



**Community Capacity to Address Racism &
Intolerance in Northern Ireland**

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Background

On 28 June 2004, INCORE held a meeting with a range of policy-makers, practitioners and academics to establish how INCORE could contribute to addressing racism, xenophobia and discrimination in Northern Ireland. Full notes from the meeting are available online: <http://www.incore.ulst.ac.uk/policy/lilp/28June2004.pdf>

During the meeting, the group asked INCORE to carry out a brief pilot study of organisations that work with communities centred around race/ethnicity, disability or sexual orientation in Northern Ireland. It was suggested that the pilot study focus particularly on organisations that:

1. Operate at the local or community level.
2. Are relatively small and modestly funded.
3. Depend on voluntary as well as paid effort.

It was agreed that the purpose of the pilot study would be to:

- Develop greater understanding of these organisations' work.
- Identify these organisations' critical capacity building needs.
- Collect examples of 'good practice' from these organisations.
- Ascertain any further research needs.

August-November 2004, INCORE conducted interviews with more than 15 community organisations (for a list of interviewees please see Appendix). This paper summarises key findings and recommendations from these interviews. Quotations from interviews are highlighted in italics.

Communities of Interest:

This paper sometimes refers to communities centred around race/ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation in Northern Ireland as being 'communities of interest.' INCORE defines communities of interest as groups that have common needs or characteristics.¹

¹ For further information about this concept see: Davis, G. A. "Exploring the Concept of Communities of Interest." Available online: <http://crawford.osu.edu/cd/cd/communit.htm>

Summary of Recommendations

FUNDING

1. The level and stability of core funding provided by statutory organisations must be ensured to support the sustainable development of community organisations working with communities centred around race/ethnicity, disability or sexual orientation.
2. Some community organisations may benefit from training and support to assist them in building core costs into *all* funding applications wherever possible.
3. More capital grant schemes are needed to provide community organisations with office space of high quality construction that is well suited to multi-functional use.
4. Collaborative funding applications should be encouraged by funders in ways that do not diminish the autonomy and activity of local community organisations.
5. Organisations working with 'communities of interest' need to be aware of all potential avenues of funding – including those relating to community relations and good relations.
6. Training and support should be provided to enable organisations to access and maximise funding from the European Peace and Reconciliation Programme post-2006.
7. There needs to be greater promotion of organisations working with 'communities of interest' as leaders in the field of grassroots good relations work.
8. It is important that contracting is developed in line with the particular characteristics of organisations working with communities centred around race/ethnicity, disability or sexual orientation. For example, there should be recognition by funders of full delivery costs and the need for investment in additional relevant skills and knowledge.

IMPACT

1. Practical tools and approaches need to be developed to enable organisations that work with 'communities of interest' to document and measure their impact.
2. More resources need to be made available to research and disseminate the wealth of good practice already developed by these organisations - a starting point may be to produce case studies on completion of successful programmes, projects and activities.
3. Awareness needs to be raised about the value, contribution, and particular qualities and strengths of organisations working with communities centred around race/ethnicity, disability or sexual orientation. For example, through increased media coverage of the sector, specific profiles of organisations, or an awards scheme.
4. Solutions to issues and challenges raised in this paper need to preserve the benefits most organisations working with 'communities of interest' accrue from being relatively small and community-based. For example, solutions should minimise bureaucracy wherever possible, monitoring, evaluation and audit requirements should be proportionate to level of funding etc.

POLICY

1. Participation of community organisations in policy development is a key activity that should be adequately resourced. There needs to be greater support for mobilising community organisations to weigh-in on policy options and decisions that will affect them.
2. All statutory agencies and Government departments who regularly liaise and consult with community organisations should make a contribution to their costs.
3. There needs to be greater focus on quality rather than quantity of consultation and participation in policy development by organisations working with communities centred around race/ethnicity, disability or sexual orientation. Policymakers should consider what means are most appropriate to engage with small, under-resourced, community organisations, for example, informal interactions may be more appropriate. Language issues may also need to be addressed and financial support provided for expenses incurred for being part of the consultation process.
4. The consultation process involved in recent Hate Crimes Legislation may be worth examining as a possible model for replication.
5. Further research and review of the public appointments system may be necessary to encourage wider community involvement.

HUMAN RESOURCES

1. While volunteers are not paid, organisations need resources to support their work, for example, in recruiting, screening, training, supervising and acknowledging volunteers.
2. Community organisations could work together to promote benefits of being a volunteer (for example, self-development, improving employability) and to champion their organisations as good career options.
3. At the same time, organisations working with 'communities of interest' need to offer personal and career development opportunities that will enable them to hold onto staff. Organisations could perhaps consider some less formal training and skills development options such as coaching, mentoring, and secondments to other organisations.
4. Costs of staff training and skills development should be included in funding bids wherever possible.
5. Organisations working with communities centred around race/ethnicity, disability or sexual orientation could engage with media professionals to explore how the media can best support their work.
6. It may be useful for community organisations to work together to respond to media enquiries with a common voice.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

1. Programmes provided by organisations working with 'communities of interest' should promote intergenerational approaches to development and community cohesion where possible.
2. Resources need to be devoted to building the foundations of political engagement in communities centred around race/ethnicity, disability or sexual orientation. For example, increasing knowledge and interest in politics, encouraging action and participation, and bringing about efficacy and satisfaction from political engagement. A starting point may be to establish mechanisms whereby members of communities of interest can present their complaints and viewpoints to politicians.

