasing, still only comprises 5% of the total (ONS, 2012), compared to 22.8% in urban areas, an increase from 3.5% and 14.8% respectively in 2001. Some counties have seen an increase from 1% to 3-5% by 2011, for example Cumbria. A significant factor in the growth from 2001 – 2011 is the arrival of migrants from the Accession countries (so-called A8 countries) post 2004. During this period the 'Any Other White' category for England and Wales increased by 1.1 million, of which 0.5 million were people whose country of birth was Poland (ONS 2012).

Urban areas are defined as built-up areas with a population in excess of 10,000. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) classifies three levels of rural - town and fringe, village, and hamlets and isolated rural dwellings, which are then further classified into those settlements that are in sparse settings (ONS, 2012 p5). The 2011 Census (ONS, 2013) gives the urban population of England and Wales as 45.7 million (81.5%) and the rural population as 10.3 million (18.5%). This paper seeks to examine the experiences of the rural BAME VCS and to attempt to understand the differences and similarities to the Urban BAME VCS and the possible reasons for those differences.

A review of the literature indicates that factors which affected the situation of urban BME communities and the VCS included: -

- The impact of the recession from 2008 onwards which lead to a significant, and the political response to that downturn which has seen a significant, and continuing, reduction in funding available

to VCS organisations from both statutory and charitable sources, and individual giving (Clarke et al., 2012).

- The Equality Act 2010 (often referred to as 'The Single Equalities Act'), which is widely seen as having diluted the funding and other support available to minority communities (Ware, 2013).
- The changed emphasis from integration and assimilation, from multiculturalism to community cohesion and recently the prevention of violent extremism initiative. (Ware, 2013).

These factors are also pertinent for the rural BAME VCS. However it is necessary to recognise that the experience of rural BAME communities and the rural BAME VCS is also subject to additional or different factors. For example commentators have examined the idealised perception of rural England and its impact on people that do not fit the white, middle class stereotype of rural dwellers (Jay 1992, Dhalech 1999, Mischi 2009). Other factors identified by the research referred to in the literature included: -

- the lack of critical mass of population, as indicated by the above population figures, combined with the relatively recent arrival of much of this population, prevents the achievement of the 'tipping point' whereby the presence of a significant BAME population would have an influence on social policy (Dhalech, 2012). There was less established activity prior to the economic downturn and cuts in public spending.
- the growing diversity of rural populations (ONS, 2013)
- distances and the lack of public transport exacerbated by cuts in funding
- employment patterns, including the prevalence of seasonal work and certain occupations such as agricultural labour and restaurant work, which can mean either concentrated, for example on one farm, or sparse communities, in restaurants across a region.

Little research has been undertaken on the BAME VCS. 'Rural Racism', a book which sought to chart the dynamics of racism and rurality and highlight the importance of developing sustainable responses to the problem, was originally published in 2004 and not updated despite substantial changes in rural areas (Chakroborti and Garland, 2012). The only other (relatively) recent book on the subject is 'The New Countryside? Ethnicity, nation and exclusion in contemporary rural Britain' (Neal and Agyeman, 2006). Classic texts include 'Rural Racism in the UK' (Henderson and Kaur, 1999), 'Needs not Numbers' (de Lima 2001) and the Commission for Racial Equality's report 'Keep them in Birmingham' (Jay, 1992). More recent writing is based on local and regional research papers including 'The new geographies of racism: Plymouth' (Burnett, 2012), 'A place called Townsville. Rural racism in a North East Context' (Craig, 2012) and 'Race Equality in the South West: Time for action' (Weston, 2013).

Diversity is perceived as an urban phenomenon in England and Wales as traditionally migrant communities have settled in urban areas where there have been more employment opportunities (Dhalech, 2012). Census figures demonstrate that this is still the case and that there is a correlation between the most urbanised regions and those with the highest BAME populations. The main exception to this pattern is the North East which has the fifth (out of 10) highest proportion of population living in urban areas, but the lowest BAME population. The South West and Wales have the lowest urban and eighth and ninth lowest BAME populations. (ONS, 2012 and 2013)

The 2011 census figures demonstrate that a very small percentage of some BAME communities live in rural areas. For example only 1% of the total population of people of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin in England and Wales live in rural areas, in comparison to 5% of BAME communities as a whole. Only 2% of people of African, Caribbean and other African origin live in rural areas. These figures demonstrate that even within the BAME communities there are differences between rural and urban settlement patterns (ONS, 2012).

There are a number of issues that impact on all rural communities, including distance and transport, and limited broadband availability (Derounian, 2013). These factors affect BAME communities, but often more so 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 many urban areas where BAME numbers are greater in actual and percentage terms (Jay, 1992 and Dhalech, 1999 and more recently, Craig, 2012 and Burnett, 2011) and populations are more familiar with diverse groups.

These factors combine to make the experience of rural living more challenging for many BAME communities. These, and other, barriers will be examined in greater detail throughout this paper using the experience of BAME community activists, VCS workers and the available literature. The purpose of this project was to examine the problems faced by BAME VCS organisations, which were neither covered by the existing literature nor acknowledged in policy development.

The paper will outline the research methods, examine the strategies that organisations used to influence people and voluntary and statutory organisations, discuss the barriers and challenges that they faced in undertaking this activity, and discuss the key issues that arose from the findings of the research activity.

## Research Methods

This section outlines the methods used in the research project. The project began with a literature review and was followed by 26 semi-structured interviews with a total of 30 participants, primarily working directly for BAME groups and communities.

### Literature Review

Research sources used included academic publications, relevant legislation and policy documents, as well as articles produced by BAME organisations themselves and articles in journals and newspapers. Key words searched were BAME and BME Organisations, Voluntary and Community Sector, rural, equalities, ethnicity, race and racism, culture and identity.

The literature review identified a limited range of publications from voluntary organisations, academic sources, and individual articles, which highlighted issues affecting rural BAME communities and the Third Sector. The research has examined the current position of a range of rural BAME VCS groups within England and Wales, in order to complement the existing research and writing on the subject, but also to address the current gap in research and literature.

## Primary Research

Interview schedules were developed addressing the following themes: -

- i. The changing policy context – from multi-culturalism to Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE), targeted funding, and integration/assimilation agendas; the recession and funding limitations; the Equality Act 2010.
- ii. Influence and involvement within the VCS as a whole.
- iii. The ability to exert influence on policy making and funding as it affects the Sector.
- iv. The distinctiveness of the rural BAME VCS. Are the issues for the Sector different, or is there convergence with the 'mainstream' VCS and the urban BAME VCS?
- v. The extent to which capacity building and funding programmes been drivers for the direction of BAME groups, or have they been able to follow their own agenda?

In total 26 semi-structured individual interviews were carried out with a total of 30 individuals. In four cases there were two interviewees present. Of the 26 interviews: -

- 18 interviews were undertaken with representatives of groups actively working with BAME rural communities in three areas/regions, an area in the North West, an area in the West Midlands, and two areas in the South West. Table 1 identifies the main focus of each of the groups. The North West area has experienced a slow rate of BAME population growth that had accelerated between the 2001 and 2011 censuses. The West Midlands area experienced a recent growth of East European communities, particularly of Polish origin, and there are asylum seeker dispersal cities in the south west as well as an A8 population.
- Eight organisations could be described as strategic, in that they engaged with a number of member organisations over a defined geographical area and undertook some representation in relation to policy, at a regional/sub-regional level.

Given our limited research capacity, interviewees were selected through discussion with colleagues at TSRC and key strategic organisations in the three areas in order to provide as wide a range of rural BAME groups as possible in relation to diversity, size, focus and faith. These groups were selected so that we could explore their experience in dealing with the impact of the current political and economic changes. Agencies were selected to give a range of types of organisation and issues that they were working on, but also to cover a broad but not representative range of communities of geographical origin.