3. Further research needs to be conducted into voter engagement among 'communities of interest' in Northern Ireland. This research could contribute to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee's ongoing investigation into *"Worrying Trends in New Arrangements for Voter Registrations."*
4. Politicians need to be challenged and asked questions over and over again concerning their attitudes and actions on racism, xenophobia and discrimination in Northern Ireland.
5. Politicians need to be encouraged to focus not only on laws and regulations, but also to work on the ground to educate and change people's attitudes in relation to communities of interest in Northern Ireland.
6. Community organisations should work together to challenge the different political parties to, 1) make sure they incorporate anti-racism strategies in their party programmes, 2) lobby the parties during election periods, and 3) follow up after the election to secure implementation of promises made.

Introduction

People belong to many different social groups, for example, with respect to race, class, sexuality, gender, background and life experience. Whether people identify with a particular social category, or a number of different social categories, is a matter of choice. Hence, people do not necessarily see every issue in terms of just one aspect of their identity such as their race/ethnicity, sexuality or gender.²

At the same time, there are a growing number of organisations founded in the shared experiences of communities centred around race/ethnicity, sexual orientation and disability in Northern Ireland. This study may seem unusual in comparing organisations that provide such disparate services as HIV counselling, English classes for adults and accessible transport for people with disabilities. It suggests however, that organisations working with communities centred around race/ethnicity, disability or sexual orientation face many common challenges, for example, in relation to core funding, staff recruitment, participation in policy development, community development, and political engagement/representation.

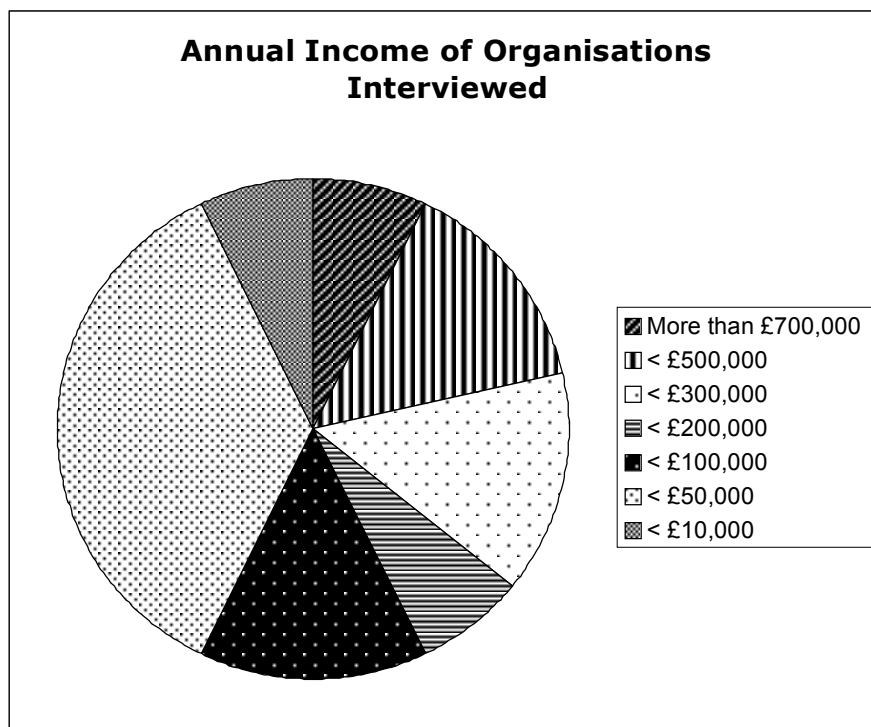
Perhaps most importantly however, organisations working with ‘communities of interest’ share the goal of greater self-determination of marginalized communities. In working towards this goal, these organisations challenge multiple forms of injustice and inequality. They also reclaim ways of understanding the distinctiveness of their communities whilst celebrating diversity, rather than fostering separateness.

“We need to start linking communities of interest together in a way that benefits them all, so we do not create a hierarchy of victimhood. We need to recognise what different communities have in common around issues such as employment. Diversity can bring in communities of interest that hitherto have been deemed ‘unacceptable.’

² For further information on ‘identity politics’ see Tietjens, Diana. 1997. *Feminist Social Thought*. New York; London: Routledge.

Funding

Sixty per cent of community organisations working with 'communities of interest' have an annual income of less than £100,000. The average annual income of organisations interviewed was about £210,000. In most cases, the majority of this income was made up of project funding; and a small minority was a mix of core and contract funding.



Core Funding

There are genuine concerns about the lack and inconsistency of secure funding available for core activities within organisations working with communities centred around race/ethnicity, disability or sexual orientation. Of the organisations interviewed, core funding (funding directed to an organisation's operations as a whole rather than to a particular project) averaged at fifteen per cent of total funding. Fifty per cent of organisations interviewed depended on OFM/DFM for core funding; several received no core support at all.

The problem seems to be not only the *amount* of core funding made available by statutory organisations; but also the *lack of consistency and confusion* regarding when it will be provided. Subsequently, a climate of instability has developed which: "distracts organisations from their key purpose, deters strategic planning and leaches essential expertise and experience."³

Furthermore, lack of core support undermines the effectiveness and impact of *all* available funding by:

1. Encouraging organisations to add programmes and projects simply to meet the year's budget.

³ Task Force on Resourcing the Voluntary and Community Sector. October 2004. *Investing Together: Report of the Task Force on Resourcing the Voluntary and Community Sector*. Available online: <http://www.taskforcevcsni.gov.uk/>

2. Preventing organisations from responding to new opportunities and challenges.
3. Generating costs, for example, through high staff turnover.

The small size of most organisations working with ‘communities of interest’ renders them particularly vulnerable to the impact of lack of core funding.

“We need more resources, that is, core funding for stability and recognition...our centre is funded year by year...so we have to fill in the same application form every year, whereas other community centres receive several years core funding from the City Council.”

Moreover, there has been a serious lack of capital investment in the organisations interviewed for this study. The majority of organisations visited had neither adequate buildings nor office space. Several community organisations were housed in temporary accommodation, a significant number had no disabled access and many had simply run out of space.

Recommendations

- The level and stability of core funding provided by statutory organisations must be ensured to support the sustainable development of community organisations working with communities centred around race/ethnicity, disability or sexual orientation.
- Some community organisations may benefit from training and support to assist them in building core costs into *all* funding applications wherever possible.
- More capital grant schemes are needed to provide community organisations with office space of high quality construction that is well suited to multi-functional use.

Project Funding

All of the organisations interviewed receive project funding from a relatively diverse base, typically including: Department for Social Development, Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Community Relations Council, City Councils, Health and Social Services Boards and Trusts, Community Foundation for Northern Ireland and the Community Fund. An important relatively new avenue of funding has been the EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation.

Many of the organisations working with communities centred around race/ethnicity, disability or sexual orientation also generate small amounts of income through, for example, charging for provision of training and hiring out rooms. A number of organisations receive support from individual donations and a few have received sponsorship from banks and building societies.

This relatively healthy picture however, hides a number of problems. Foremost, raising and accounting for funds from so many different funders takes up a disproportionate amount of organisations’ time and energy:

“Our staff do have fund-raising experience but we could do with more support as it takes up a lot of time. A specific fund-raiser would free up the time for our other staff to do what they are employed to do.”

Second, organisations centred around race/ethnicity, disability or sexual orientation are facing increased competition from older, more established members of the community and voluntary sector (sometimes referred to as the ‘mainstream’ community and voluntary sector). Such competition is intensifying as funding is increasingly distributed in support of ‘good relations’ between people of different religious/political beliefs and racial groups; rather than in support of ‘community relations’ - traditionally defined as interaction between the Protestant/Unionist and Catholic/Nationalist communities. Organisations once oriented towards ‘community relations’

are therefore increasingly engaged in 'good relations' activities, for example, offering anti-racism training. Yet, the experience of organisations working with marginalized 'communities of interest' means they are at least as well, if not better, placed to lead the promotion of good relations as the established community and voluntary sector.

"It is problematic that we are often chasing the same funders and people we've used before, we would like to diversify more"

The future of the EU Peace and Reconciliation Programme post-2006 is currently unclear. However, it is more than likely to involve some reduction in funds and increased competition for access to them. While members of the established community and voluntary sector in Northern Ireland tend to have sophisticated fund-raising infrastructure, only two of the organisations interviewed for this study had dedicated fund-raisers. Organisations working with 'communities of interest' generally fund-raise on an ad hoc basis and learn fund-raising skills on the job. These organisations may also be at a further disadvantage when competing for funding, as they may not wish to apply for certain funds, for example, lottery funding, due to their culture, traditions, values or beliefs.

Recommendations

- Collaborative funding applications should be encouraged by funders in ways that do not diminish the autonomy and activity of local community organisations.
- Organisations working with communities centred around race/ethnicity, disability or sexual orientation need to be aware of all potential avenues of funding – including those relating to community relations and good relations.
- Training and support should be provided to enable organisations to access and maximise funding from the European Peace and Reconciliation Programme post-2006.
- There needs to be greater promotion of organisations working with communities centred around race/ethnicity, disability or sexual orientation as leaders in the field of grassroots good relations work.

Contract Funding

Contract funding makes up a small but growing proportion of total funding for organisations working with 'communities of interest'. It is primarily larger organisations that are involved in contracts with statutory agencies. However, even these organisations have capacity issues in balancing the competing demands of core and contract work; sustaining services when they are heavily dependent on volunteers to ensure they are delivered successfully; and carrying out quality assurance work.

Recommendations

- It is important that contracting is developed in line with the particular characteristics of organisations working with communities centred around race/ethnicity, disability or sexual orientation. For example, there should be recognition by funders of full delivery costs and the need for investment in additional relevant skills and knowledge.