**Table 1: Interview Summary Profile**

Locality	Interviews with BAME Community Groups		Interviews with Strategic Organisations		Total
	Local established BAME groups	Refugee and new migrant groups	Regional policy networks	Statutory Organisations	
A rural area in the North West	3	3	1	1	8
A West Midlands rural area	3	2		2	7
Rural areas in the South West	5	2	4		11
Total	11	7	5	3	26
<b>Interviewees</b>					
Female	7	5	3		15
Male	5	4	4	2	15

Strategic organisations were interviewed to offer an overview of the changing environment for, and issues faced by, the rural BAME VCS.

The research did not seek to engage a representative sample of BAME groups in the identified areas. Such an approach would have been impossible given the time and resources available, the super-diversity of communities in England and the lack of a complete list of BAME organisations in England from which to sample. Within these constraints, attempts were made to interview members of groups representing as diverse range of BAME communities as possible. As such interviewees, and/or their groups, represented communities originating from geographical backgrounds including Africa, the Caribbean, the Middle East, the South Asian sub-continent, Eastern Europe and South America. Of the interviewees there were 15 female and 15 male – see Table 1 for breakdown.

Five of the interviews were undertaken on the telephone and all were recorded and then transcribed. All quotes used are anonymised and taken directly from the transcriptions.

Overall nine groups could be characterised as offering strategic infrastructure support, eight offering individual support and a further eight predominantly organising social and cultural activities (See also Table 1). Additionally three organisations included campaigning as part of their remit, two were predominantly faith based, two were concerned with integration and one offered voluntary support to members of the 'host' community. Some organisations are included in more than one of the above categories. Within these headings specific activities undertaken included: -

- grant giving
- advocacy and advice with individuals on domestic violence, hate crime, mental health and addiction issues
- education, recreation and integration with young and elderly people, including sport, trips and annual events
- protecting culture and traditions
- anti-poverty work
- undertaking practical voluntary help for elderly people and voluntary organisations.

All primary research material was gathered between January and July 2014. Interviews followed a standard range of questions/topics, with supplementary questions asked to extend and/or clarify the understanding of the responses.

Where quotes are used, even indirectly, either from interviewees or from literature, the author's original terminology in relation to BME or BAME is kept.

## Findings

The findings are broken down into three areas as follows: -

- Strategies – the current activities of groups and what they are doing to maintain their services
- Levels of influence – the voice that groups have in relation to individuals, groups and organisations, both voluntary and statutory.
- Barriers and challenges – the barriers that face BAME VCS groups and organisations in attempting to operate in rural and less diverse regions of England.

## Strategies

In light of challenges faced by rural BAME organisations it was important to examine the strategies used by staff and management of organisations and activists in more informal groups to maintain their services and, where possible, develop them and to take action in relation to policy changes. This section therefore explores four different approaches adopted by groups to influence at all levels. These are:

- Politicisation – attempts and rationale for seeking to have an impact on policy at a local, regional and national level

- Education and capacity building – education is used in this context to mean a two-way process involving the sharing of information about culture and history between different communities and also between communities and organisations. Capacity building is a process by which organisations address their development needs from a self-defined starting point (CCWA, 2011)
- Social and cultural activities
- Partnerships, both strategic and political – working with other organisations and individuals in the statutory and voluntary sectors

Faith was also seen as an added dimension of organising; bringing people together and undertaking activities. This referred mainly to communities not predominantly born in England, but newer arrivals, including those from the A8 countries.

A wide range of strategies for organisation and development were identified by respondents. Some were outward looking, working in partnership with other groups and challenging policies that affected their communities. However, as with urban BME groups studied (Ware 2013), for many groups survival and the imperative to meet the immediate needs of individuals in their communities, dictated a more inward looking, less strategic, approach, particularly in relation to activity and priorities, than many would have chosen. The four strategies were analysed through the responses of the interviewees.

## Politicisation

Because of the focus of groups on survival, this strategy was not a priority for the majority of the respondents. Only three, all with a strategic remit, identified policy as a priority for them in their current work plans. It was argued that there was a need to raise awareness of cultural diversity within communities in order to achieve increased tolerance. They identified that

the lack of a positive BAME presence in the media was a hindrance to this process which shaped negative perceptions of BAME communities. It was also argued that there was a consistent tension between undertaking individual advocacy work and achieving strategic aims through using voice and influence, and stated that individual support through advocacy tended to be the priority. It was identified that there was general lack of organisation and coordination on policy issues. There was little evidence of work being undertaken with national strategic bodies, either on a voluntary or statutory basis.

The 'Race Equality in the South West: Time for Action' report identified that 'Many people in the South West are seriously disadvantaged in seeking to claim their rights...' that rural racism is 'seen but not heard' and that the task of eliminating racism 'rests far too heavily on the shoulders of overburdened voluntary groups and committed individuals' (Weston 2013 p9). The report concluded that 'Public bodies, from national government down to parish councils and area-based committees, should show leadership and determination to eradicate racism...' if the Equality Act 2010 is to have the effect of progressive improvement in promoting race equality (p10). The report also stated that

there was resistance from senior parliamentarians in acknowledging the influence of racism on BAME communities and community groups. Additionally it was acknowledged that there was insufficient critical mass of BAME people for there to be, for example, an effective Operation Black Vote in rural areas.

Earlier work on BME communities in urban areas found that the Act was a problem for the development of these communities and their VCS, having had the effect of 'watering down previous legislation' (Ware 2013 p17). The experience of rural BAME communities mirrored this view.

## Education and Capacity Building

Six interviewees identified offering educational opportunities such as language classes as being an important strategy for their organisation. Some said that it was a platform to educate the white British public about their community as a group and individuals. A project giving refugees and asylum seekers the opportunity to undertake practical work on a voluntary basis for elderly and disabled people was said to arouse the suspicion of recipients, largely elderly white residents. However the organiser said that the project does '[educate people] about why we are here and what we can add to this community'. Another organisation said that a barrier to volunteering is a lack of education and that 'there is a need to educate people, especially young people, on new issues', also that 'you cannot develop members...although they are involved they don't have the right skills and knowledge to do it [actively contribute to the running of the organisation]'. A worker from a statutory organisation with a strategic remit said that more use should be made of the media to promote community cohesion through positive stories, for example the economic contribution of new arrivals. He felt that there was a need to 'change the tone of the debate on migration'.

The Equality South West report, 'Race Equality in the South West', identified that BAME people lacked a basic knowledge of rights in workplaces, in community action and when accessing services (Weston 2013). Four organisations saw the capacity building of BAME community groups as a key strategy for development, but were concerned that there was a lack of resources to meet needs in this area. One stated that 'human capital was not robust enough' but that 'in time the East European BAME will become more robust, tough and vocal', as numbers grew and the community became more established. A strategic organisation respondent said that capacity building can be a top down, paternalistic, approach which 'some find a reassuring way to be supported, others get downright furious and I can understand why.'

It was argued by some respondents that the lack of capacity building was a barrier to the development of the sector. The reasons for this were identified as a lack of volunteers, distance, transport and time, which meant that capacity building opportunities needed to be residential, a difficult first step for those not familiar with training and educational opportunities as adults.