IMPACT

Roles

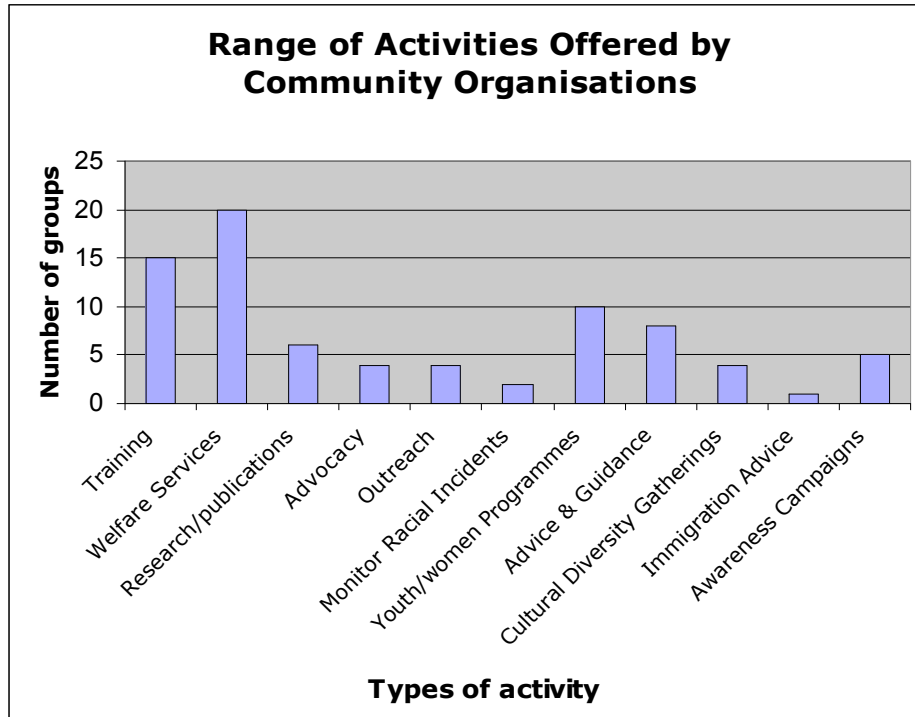
Organisations working with 'communities of interest' take action for the improvement of their respective communities. Like the broader community and voluntary sector in Northern Ireland, these organisations play: "a particular role in tackling social need, disadvantage and addressing inequality and draw on much that is good in our society: voluntary effort, concern about fairness and social need and providing a willingness to invest energy and imagination to improve living conditions for us all."⁴ More specifically however, community organisations working with communities centred around race/ethnicity, disability or sexual orientation:

1. Work at the cutting edge of social issues reaching out to those sections of the population no-one else will.
2. Promote the mental, emotional and physical health of members of communities of interest in Northern Ireland (organisations working with gay, lesbian and bisexual people play a particularly important role here in preventing the further spread of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections).
3. Challenge oppressive and discriminatory actions and attitudes, power imbalances, and unequal life chances.
4. Facilitate cross/inter-community engagement and address the misapprehensions, fear and bigotry that underlie racism, xenophobia and discrimination in Northern Ireland.
5. Promote the empowerment and participation of individuals and communities; supporting communities in developing relevant skills and structures to be able to take action and participate effectively.
6. Assist government and other institutions in developing inclusive policies and delivering services successfully.

⁴ Ibid.

Range of Programmes & Activities

In doing so, these organisations deliver a vast array of projects, programmes and activities in both urban and rural settings throughout Northern Ireland:



Beneficiaries

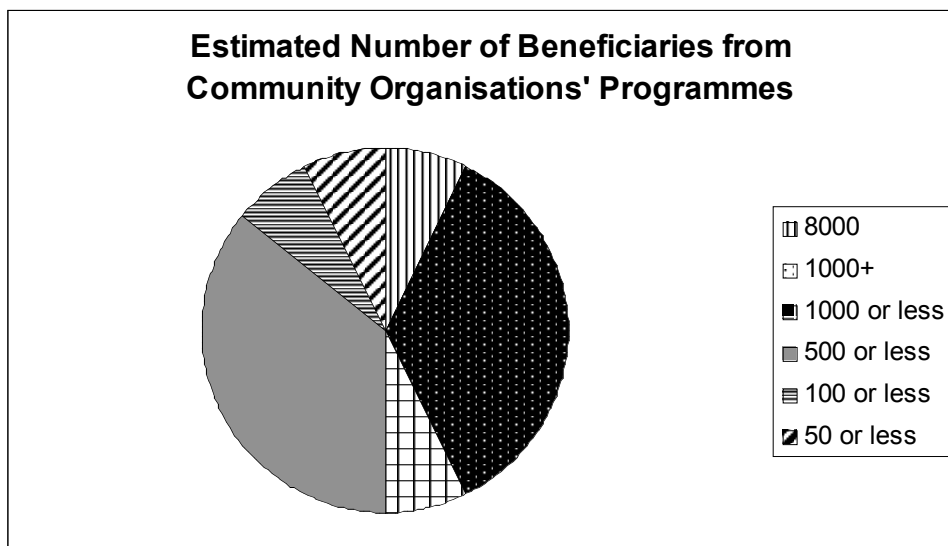
Fifty per cent of the organisations interviewed estimate that they are currently reaching more than one thousand people through their programmes, projects and activities. Given that the average annual income of organisations working with 'communities of interest' is about £210,000, this suggests that these organisations are highly cost effective, reaching deep into Northern Irish society.

"We are the only gay male specific counselling and support service available in Northern Ireland... for 6 months of the last year, we had 750 people contacting us for access to HIV information in both group and one-to-one sessions, we received 1500 telephone queries, 180 accessed our residential services, we had 1300 personal callers, and 200 condom packs/leaflets are given out each week...."

"The Indian Festival which took place at Botanic Gardens in August was a great success – more than 6000 people attended"

"By doing presentations and speaking to local groups and schools the word about our centre spreads. It is crucial for us to break the ice with people and make direct, personal connections to them. This really makes a difference when we can speak to people and answer their questions honestly. We need more resources for this. We are most concerned about those with whom we have never connected."

“There are a lot of barriers between the travellers and the local communities due to prejudice and fear that have built up over the years, so we need to make more personal connections with local people”



Demand

Organisations working with 'communities of interest' are facing increasingly high levels of demand for places in community organisations' programmes, projects and activities. Many of the organisations interviewed noted that they never had to *“chase down”* participants and that *“people come to us.”* Four organisations described how they could not expand their current programmes to meet existing demand due to lack of funds, staff and, in two cases, due to inadequate premises (for example, premises with no disabled access and lack of space):

“There is some excellent work going on in certain areas but this is not true for the whole of NI. It does depend on your postcode. There are ‘black’ spots – where we have nothing to offer people with mental health issues.”

“We are well known in the Chinese community as their main source of support. Not all of the Chinese community need to use us but they know we are there.”

“People can see the changes in those who participate in our programme and more people are being referred to us because of this —we have an established reputation

“We currently have a waiting list for our youth project as it can only accommodate 12 young people at a time.”

“We get requests to hold cultural events all the time but we do not have the time or the people to respond to these.”

Innovation

An important characteristic of small organisations working with communities centred around race/ethnicity, disability or sexual orientation, seems to be their ability to maximise impact and efficiency by being flexible, responsive and accountable to local/community needs:

“We launched our anti-racism work with a cultural exhibition targeted at adults in North Belfast but it didn’t prove to be that popular so we went back to the drawing board and came up with the idea of going into schools to deliver anti-racism programmes, this has been a great success.”

“We were running a 10-week training course and found that some of the participants were dropping out because it was too much for them. So we changed it and began providing pre and post-programmes. This has worked...if something isn’t working and our clients are not benefiting, we do not want to waste money so we change it.”

“As a voluntary organisation we can be very innovative – perhaps more so than statutory bodies. For example, we recently identified the need for more research on the mental health and well-being of the Chinese community and so we lobbied the health trusts and government to provide us with some funding to produce a research report on the issue. We produced the report are now using it to lobby for funds to address those needs.”

“Young travellers and their parents raised the issue of the problem of early school leavers and lack of provision for them with us. We responded by developing a proposal for an Alternative Education Project for young travellers and the project began in November 2003. E.g. young travellers and parents raised the issue of early school leavers and lack of provision for them.”

Measuring Impact & ‘Good Practice’

As demonstrated above, all of the organisations interviewed for this study have brought about positive change for individuals and communities on the ground. However, aside from carrying out periodic evaluations for funders when required, these organisations do not formally measure or document this impact. This may account for the fact that there is little appreciation of the impact of these organisations beyond the immediate communities of interest concerned, and the few statutory organisations that work with these organisations on a regular basis.

At the same time, government initiatives such as Best Value, and increased competition among public, voluntary and private sector organisations, means it is increasingly important that organisations working with communities centred around race/ethnicity, disability or sexual orientation demonstrate their full value, contribution, and particular qualities and strengths to broader society:

“there has been too much emphasis on funding projects and activities rather than the impact of the change delivered...Improvements in how outcomes of fund activity are identified and measured will build confidence in the sector and should ultimately lead to less bureaucracy.... We recommend that the social capital indicators are adopted and promoted across government and the sector as a key part of the framework for the measurement of voluntary and community based activity.”⁵

⁵ Ibid.

Furthermore, increased collection and dissemination of 'good practice' would improve the effectiveness and efficiency of organisations working with communities centred around race/ethnicity, sexual orientation and disability. For example, sharing good practice encourages an exchange of ideas and strategies regarding how to solve common problems, build partnerships, and avoid each other's mistakes.

Obviously, there are challenges involved in community organisations measuring impact. For example, it may be difficult to measure more intangible or long-term outcomes; to identify a causal relationship between a particular activity and a particular outcome; and to find the necessary resources to commit to the process. Moreover, it may be necessary to develop approaches that pay special attention to the unique qualities of organisations working with communities centred around race/ethnicity, disability or sexual orientation.

A starting point however, could be for organisations working with 'communities of interest' to produce brief case studies on completion of successful programmes, projects and activities. These could be used to raise the profile of the organisations involved and to build a platform for lobbying for increased funding.

Recommendations

- Practical tools and approaches need to be developed to enable organisations that work with 'communities of interest' to document and measure their impact.
- More resources need to be made available to research and disseminate the wealth of good practice already developed by these organisations - a starting point may be to produce case studies on completion of successful programmes, projects and activities.
- Awareness needs to be raised about the value, contribution, and particular qualities and strengths of organisations working with communities centred around race/ethnicity, disability or sexual orientation. For example, through increased media coverage of the sector, specific profiles of organisations, or an awards scheme.
- Solutions to issues and challenges raised in this paper need to preserve the benefits most organisations working with communities centred around race/ethnicity, disability or sexual orientation accrue from being relatively small and community-based. For example, solutions should minimise bureaucracy wherever possible, monitoring, evaluation and audit requirements should be proportionate to level of funding etc.