Both education and capacity building can be regarded as double edged swords. In many cases it is thought that disadvantaged and /or minority communities will be expected to educate or capacity build themselves to attain the level of the 'advantaged' community or elite. However it is clear that, whilst members of disadvantaged communities do need to develop their skills, knowledge and capacity, they

can educate and capacity build others to understand different cultures and improve their ability to interact on a more equal level, without being patronising. This includes those in organisations that have some power and resources, such as statutory bodies and the mainstream VCS. Weston argued that there was a need for 'improved equality awareness training and education across all protected groups in relation to all public service providers, from decision-makers to frontline staff.' (2013 p10)

## Social and Cultural Activities

Nine organisations identified social and recreational activities as their main activity, as a strategy for wider engagement beyond bringing people together. They saw this as a means to help members of their communities to integrate, network and to identify appropriate services. The main reason for a number of organisations undertaking social and cultural activities was that it had been easier to obtain funding for such activities, particularly from statutory bodies. Other interviewees said that it was a less challenging way to work across communities and also, as one interviewee said, 'social groups can make it easier to talk about issues.'

In some cases social activities were used overtly as a diversionary activity for young people to enable them to take a more active role in the wider community. Other groups used social activities as a way of introducing their community to services available such as health and social care, through meeting with service providers. Groups said that they used arts and culture to bring people from a range of BAME communities together, although there was concern that a loss of funding was putting cultural and inter-cultural activities at risk.

## Partnerships

Partnerships were used by organisations to attempt to maximise their resources and influence. Respondents were able to identify positive relationships and benefits accruing from them. Groups reported working effectively with the police on hate crime for example. Others felt there was scope, often unrealised, to form alliances with other community and/or strategic organisations. One strategic organisation said that they could form alliances with other organisations affected by the cuts, including the elderly or Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and transgender (LGBT) groups, and have 'a centre or catalyst for all other marginalised groups in [the region].' The same person also said that there was a 'need to do homework on how to influence the system'.

However problems were identified with partnership working. The groups that discussed partnerships argued that they can be manipulated by those in a position of power in the partnership, particularly when they were working with statutory organisations. Phrases that came up regularly included 'the usual suspects', meetings 'where nothing seems to be happening' and: -

'I wouldn't be listened to... and [I] said I won't be used as a ticking box exercise.'

'What little money there is tends to go to the people they [the Council] know' and 'the Council want to talk to the same people, who may or may not be representative'.

The majority of the organisations felt that they were or would be the weaker partner in actual or potential partnerships. Additionally partnership activity used valuable time and resources that they could ill afford in a climate of reduced funding and uncertain benefits and rewards. A further concern was the perceived weakening of their strategic position due to a changed political climate following the recession and change of government. Partnerships often depended on an individual or champion, rather than the partnership relationship with the BAME group to which they belonged.

Faith was identified as a key way of coming together by six organisations, two of which were actually faith-based organisations. A strategic organisation, based in an urban area, said that people were organising around places of worship, particularly the 'strong black churches', temples and mosques. Others working with East European communities identified the Catholic Church as a hub for activity, but also in terms of people having access to information, especially on health and employment.

However interviewees also said that people had to travel great distances to attend their nearest place of worship; for example from the rural North West to Glasgow or Manchester. An NCVO report looking at faith in rural communities found that the number residents having a faith other than Christian was 'too small to be recorded' because they were fewer and more dispersed. It said that 'a different approach to meeting the needs of minority communities may be needed' (Grieve, 2007, p8), but did not offer any suggestions. This is despite the fact that 'in contrast to Whites, BMEs are more likely to have a religion, more likely to practice that religion regularly and more likely to feel religion plays an important part in their life' (Sunak and Rajeswaran, 2014, p8).

Respondents working with community groups at a strategic or local level identified that it was impractical to use many strategies, particularly those that involved using resources which wouldn't produce clear short term outcomes, when survival depended on meeting targets for funders and/or the more immediate needs of the members of their communities, increasingly at an individual level. Consequently it is important to analyse perceptions of their impact and their levels of influence.

## Levels of Influence

To evaluate 'voice', the ability of participants to exert influence on people and policies, activity was categorised on levels ranging from individuals and communities, through to local statutory bodies and funders, to regional and national strategic organisations and policy makers.

### Individual

Some 17 organisations identified that they exerted influence at the level of individuals. A wide range of interventions and outcomes were described, including promoting integration; reducing isolation, loneliness and depression; casework on issues ranging from hate crime, mental health and substance abuse; language and support to newly arrived people; empowering and confidence building; and working with volunteers. Attempts were being made to encourage individuals to see that their issue was experienced by others and to encourage them to look at a collective response. One

organisation would say to individuals 'Did you know that 10 people complained about the same thing today?' Another said that 'because we do casework we are one of the few organisations that has grass roots support.'

There was the view that individual casework was not necessarily a good use of funding and that the limited money available 'could've been used for the building blocks of a confident community...' This was in relation to a particular funding stream. However the dominant view was that it was necessary to work with individuals because they were facing serious issues that would prevent them moving forward in a wider context if they were not engaged; 'There has to be adequate support to enable someone to become an active citizen'.

## Community

Despite the prevalence of organisations working with individuals there were 15 organisations that were operating at a community level, particularly but not exclusively, those with a more strategic remit. These organisations were able to use their work with individuals to progress the wider aspirations of communities, often in relation to finding their place in the village or rural community, or as one person put it 'finding a place in the county'.

Communities in the study areas could be described as superdiverse in that there were people from a large number of countries of origin with relatively small populations, many born in the UK. For example one interviewee said that there were 45/50 nationalities in a North West town and surrounding area, whilst the BAME population was only 5,335. This was perceived as an impediment to community development. Policy makers were seen as unlikely to adapt to the changing demographic circumstances by not recognising the superdiversity of the rural BAME communities and attempting to treat them as being monolithic, 'lumping' them together.

In a county in the South West there was a wide range of BAME communities and class differences within those communities, for example between one town, that was largely middle class, and another that was working class.

The impact of the range of origins was that in many parts of the study areas it was difficult to achieve a critical mass to develop a community or faith group of a single origin. There is an example of a multi origin group operating successfully at a local level, in one sub regional area of the South West, where the closure of the Race Equality Council (REC) brought a number of activists together to develop an umbrella organisation supporting a range of BAME VCS organisations. However this is an exception, most groups were faced with having to travel, sometimes even out of the region, to access facilities that were appropriate to their needs.

## Voluntary Organisations

17 interviewees said that their group had an informal partnership with other voluntary organisations. The response on the effectiveness of working with these organisations was varied. Some responses were very positive; for example 'the local charitable sector always wants to engage' and (a North West market town voluntary sector environment) 'is a very welcoming place'. One

interviewee operating at a strategic level was of the opinion that there were positive aspects to the reduced funding situation, 'Having no money is good insofar as it encourages cooperation', as previously groups were competing to access the same pots of money. One respondent commented that in a rural area it helps to link with a larger organisation; in this case a BAME umbrella organisation. Areas of influence included other BAME organisations and some more receptive 'mainstream' VCS groups such as the local Council for Voluntary Service (CVS), Citizens Advice Bureau or Age UK.

However seven respondents specifically pointed to a lack of cooperation and influence, commenting that 'We don't have a voice', 'Very quiet...Very quiet, very quiet', 'I don't think there's a big voice at all, and 'in a rural community they [the BAME VCS] have got a voice but it's just not heard enough.' This mirrors the findings in relation to BME groups in urban areas, where groups were able to have an impact on the local VCS, but where also there was an identified barrier of distrust between BME and mainstream voluntary organisations (Ware, 2013). The mainstream organisations were, it was argued, taking on voice for the BAME groups and, through claiming representation, also taking advantage of funding opportunities.

## Local Statutory Organisations

15 groups said that they were working with statutory agencies in their area, in particular local authorities, the police and health services. Again the experience of working with these agencies was varied with some respondents critical of all three sectors. Groups had managed to achieve an effective level of consultation, one respondent stating that their network was included in any consultation with the council, although this did not necessarily imply influence. Another said that the local authority was very welcoming and another that there was an improvement in engagement with the County Council. Groups had worked with the police on the issue of hate crime referring to close contact and having a champion within the local force. This was a recurring theme throughout the research; in the absence of equality structures there was the need to have a champion in order to achieve influence or even to be heard. If there was no champion on the 'inside' there was no influence, if an existing champion left their post that influence was lost or diminished.