POLICY

Advice & Guidance

Organisations working with 'communities of interest' work closely with a wide range of public bodies and statutory organisations. As discussed above, several larger organisations are involved in formal contracts with statutory agencies. About fifty per cent of community organisations interviewed state that they are regularly called upon by public bodies and statutory organisations to provide *informal* advice and guidance about managing relations with members of their respective communities of interest. In addition, nearly all organisations working with communities centred around race/ethnicity, disability or sexual orientation play some role in facilitating access to public bodies and statutory agencies by members of different communities.

"We have started providing translations services. We have no funding to actually do this – staff have to take time off to do it at the moment so this is not an ideal situation. By doing the translation, we are helping the statutory bodies fulfil their obligation to help the community access services."

Rights-based Strategies

Currently, there is widespread concern that government services are being 'downloaded' onto small organisations that work with communities centred around race/ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation, and that these organisations do not have adequate resources to cope. Such feelings may have contributed to a shift in the focus of a number of community organisations - away from 'remedying gaps' in statutory service provision, and towards empowering communities of interest to access mainstream services directly. About twenty five per cent of organisations interviewed described how they employ rights-based strategies to achieve this:

"We are overwhelmed by ethnic minorities coming to us for help and support in solving their problems. There is a general need to move away from problem solving and to encourage ethnic minorities to start going directly to public, bodies, statutory agencies and other advice centres. This means educating people about their local legal rights and system."

"The Chinese community needs to know about its rights and to develop the capacity to stand up and speak up – this is especially true for the first generation who generally feel helpless and that there is no point in complaining in a 'host' country where they are 'guest.' We need to develop a sense of citizenship and a sense of civil liberties in the Chinese community to provide the Chinese community with power and a sense of control. They need to know they have the right to be involved in the decision-making of public authorities."

"We believe in a sense of justice. The legislation and statutory services have been appalling in their treatment of mental health service users e.g. mental health services make up 27% of NHS services but we only get 16.8% of funding. There is a shortfall and this is because mental health is being discriminated against – people are written off and not regarded as equals."

Influence

Many of the organisations interviewed for this study have successfully established ongoing, working relationships with a wide range of public bodies and statutory agencies (a significant number of organisations noted their relations with the PSNI were particularly good). However, very few organisations feel they have any real effect or influence over policy-making. Whilst organisations working with communities centred around race/ethnicity, disability or sexual orientation are overwhelmed with requests to respond to consultations, most feel their inclusion in policy-making processes is tokenistic or an afterthought.

“We are starting to ‘barge down the doors.’ We find that we are included at the beginning of a process but it is always as an after-thought. We feel we are often commenting on what’s already been decided.”

“The reality is that we have no say in policy – there are not many policy documents out there that actually change after the draft has been circulated.”

“The programmes are developed from a Civil Service point of view and not from the ‘community’ point of view. It would be better if everyone sat down together and all departments were included in activities aimed at strengthening the (disabled) community.”

A significant number of organisations interviewed (particularly those working with communities centred around sexual orientation and disability) felt that policies in Northern Ireland still focus too heavily on sectarian issues and are not Section 75 compliant. Interviewees noted that the private sector in Northern Ireland has a very low level of diversity awareness, with only thirty-eight per cent of businesses having a full diversity policy in place. Northern Ireland companies compare unfavourably with the Republic of Ireland in this regard, where twice as many companies (seventy-six per cent) have a full diversity policy in place.⁶

“We need consistent support from government and government agencies. The Equality Commission needs to be supported and strengthened in its capacity to act in terms of people with mental health difficulties.”

“People need to start think beyond the two main traditions in NI and long the lines of equality for everyone.”

Participation

In general, the participation of community organisations interviewed in policy discussions is ad hoc – largely depending on whether the Director of the organisation has the capacity or resources available to get involved. Only a small number of organisations interviewed felt they were proactive in engaging with policy-makers; only two had a dedicated policy officer on staff.

It is worth noting that a significant number of organisations felt they made a positive contribution to the recent Hate Crimes legislation consultation process. Moreover, a number of organisations working with communities centred around sexual orientation seem to have developed a particularly high profile with regard to policymaking, and have developed substantial links to the Republic of Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom.

⁶ BBC News. 14 June 2004. “Northern Ireland Firms ‘Behind on Diversity.’” Available online: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/3803019.stm

“We exerted real influence on the Hate Crime legislation to ensure that homophobia was included.”

“Our Community leaders are well-connected and do know the movers and shakers. People are starting to pay attention now.”

Public Appointments

However, a large number of interviewees expressed deep concern about the lack of representation of communities of interest in public bodies. This is significant as:

“membership of public bodies enables the wider community to play an important role in influencing and shaping the provision of a whole range of services which are of critical importance. And this is particularly important in Northern Ireland where many public bodies are involved in areas which in Great Britain would be the responsibility of locally elected representatives.”⁷

Indeed, as of March 2004, there were 2,065 public appointments held in Northern Ireland in a total of 99 bodies, including those such as Equality Commission, Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, Northern Ireland Policing Board and District Policing Partnerships.⁸ In 1999, the Central Appointments Unit of OFM/DFM published an Action Plan and began to co-ordinate a number of steps aimed at improving the public appointments process and addressing under-representation of women, disabled people, ethnic minorities, young people and people representing grass roots interests.