Some groups also had a more negative experience to report. 'XX Council deny that there is any racism.' 'There is no race champion so the [rep] from the BME community is self-promoting...I said 'Well he's not representing me''. Another respondent outlined the loss of the regional strategic migration partnership and said that now 'three middle-aged whites represent the concerns of asylum seekers and refugees at a strategic level'. A further interviewee said that the local authority 'doesn't know groups and therefore doesn't trust them, and doesn't explore ways to help. I'm like how would you trust them? How would you if you don't give them chance...?' A fairness commission set up by one local authority was said to give no recognition of race issues. These comments suggested that there was a considerable lack of trust or understanding by

statutory bodies, in particular local authorities.

An additional factor referred to by two interviewees was that they felt that they lacked time or resources to sit on strategic groups, particularly if they felt they were not listened to and/or there were

no perceived benefits. Research carried out by the Carnegie UK Trust with North Wales Equality Network found that 'Typically ethnic minorities in rural areas lack the political clout to participate in local affairs' (Carnegie, 2009 p30). Carnegie also found that service needs were unrecognised by statutory bodies and that BAME groups and individuals may well face racism and discrimination in their home environment. One factor mentioned by several respondents in relation to statutory services was that the lack of numbers was often used as an excuse for not providing a service.

## National/Strategic Organisations

Only three organisations, all strategic, said that they felt that they were able to influence at a strategic level, and even then it was locally rather than nationally. One organisation felt that they were able to empower the voice of the third sector in their region, through challenging and arguing for public policy and by supporting individuals. They also said that they had a strong regional voice. Another organisation had a specific remit for small grant funding regionally and the other organisation had a regional remit for the development of the BAME VCS, although due to funding restrictions now tended to serve organisations in and around the city in which they were based and had little opportunity to work in rural areas.

One respondent pointed to the fact that although they had three white reps at regional level, at least they had some regional voice, whilst one group identified good links with the local VCS but that they lacked upward communications regionally or nationally.

## Strength of Influence

At individual, local voluntary and, to a variable extent, local statutory level groups felt that they had a voice and could exert some influence. There were examples of partnership working, which was necessary because of low numbers in individual groups and, more recently, the need to pool resources following austerity cuts and the associated reduced availability of funding. However eight community groups felt that they had to prioritise work with individuals, partly due to the excessively challenging position that many people found themselves in. The factors facing individuals included a lack of personal resources and/or being the victims of racism. Dhalech found that 'the lack of consideration of racial equality in the rural agenda' had a number of consequences including 'the lack of representation and voice for BME communities' and 'a lack of support to empower BME communities to participate at all levels of society' (Dhalech, 2012 pp 74-5).

Consequently, the work that they were undertaking tended to focus on liaison with other VCS and statutory groups for the benefit of individuals in their community, rather than to develop a strategic approach to these issues. It was articulated that there was insufficient capacity to undertake work of a more developmental nature, particularly when it involved working with other, particularly statutory, organisations that weren't receptive to the needs of minority communities. In summary, it appeared that the higher the level of activity the less influence there was, particularly at regional and national level. The barriers and challenges that have led to and exacerbated this situation will be examined in the following section.

## Barriers and Challenges

Before looking at barriers and challenges it is useful to identify areas where rural BAME groups and organisations have had some success on behalf of their communities.

## Successes

Positive outcomes are few in the literature. Mohammed Dhalech (2012), writing in 'The Big Society: The Big Divide' outlined a successful initiative run by MOSAIC (the Campaign for National Parks) and the Youth Hostels Association that had developed capacity in BME communities to take groups to the countryside, which has led to change in the National Parks. Though as he says, 'This is however, only one small initiative'.

Groups participating in the research were able to identify successes within their work programme. In the South West one group was able to successfully fight the closure of its project after the local Race Equality Council (REC) had its funding withdrawn, saying 'I was really furious, because they can't just close it down, you know? We pay our taxes too.' This group was also able to identify the positive benefits, 'the volunteers that come in, they're really down and we bring them up, and that to me is my consolation.' Another organisation in Cumbria that brought people of different backgrounds together said '...and you actually see that there's not a lot of difference between people.'

Projects were able to identify some success in bringing people together from a wide range of backgrounds, alleviating isolation, holding events, helping people combat substance and alcohol abuse. Other examples were achieving practical victories such as a prayer room in a hospital; a volunteer project undertaking practical tasks for elderly and disabled people that was also able to identify the benefit for volunteers in developing their self-worth and language skills, as well as breaking down barriers between asylum seekers and refugees and other communities. These were small scale but important examples. Otherwise the majority of respondents identified that they were struggling to achieve their goals due to a wide range of barriers, which will be analysed in the remainder of this section.

## Rural Impact

There are three main dimensions of rurality that impact on BAME community groups: -

- Lack of population and critical mass
- Distances and transport problems
- Employment patterns

It is argued that, whilst these factors affected all rural communities, an added dimension for BAME communities was that rural settlements had developed to serve the predominant, established white communities. BAME communities were sparser and therefore unable to organise effective activities in each settlement, therefore requiring them to travel further for activities that existing communities would access in their own settlement.

## Sparsity of population and critical mass

As identified in the background section, there are substantial variations in country of origin between urban and rural populations in terms of BAME communities. Within predominantly rural areas people of BAME origin tended to gravitate towards the few urban areas. In the North West region for example 5,333 out of 7,734 people recorded as non-white UK live in the main urban settlement. Figures for the other regions studied show similar disparities. The non-white population is 14% for England and Wales, but only 4.6% for the South West as a whole and only 2.5% for Devon and 2.7% for North Somerset (Bristol City Council 2013). The Asian community was particularly under-represented in the South West; the South West percentage of the population with an Asian background is just 1.9% compared to the England figure of 7.6%' (ONS, 2013).

An additional factor is the growing geographical spread of ethnic diversity, particularly in the larger towns in rural regions. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation compared the change in ethnic diversity in local authority districts across England and Wales and found that the direction of residential movement of ethnic minority groups is towards suburban and rural areas. These are the areas where the ethnic minority population was most underrepresented but which were showing the greatest relative growth (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2012).

However Khan, in 'A Sense of Place', looking at retirement decisions among older black and minority ethnic people, found that a lack of access to amenities including services, places of worship and community centres would discourage older BAME communities from taking the decision to retire to rural areas. 'Without a critical mass of ethnic minorities, local areas cannot support or sustain such amenities and institutions.' (Khan, 2012 p7)

BAME groups identified the difficulties inherent in trying to develop and sustain their organisation without the critical mass of people to support it. It was argued that the lack of people makes it hard to raise money for room hire; for example a group that only has a maximum of 8-10 people requires a high attendance rate in order to remain viable.

The strategic organisations interviewed argued that the lack of population in rural areas, and urban areas with lower BAME populations, impacted negatively on their work with groups in a number of ways. Firstly they identified that 'issues of rural areas are just getting lost' for BAME communities and that the challenges faced by rural groups 'are ignored by most people, they are not visible.' An organisation based in a large settlement said that although they had a remit for the whole of the region that their own work was primarily in areas where BAME communities are concentrated, i.e. large conurbations. This was related to the considerable reduction in their resources, particularly staffing, and the distances involved in travelling to support rural communities in their region.

Secondly there was a lack of recognition of problems, again due to low numbers. 'BME communities are victims of statistics, so if the statistics are really low, organisations say... 'there's not much of an issue here.'" Further an interviewee said 'The Black vote doesn't matter to them.'

A third problem concerned the difficulty in developing funding applications when there were low numbers in any one community; 'We don't have the numbers but the issues are real...to those people who are affected'. They said that there were 34 nationalities within a population of 5,000 people and that 'if we had 5,000 people of one race saying there's a problem it would be responded to.' This was

a recurring theme in the North West region. Even in the largest town where there was a greater population there was fragmentation due to the large number of nationalities.

One interviewee said that where there were only one or two BAME households there were sometimes difficulties in schools. Gill and Talbot (2010 p2) found that while a number of parents reported a general acceptance of their children, 'the large majority of the families [in their study] had experience of racism directed at their children' and that 'bullying was frequently referred to'.

This lack of population and critical mass affected the ability to get together, the ability to influence particularly at a policy level, and to attract sufficient resources to develop and maintain organisations to run activities and influence policy for the benefit of BAME communities.

The lack of groups and organisations was seen as leading to increased isolation. Craig (2012) found that the majority (11 out of 16) of BAME women in his study experienced social and cultural isolation, despite having lived in the town for several years. In her research for 'Needs not Numbers' de Lima said that 'the most frequently mentioned disadvantage was lack of contact with others from the same cultural background' (de Lima, 2001 p 49). She also referred to the inability to access aspects of culture such as food and religious rites. In the final report of *Racism in Rural Areas*, (Blaschke and Torres 2002, p272) argue that racism in British rural areas was related 'to the isolation of members of ethnic minorities and to the lack of structure for their integration' and also said that this was an issue for BAME persons who may wish to visit the countryside.

10 of the organisations interviewed referred to isolation as an important barrier to the development of BAME community groups in rural areas. Respondents variously referred to the impact of racial abuse, isolation from the 'host' community, remoteness, the effect on confidence, the suspicion that was faced, and in some cases suffering depression, mental health and substance abuse issues. Some mentioned the need to keep close to their own communities, however small, and 'keep intact their cultural heritage...but they need a wider network to support them.'

Interviewees said that isolation made the experience of rural racism very different to urban racism, 'If you're the only black person in the village...it's like you may have to laugh at the racist jokes' [to survive]. There were also cultural differences that added to the isolation. It could be difficult to engage in social activities as 'It's all based around drinking and partying.'

The small size of BAME populations made it hard for communities to organise, be acknowledged as communities that funders would support, and therefore raise funds. This was exacerbated by the fact that several groups reported that the small communities were superdiverse (Phillimore, 2011), so that it was difficult to organise around a particular issue or to bring people together for worship. Contrary to the dominant argument, it was clear from this study that superdiversity is not only an urban phenomenon. Whilst scattered populations also affected the non-BAME communities the impact on BAME communities was far greater due to them comprising only 5% of the total community overall, being internally diverse by ethnicity, country of origin, language ability, socio-economic status and class, and therefore not having 'critical mass'. From the perspective of policy makers and funders (in all three sectors) communities were 'lumped' together and treated as one, along with other equalities, and often provided resources through a 'mainstream' voluntary agency, which was attempting to manage reduced resources itself.

The research found that funding was often predicated on numbers and BAME communities were relatively small percentages. This was despite the fact that their needs may have been more urgent and/or severe. Despite the predominance of race hate crime, it did not translate into a proportionate distribution of resources. It was also argued that BME communities were the victims of statistics and that if the statistics were low it would be said that there wasn't much of an issue. Dhalech, and others, have also found that the predominant approach to the issue of BAME communities in rural areas was 'no problem here' (Dhalech, 2012 p72). This had led to a loss of infrastructure organisations and increased dependence on individual champions undertaking the role on a voluntary basis. There was little evidence of influence beyond individuals and immediate communities.

## Distances and transport

Some 13 of the interviewees identified travel distances and transport difficulties as problematic for rural communities. Strategic organisations pointed to the time and travel costs involved in working with geographically widespread communities, particularly where funding was dependent on being able to deliver a high level of outputs. One organisation found that travel time was often not fully costed into contracts. As a result organisations, often national, that had tendered for contracts, were not familiar with project management in rural areas, and were unable to deliver the contract for the price that they had tendered. Further, more local organisations thus found that they were being expected to deliver contracts for the same price per head as urban areas, despite working with more sparsely located rural communities.

Smaller groups had to plan meeting times around transport issues, particularly if they had to deliver a service to a number of small settlements. Holding drop in sessions was not viable for some groups due to the lack of staffing and distances involved. Respondents referred to the loss of many bus services through public spending cuts and one said 'if you can drive that's fine, but if you cannot drive that's it, you're finished'. Dhalech writes that BME communities require extensive travel to get to a major centre and are often prohibited by a lack of transport. 'BME communities will often travel to larger cities to access specific services' (Dhalech, 2012 p71). Whilst distances and transport are problematic for all rural community groups, for BAME groups it was a significantly increased barrier for them due to the fact that the rural BAME population is only 5% of the total rural population. Although the above factors affect all rural communities, BAME communities were more severely affected as they were unable to access information, facilities were at a greater distance, and they were vulnerable to racism. This would not affect traditional rural communities in the same way as there would be a higher percentage of their own communities, despite them being sparser than in urban areas. Additionally some BAME groups found difficulties in maintaining communication with their members and communities due to the dispersed population and problems with broadband coverage and connectivity.

Travel, lack of finance and confidence combined to affect the ability to meet. Also the physical isolation was important, and not seeing others of one's own background. It was also said that isolation can lead to suspicion, that people may be thinking 'Well they're Asian so they must be Muslim, so perhaps they are fundamental Muslims' as a member of one community group explained. Craig, in an

in-depth study of 16 BME women, first generation migrants living in a rural town in the north east, found that 'Observing religious practices and attending places of worship was a way to preserve their religious identity and connect with various 'co-ethnic' communities.' (Craig, 2012 p4) The lack of meeting places can affect faith groups particularly. Some organisations used shops, houses and restaurants in order to meet.

Rural communities, we were told, can be very conservative and BAME communities can feel much excluded and resettle into the towns; 'They come into town because from a black person's point of view it's a feeling of belonging.' Also this improved the opportunity to establish social, recreational and faith activities.

## Employment Patterns

There were specific working patterns in rural communities, in agribusiness and the tourism trade for example, that constitute a further impediment to people's ability to organise. In some cases people, often men, worked long hours. They were also isolated from the wider community, particularly when working on farms. 'Immigrants are here for work, and they work really unsociable hours,' and 'don't have much time to engage with activities'. It was argued that they contribute to the local economy but are excluded from local community activities due to their work commitments and other factors such as distance and lack of transport.

The exploitation of migrant workers was highlighted and health and safety was a particular concern. Farms were seen as unwelcoming to anyone who wanted to help workers organise even on social issues, but particularly on employment matters. Whilst some farms were seen as welcoming many were not. An organisation working with mainly East Europeans in the Midlands said 'Many East European migrants have been open to exploitation from the beginning.' Another organisation in the North West said 'I would just blame greedy employers who are looking to gain as much as they can before they get caught.'

Research in the North West region found that 'because of their working situation such workers are particularly isolated from sources of support and advice' and also that 'migrant workers face a range of social and workplace discrimination, difficulty in accessing advice and information...' (Dhalech, 2008 pp 7 and 9).

Dhalech also identified that BME small and medium enterprises were susceptible to racial harassment and property damage, and that little focus was placed on this issue. The vulnerability of these businesses was exacerbated by their relative difference or 'otherness' in the rural context and added to the exclusion of BAME communities from the wider communities and their organisations.