It is clear however, that inequalities remain. In 2003/2004 sixty nine per cent of public appointments were held by men and thirty one per cent by women. None of the 456 appointments made during 2003/2004 were from an ethnic minority background; only three per cent of those appointed during the period declared a disability; and no figures are available in relation to sexual orientation. There remains therefore:

“a need for more inclusivity if public appointments in Northern Ireland are to be seen to be truly representative of the community. Areas of under-representation are being actively pursued by all departments and it is hoped that this will provide encouragement for more individuals from all parts of the community to put themselves forward for appointment.”⁹

“There is still no participative democracy here in Northern Ireland. It seems to be always about who can get ‘first past the post.’ In order to sit on QUANGO’s you first need an acceptable status in society.”

Recommendations

- Participation of community organisations in policy development is a key activity that should be adequately resourced. There needs to be greater support for mobilising community organisations to weigh-in on policy options and decisions that will affect them.
- All statutory agencies and Government departments who regularly liaise and consult with community organisations should make a contribution to their costs.

⁷ Secretary of State cited in OFM/DFM. 2002. *Public Appointments and Public Bodies in Northern Ireland*. Research Paper 04/02. Available online: <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/io/research/0402.pdf>

⁸ OFM/DFM. 2004. *Public Appointments Annual Report: 2003/2004*. Available online: <http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/publicappointments/index.htm>

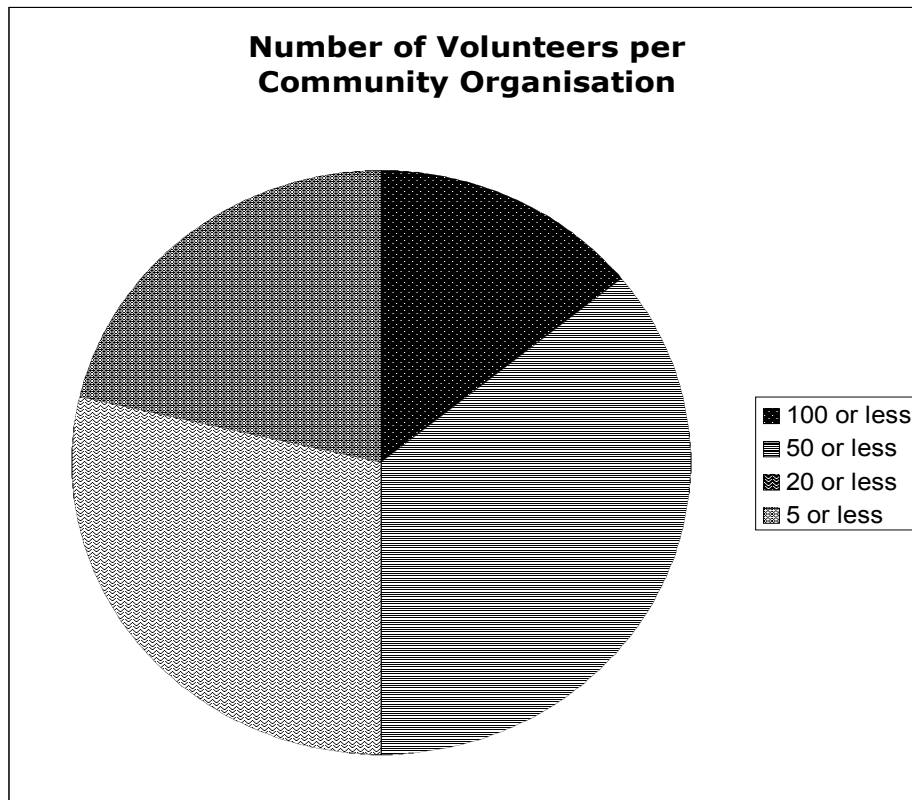
⁹ Ibid.

- There needs to be greater focus on quality rather than quantity of consultation and participation in policy development by organisations working with 'communities of interest'. Policymakers should consider what means are most appropriate to engage with small, under-resourced, community organisations, for example, informal interactions may be more appropriate. Language issues may also need to be addressed and financial support provided for expenses incurred for being part of the consultation process.
- The consultation process involved in recent Hate Crimes Legislation may be worth examining as a possible model for replication.
- Further research and review of the public appointments system may be necessary to encourage wider community involvement.

HUMAN RESOURCES

Volunteers

All of the organisations interviewed benefit from the contribution of at least one volunteer. Fifty per cent of organisations currently employ more than 50 volunteers. These volunteers contribute hours, new skill sets, motivation and local knowledge of the needs and resources of their community. They increase the quality and level of services provided by organisations working with 'communities of interest' while keeping costs reduced.



“The only thing the volunteer does not get is a salary, they are treated as equals to staff in every respect”

“Volunteers are crucial to us. For example, we only have one youth worker here but to run activities with children we need more than one adult available to provide adequate supervision and meet legal requirements etc.”

Several of the organisations interviewed encourage and train volunteers to launch their own programmes, activities and community-based projects. In addition, nearly all of the organisations interviewed mentioned the positive contribution made by voluntary members of their Boards and Management Committees.