In addition to the barriers that have a specific rural element, and which BAME populations are more adversely affected by, the following are barriers that they face that have also been shown to impact on BAME communities in urban areas. (Ware, 2013)

In all three regions BAME people were employed in the restaurant trade and were therefore scattered thinly in settlements across a region. In the research for 'A place called Townsville' Craig (2012 p9) found that 'nearly all the fast food outlets and restaurants are owned by BME people'. One

interviewee said that often owners, and workers, of these outlets lived in metropolitan areas and would only commute to be present on the busiest nights.

These factors contributed to the difficulty for these communities to organise. The patterns of employment and range of communities were inimical to developing community organisations. Many of those from BAME communities were specifically in rural areas to work and would expect to work long hours and have little time for community and social activities.

## Funding/Lack of Resources

Some 22 out of 26 groups interviewed, referred to the impact that a lack funding and other resources was having on their work and development. The Equality Act 2010 was seen as one factor shaping access to resources 'the pot of money is no longer just for BME groups now it's for everybody'.

The situation was said to have deteriorated over six to seven years (prior to 2013) and people appreciated that in many cases funders and support organisations, local authorities and 'mainstream' VSC organisations were facing severe funding problems of their own. Weston identified that 'between early 2012 and the spring of 2013, additional losses occurred among race equality organisations, along with changes in focus necessitated by funding conditions' (Weston, 2013 p6). This referred to the increased focus on contracting and the need for organisations to work on a range of equalities rather than being able to specialise. In Plymouth in 2010 the Law Centre closed and 'That same year Refugee Action also had to close its offices in the city and other organisations have been forced to restructure their services in line with a hostile funding climate' (Burnett, 2011 p8)

There was reference to the 'squandering' of money in the past, where it was perceived that the local authority had provided regular and considerable funding to a 'safe' organisation that had left no legacy from the funding. It was said that there was a positive aspect to a lack of funding in that it reduced arguments about who accessed resources and also 'If there's no barrier you will be weak...the barriers are making you stronger.'

However the majority were struggling to survive and found themselves heavily dependent on volunteers. Dhalech found that 'the reliance on individual effort and commitment (voluntary in many cases) to champion the cause of racial equality' was one consequence of the reduced funding available for the rural BAME VCS (Dhalech, 2012 p75). This was confirmed by respondents in this research.

The lack of funding had impacted in different ways. Groups and services had closed. Other organisations had changed their services to meet funding requirements and had less scope to campaign or develop. For example a local strategic organisation had adapted to achieve a 20% cut in funding by working a four day week and was consequently having to prioritise individual support over strategic and policy work. One group said that it could no longer run an annual multicultural event. Other BAME groups were struggling to find the cost of hiring meeting places. In some cases due to funding cuts larger organisations, including local authorities, had to implement or increase charges for room hire, which had previously been provided free to community and voluntary groups.

Groups, whilst becoming heavily dependent on volunteers, were nevertheless still finding difficulty in raising funds to cover their expenses. The impact of transport issues has been referred to above. Many volunteers had to work from home due to the lack of affordable office space, 'and it's a massive, massive shock because the Race Equality Council (REC) has shut down and we [no longer] have an office.' Usually volunteers had paid employment so had to work round this in order to maintain their organisation, 'all the staff are volunteers with other work'. This was an important factor in relation to the ability of groups to work on campaigning and/or policy issues.

Groups also mentioned that they were looking at different sources of funding including sponsorship. One group said that 'to be sustainable you can't rely on grants all the time'. Another organisation had received funding from an East European embassy, but one interviewee said that this was unusual and that when it had been mentioned as a possibility to another group, 'they weren't interested because the embassy's not interested.' Whilst there was a realisation that other sources of funding and sustainability needed to be found there was little evidence of opportunity or success.

Whilst lack of funding was an equally important issue in urban areas in terms of the number of times it was referred to by interviewees, it is important to note that in rural areas there is little history of community and organisational development. Consequently rural BAME communities lacked an infrastructure that could be adapted during periods of reduced funding. As with urban areas there were groups that did not rely on external funding that were able to survive but, due to the sparseness of populations and the distances involved, these were few. The main infrastructure that had been developed during the periods of better funding centred on the Race Equality Councils at sub regional level and these had, for example, been reduced from nine to three in the South West. Regional organisations had suffered a considerable reduction in staff and this was also true of national organisations such as Voice for Change. It was also mentioned that the CVS (Community and Voluntary Service) infrastructure was collapsing and where CVSs still existed it was said that 'they weren't really desperate to advise Black and Minority Ethnic Groups'.

### The established sector 'claiming credit'

As with previous research (Ware 2013), there was a view that the established sector, the 'mainstream' VCS was claiming to deal with rural BAME issues but that inevitably it would struggle to deliver due to a lack of knowledge and resources. There were apparently BME posts that nobody knew about. 'Every now and then you find out that an organisation has a BME officer...and no one has ever met them. It seems like an easy tick box.'

This was a symptom of the distrust referred to in relation to the mainstream voluntary sector. It was argued that it was difficult to get services for groups because 'if you look round the third sector in [sub region in South West] it's all designed for the majority.' Problems with contracts were also referred to, both in applying because of an insufficient annual turnover and also in delivering as the contracts were for a broader range of activity than the group delivered. It was also the case that contracts weren't meeting the perceived needs of the BAME communities that the groups were seeking to support. Further the cultural resistance of influential people was highlighted. Q 'They being the local authority?'

A 'I'm afraid in the voluntary sector...is the sad reality. I can't imagine Lambeth [BAME VCS] putting up with being side-lined in the way they are here.'

These comments indicate a lack of trust between the small BAME community based groups and voluntary organisations and the wider sector, particularly at regional and national level. Whilst there was recognition that these medium and large organisations were facing difficulties of their own, there was also a strong feeling that they were focused solely on their own survival and development by taking contracts for services to BAME communities and then failing to deliver to a reasonable standard. This was due partly to a lack of experience and knowledge of working with these communities but also due, in the case of national organisations, to their lack of understanding of the costs involved in delivering rural projects. It also indicated that there were wider issues for rural BAME communities, including a marginalisation of the issues that were important to them.

These findings support those of the urban BME research, which found that there was a similar lack of trust between the mainstream 'well heeled' VSC and those community based BME groups that were delivering services to their own communities (Ware, 2013).

## Language

Some 12 groups referred to language as a significant barrier that could potentially lead to isolation, sometimes fuelling addiction. The amount of time required to learn the language was also a problem given that people worked long hours and had to travel long distances; 'language is the main barrier, and as there are considerable distances to get to classes the children tend to interpret.' One group said that language was problematic in dealings with the NHS for women and elderly people.

## Diversity

As referred to previously, population 'fragmentation' associated with diversity has had a disproportionate impact in the regions studied, given the large number of communities with small number of individuals. One strategic organisation said communities were lumped together and in reality there was a 'scattering of ethnicities'. Another referred to the fact that 'people think that East Europeans are a homogeneous kind of community' and that there had been 'the artificial creation of a Muslim community. There is no such Muslim community.' East European covers a wide geographical area and range of communities, as does 'Muslim' to an even greater extent and yet these terms are used without explanation or qualification.

Responses to increased diversity varied within regions. For example in the North West it was argued that a gradual rate of change had provided the opportunity to facilitate integration, whereas in the South West there had been difficulties caused by a rapid increase in the BAME population due to the presence of an asylum-seeker dispersal city and growing employment opportunities at a local hospital and university. In the West Midlands area studied the population of East European origin was driven strongly by employment opportunities in agribusiness and often living in accommodation on farms and doing seasonal work.

Craig refers to fact that superdiversity is now a feature of all BAME communities, including those in rural areas (Craig, 2012). Differences, and in some cases racism or tensions, between communities were also mentioned, although across the areas researched this was not a general experience and there was evidence of communities of varied backgrounds working together, particularly in one region of the south west.

Class was also identified as important, manifesting itself in a number of ways. Issues with class were reported in the South West in relation to class differences between two cities and the presence of a large black middle class group in the region, especially based around the teaching hospital, universities and Islamic Centre. In the rural Midlands it was recognised that there was an increasing middle class 'living in the villages, more professional people you know, like doctors.' In the South West it was reported that there was a takeover of community activity and that there were 'no Bangladeshis in the South Asian group.' Within one community in the Midlands it was argued that there appeared to be fragmentation based on class.

Thus class impacted in a different way as it was also identified in all the regions studied that there was extreme social exclusion in otherwise very rich and affluent rural communities. In a South West city it was said 'you can see poverty. The use of the word 'Paki' starts in schools. Racism is on the rise.' In this context it was identified that 'class adds another dimension but race is the determinant. People are not used to seeing different people around them.' Rural racism and its impact on rural BAME group and organisation development will be examined in more detail in the following section.

## Racism

In 2005 Jay Rayner, writing in the Observer, reported a large increase in racial attacks in rural and predominantly white urban areas. The North Wales Constabulary reported that the number of racist attacks reported had increased from 80 in 2000 to 325 in 2012/3, affecting 4% of the BAME population. Similarly in Cumbria reports had doubled and were now affecting 6% of the BAME population. 'There is a similar picture in West Mercia, Cleveland, Hampshire and Staffordshire, all police areas with relatively small minority populations.' (Rayner, 2005) By contrast London had seen a decrease in figures, from 23,000 in 2000 to 9,453 in 2012/3. Craig's research with BME women found that 'Among 16 interviews only five stated that they had not encountered racism or racial abuse...' (Craig, 2012 p15)

Despite the fact that there was, deliberately, no specific question or prompt about racism in the research schedule, it was referred to by 19 of the organisations interviewed and was clearly the most pressing issue for most of the respondents, from those working at a strategic level through to representatives of community groups. Within this there was a nuanced response on many subjects. For example in relation to hate crime some interviewees thought that the police were a large part of the problem, whilst it was also said that they had 'definitely improved on the hate crime issue'.

The overall view was that there was a lack of response to racism, that responses were slow and evidence was not followed up. One respondent argued the 'Police say 'we're not even sure it was a racist issue' but 'so many people left [North West settlement], because of incidents that have happened.' Interviewees commented on extreme examples of overt racism and Islamophobia. 'I have

supported many people who have experienced racism from police officers. In [NW region] we have extreme incidents of racism and violence.’ In the South West a worker talked about the severity of the racism experienced, the need to laugh at racist jokes and ‘You know racism’s not nice. It kills people.’ Another respondent in [the South West Region] said that ‘people were ‘being beaten in the street, being attacked, just because they look different’. One organisation in the south west said that ‘the local Islamic Centre was suffering racism including fires and pigs’ heads through the door.’ In the West Midlands area mosques had been vandalised.

In the North West it was said ‘people live with it, yeah. They live with discrimination.’ And [victims] ‘very often choose not to do anything about it.’ One organisation based in a South West urban area referred to the fact that it was a garrison town, tough and violent and also deprived, and that nothing had changed since Martin Bright’s ‘City of hate’ Observer article written in 2003 (Bright 2003). At the time the city was Britain’s whitest, least ethnically diverse city. This was also confirmed in the literature by Plymouth Fairness Commission which found that ‘Racism and abuse in Plymouth is hugely prevalent and massively under-reported. This is the undercurrent above which more frightening and life-changing physical attacks have occurred’ (Plymouth Fairness Commission 2014 p45). As quoted earlier, Gill and Talbot found that rural schools were often seen as ignoring racism, one interviewee saying ‘there’s always denial that it goes on and there’s always the comfort of ignorance...’(Gill and Talbot, 2010 p2).

Whilst hate crime is likely to be overt racism, there are more subtle forms of racism which may be equally insidious and may be an important barrier to the development of community groups and activity. Interviewees referred to the way in which they had been isolated and excluded. One woman described being the only visibly black person in her rural village. ‘The only black person in my village. Horrible there. I feel the odd one out because I’m not white.’ She also said that ‘the biggest barrier is fear. People are scared of anything new coming in.’ Another woman described how the dynamic changes; ‘you go to a tea room, I’m sure they think black people don’t drink tea...’

Institutional racism was also said to be a factor. It was argued that stereotyping and ‘patting on the head’ enabled mainstream officers to look at BAME communities as vulnerable, claim money for them and deliver services on their behalf. BAME communities were lumped together and differences were not recognised or acknowledged. It was also said that racism is supposedly solved and that ‘talking about it may affect your funding’... ‘you’re not supposed to talk about racism any more’.

One theme referred to by writers is that of an invisible line around rural England that minority communities are not expected to cross. This is a perception that may be held by BAME or white writers. Hannah Pool interviewing Benjamin Zephaniah in 2009 said ‘I’m always confused by black people who choose to live in the countryside. Why do it to yourself?’ To which Zephaniah replied ‘Because it’s great...This is our country and if we keep living in inner cities people will stereotype us as inner-city people... Don’t think you can’t live in the countryside because you’re black’ (Craig, 2012 piii).

Jay (1992, p17) reported on the barriers that prevented black people from moving to rural and other ‘white’ areas of the country. He spoke to a woman struggling to live in a town in the south west ‘refusing to capitulate to the monstrous idea that the south-west is a no-go area for black British citizens.’ Jay (p19) also heard from a district council officer she had been told by a member of one

voluntary organisation that 'there were not enough black people to create trouble'. Grant (1995) in the Independent, following up Jay's report, found that BAME people in Cornwall faced a double discrimination in that firstly they were not Cornish, they were incomers or 'emmetts', and secondly they were black. Craig (2012, p57) commented that 'For rural dwellers, 'immigrants' have largely remained an exotic, unwelcome phenomenon'.

All of these barriers impacted on the opportunity for BAME community groups to operate in rural areas. It is within the context of these barriers that the development of rural BAME community groups and organisations was severely curtailed in most parts of the regions researched. As outlined at the start of this section there are examples of individuals and groups developing activities and, in some cases, working at a policy level, but these are few and far between.

## Discussion

The research aimed to analyse the position of the rural BAME VCS, in relation to that of the urban BAME sector, as analysed in the previous research (Ware,

2013). It set out to examine the rural sector's ability to exert influence on the wider rural VCS and on policy making and funding as it affected BAME community groups and organisations. The research was also concerned with the distinctiveness of the rural BAME VCS and its ability to follow its own agenda as opposed to following funding opportunities.

One of the aims of the research was to identify the extent to which the BAME communities were affected by rural issues, which would also affect those from local white communities. These were identified as the sparseness of the population, distances and transport and employment patterns. Additionally there was racism which in theory might affect rural communities more harshly, particularly when allied to the other rural factors.

This contrasted with the urban areas studied where the BAME population was considerably higher, which enabled BAME communities to at least argue for a greater redistribution of finite resources, even if influence was perceived to be limited. Workers and activists in rural areas, and the available literature, indicated that the requirements of the members of these communities were far more intense and they experienced far greater isolation and therefore had more need for social interaction to be able to confront this level of racism.

The working paper on the urban BME VCS found that the voice of the sector was 'very small, very quiet, a whisper...' to quote one of the participants in the research (Ware, 2013 p25). As quoted, and repeated for emphasis, participants in the rural BAME research variously responded 'I don't think there's a big voice at all', 'We don't have a voice', and 'Very quiet...Very quiet, very quiet' to a question on the level of the sector's influence. A major difference to the urban research was that there was less expectation of having a voice, and many of the organisations were more focused on attempting to initiate or maintain activity than exerting influence on social policy as it affected their communities.

Beyond this there were examples of activity and influence and, as with the urban based research, there were organisations, particularly smaller groups not dependent on statutory funding, managing to

survive and continue their activity. Within rural projects there was some evidence of members of BAME communities being able to exert influence in specific areas including health and presenting a positive image of their community.

However the overall picture was that there was a lack of influence and that this was against a background of overt and covert racism, which was seen to be unacknowledged and unchallenged. Despite not being prompted on racism the majority of the interviewees identified it as a significant barrier to their work at community level and taking meaningful part in community life. Racism was seen as a key factor in isolating many individuals from BAME communities, especially those living in villages where there were few or no others from their background. This was also confirmed in the literature by writers such as Dhalech (1999), Jay (1992), de Lima (2001) and, more recently, reports from Craig (2012) and Weston (2013).

Additionally it was clear from the research that respondents in the rural study did not have the capacity to move beyond individual advocacy, whereas there was evidence in the urban study that some groups were able to engage in group advocacy.

As with findings from the urban research, all five respondents commenting on the Equality Act 2010 said that it had adversely affected their work on race equality. Various it was seen as 'a move away from race equality and single cause', 'the local authority has dumbed down', 'used by statutory bodies to tick boxes' and 'we've moved down the agenda'. Because available funding was spread across a number of inequalities those organisations representing BAME communities perceived that they were being excluded from funding opportunities. Whilst there were seen to be benefits such as the potential to work across equalities, the overall response was that organisations, often relatively large, possibly national and rarely BAME, were in the best position to win contracts.

A local authority officer said that there had been a move from race to hate crime 'notwithstanding that 82% of hate crime is based on race'. The impact was that their groups and communities were receiving less funding and were struggling to have an impact on policy that would affect them. The difference from the urban BAME groups studied was that there had been little funding to establish groups initially and therefore there was no infrastructure to enable groups to deal with issues that were becoming more pronounced in their communities.

In 'The New Countryside?' Solonos (in Neal and Agyeman, 2006 p ix) states that 'the sociology of race and ethnicity has been constructed through an urban frame of reference'. Elsewhere Neal and Agyeman (2006) refer to 'a racialized landscape in which questions of inclusion, exclusion, legitimacy and authenticity have been struggled over' (p101). Their conclusion is that 'there is a pattern of racial harassment and violence in many rural areas against Black people and people from minority ethnic, asylum seeker, Gypsy and Traveller communities...' (p234).

Whilst the urban research found that BME communities in the urban areas studied (Birmingham, Manchester and London) faced the barrier of racism it was not raised as frequently as in the rural research. That is not to diminish its importance and extent. For example in the urban research one interviewee said that 'Britishness did not include black communities' whilst another mentioned that 'the voluntary sector is not immune from racism' (Ware, 2013 p18). It was clear that interviewees at both community and strategic levels felt that their own group and the sector as a whole were being held

back as they were acting for BME communities. Craig (2011) and Afridi (2009) also argued that there was a lack of recognition of the BME VCS.

However the responses of participants in the rural research have identified that, for the reasons above, the nature of racism in rural areas was far more direct and, in some cases, extreme, including attacks on people and mosques, and bullying in schools. Additionally participants in the research faced more subtle racism by being isolated and excluded, both by people in communities and also by a lack of recognition due to low numbers and the fact that racism is allegedly 'solved'.

Institutional racism, in the form of a refusal to recognise and fund groups working with BAME communities, largely because their needs are unacknowledged, is also a factor in the lack of development of a BAME VCS in rural and predominantly white areas of the UK. ACRE has argued that the needs of rural communities have gone unrecognised by policy formulation that is very urban/population density focused (ACRE 2015). For BAME communities the problem is exacerbated by the barriers that were identified in the research and the fact there was found to be no 'voice' or mechanisms to articulate the needs of these communities which have increased and will continue to increase.

The research confirmed that BAME communities were still predominantly living in the more urbanised settlements of England and that social barriers, including racism and isolation, were limiting movement along the continuum from inner city to suburban and to market towns and villages and into more rural settlements. Whilst there were significant, and increasing, numbers of BAME communities in the less urbanised parts of the country, there was clearly unease surrounding the security of these settlements. Rural BAME communities are established but face barriers to their organisation and development and have consequently moved to the more urbanised settlements of the regions that they inhabit.

## Conclusions

There is currently little or no debate in rural England parallel to the debates of the 1970s about the settlement of BAME communities in urban areas. Rural BAME communities remain largely invisible, particularly in relation to policy and practice.

The main aim of this research was to follow up the paper on the voice and influence of the BME groups in urban areas of England by examining the experiences of rural BAME groups, acknowledging that its development would be expected to be at a less advanced stage, and attempting to identify the extent to which BAME communities had been able to organise civically. The small sample size and limited resources meant that it was not possible to undertake research in the most rural parts of the regions studied.

In conducting the literature review it became apparent that there was little written about the organisation of BAME community groups in rural and other largely white areas of the UK. Much of the available writing focused on the issue of racism in such communities. 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 (Chakroborti and Garland, 2012).

There was little about the groups that represented the BAME communities that lived in these areas or how they organised themselves.

BAME umbrella and strategic organisations have (largely through necessity) given priority to racial issues in urban areas. Traditionally communities in rural and predominantly white areas, and their statutory and voluntary organisations, have tended to take a problem centred approach to minority communities and declare 'no problem here'. This approach was seen to recognise only problems that might be created by incoming communities, rather than the problems that might be created for them by 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 depended on key individuals and champions, often giving their time on a voluntary basis. Whilst this was also true to an extent in the urban areas, it was noticeable that if there was the loss of a key individual the impact could be far more serious for rural BAME groups and communities, as there was a lack of other people or organisations who could continue the work. One reason for this was the loss of infrastructure organisations, the Race Equality Councils. However it was also the case that some communities were able to strengthen their organisation in adversity. For example the group in the South-West that fought the closure of their local REC by finding and staffing their own premises. As with urban community groups there were also examples of small groups that were able to maintain their activity due to a lack of dependence on external funding and/or staffing.

In order to survive, particularly in the current hostile funding and policy climate, it will be necessary for rural BAME organisations to form alliances with others in the VCS as a whole, especially where there is limited capacity to support BAME communities that are facing considerable adversity. Within the range of groups and organisations interviewed there were examples of partnership working and the potential to increase it. Racism is a significant barrier and, as with urban areas, there are examples of it within the mainstream voluntary sector. However there may also be more to gain where there is a mutual interest to develop sustainable groups that can be for the benefit of all communities.

The rural BAME population, currently 5%, is increasing and will become a more significant proportion of the overall community and as such the requirements of superdiverse populations need to be considered. Services and support for civil society action need to be adequately resourced. There needs to advance planning to establish what the tipping points for the provision of services will be, taking into account the severity of need even where there are small numbers. It appeared to be around 7% for BAME communities in urban areas when the equalities legislation of the mid 1970s was developed. Changes during this period in England coincided with the rise of the far right. The recent rise of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) before and during the 2015 election could parallel this rise for BAME communities in rural England in the near future.

Given these changes there will, as an example, be a need for relevant and culturally sensitive health services. These services may only be required in the transition phase. However the evidence from the research indicated that where numbers are low provision may be equally, if not more, important to prevent the isolation of individuals. Currently there is little discussion, or consideration in relation to policy development, about the needs of rural BAME communities. Work needs to be

undertaken at a policy level to enable resources to be allocated for the benefit of all communities, even those that have a relatively small population.

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## Below the Radar

This research theme explores the role, function, impact and experiences of small community groups or activists. These include those working at a local level or in communities of interest - such as women's groups or refugee and migrant groups. We are interested in both formal organisations and more informal community activity. The research is informed by a reference group which brings together practitioners from national community networks, policy makers and researchers, as well as others who bring particular perspectives on, for example, rural, gender or black and minority ethnic issues.

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