“Many of our workers are voluntary, but not amateur”

Staff Recruitment

There is evidently a pool of talented, intelligent and creative individuals working in the organisations interviewed for this study. However, in sharp contrast to these organisations' success in employing volunteers, eighty per cent of organisations interviewed find it extremely difficult to recruit and retain staff. Interviewees cited a number of different reasons for this including:

1. Language barriers.
2. Lack of job security due to short-term funding of posts.
3. Members of minority ethnic communities gravitating towards 'professional' careers and careers in the private, rather than community and voluntary, sector.
4. Lack of funds available to be able to offer competitive salaries and attract quality applicants.
5. Difficulty in recruiting staff with experience of working with relevant communities of interest, or experience in 'diversity' i.e. having worked with more than just one community of interest.

"There is a shorting of experienced sexual orientation counsellors. We are having problems trying to recruit for this post."

"We are trying to attract capable and committed staff but this can be difficult as a lot of the community are first generation Chinese so there can be a language barrier. We are lacking in the availability of multi-lingual skills."

"Diversity is a more specialised field than having worked with just one community of interest e.g. youth."

Staff Training & Development

About fifty per cent of organisations interviewed had staff training and development policies in place and resources available to support them. Several of these organisations are working towards the Investors in People Standard and have won Investors in People Awards.¹⁰ At the same time however, a large number of organisations felt their provision for staff training and development was extremely poor due to lack of time and resources, or there not being appropriate training courses available, for example, anti-racism training for trainers programmes.

"Most of our training is in-house. We have very limited budgets for training."

Media & PR

Significantly, six of the organisations interviewed feel they need more training to be able to manage relations with the media effectively and to improve their public relations practice more generally. While there is currently a great deal of interest from the media in relation to racism, xenophobia and discrimination in Northern Ireland, most organisations working with communities centred around race/ethnicity, disability or sexual orientation feel the media stereotypes their respective communities and that they are unable to get *positive* information about their communities into the public domain.

¹⁰ The Investors in People Standard is a framework for delivering business improvement through people. Further information about the framework and how to put the Standard into practice is available on the Investors in People web site: <http://www.investorsinpeople.co.uk>

“We need the media on our side. We can get portrayed as murderers, sex offenders and violent people. This needs to stop...It is all about challenging stereotypes and bigoted and intolerant statements.”

While many organisations cited PR as their ‘downfall,’ several organisations centred around sexual orientation use innovative methods such as keeping members up to date with free of charge texts.

Recommendations

- While volunteers are not paid, organisations need resources to support their work, for example, in recruiting, screening, training, supervising and acknowledging volunteers.
- Community organisations could work together to promote benefits of being a volunteer (for example, self-development, improving employability) and to champion their organisations as good career options.
- At the same time, organisations working with ‘communities of interest’ need to offer personal and career development opportunities that will enable them to hold onto staff. Organisations could perhaps consider some less formal training and skills development options such as coaching, mentoring, and secondments to other organisations.
- Costs of staff training and skills development should be included in funding bids wherever possible.
- Organisations working with ‘communities of interest’ could engage with media professionals to explore how the media can best support their work.
- It may be useful for community organisations to work together to respond to media enquiries with a common voice.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Community development is, “a range of practices dedicated to increasing the strength and effectiveness of community life, improving conditions, especially for people in disadvantaged situations, and enabling people to participate in public decision-making and to achieve greater long-term control over their circumstances.”¹¹ However, there are a number of challenges to the development of communities centred around race/ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation.

Lack of Confidence within Communities

Ten of the organisations interviewed represent, or work with, just one community of interest. Nearly all of these organisations described a profound lack of confidence within their respective communities. Interviewees generally attributed this lack of confidence to the recent spate of racist attacks and hate crimes, as well as to broader concerns regarding threats to community identity.

Many organisations described the diverse forms of assault, verbal abuse and bullying taking place, “in people’s homes, in the street, in the workplace, in schools and in social settings.”¹² Harassment in schools and the education system seemed to be an area of particular concern for organisations centred around sexual orientation. Education is also a key matter for organisations centred around disability, many of whom called for the introduction of the Special Education Needs and Disabilities Bill, for inclusion of education in the Disability Discrimination Act, and for provision by Department of Education of sufficient resources to enable every disabled child in Northern Ireland to attend local mainstream schools.

“The community (mental health) as a whole is not confident. We have been treated so badly for so long. The stigma and discrimination are still evident. There is a lot of anger within the community from the ill-treatment, neglect and abuse that has been received.”

“Due to the level of harassment in society and schools it can be difficult to be proud to be Chinese.”

“Our community is confident in some respects – many of our community members are doctors, lecturers, business people and are very highly educated. But the community is not confident concerning the education of their children and racist attacks...we are living in a culture of fear...victims are scared to speak as they so easily be identified – Northern Ireland is a small place.”

“Confidence levels are very low and there is feeling of apathy within the community. There is the sense that promises have been made and not delivered. Travellers feel they are not accepted to the extent that some try and hide their identity.”

“We are confident in our beliefs but when it comes to achievability this is a different matter, for example, the Human Rights Bill and the Equality Bill focus on sectarian issues only.”

¹¹ Banjoko, Tunde. February 2005. *Tools for Community Development*. Presentation made at “Tools for Community Development Workshop” hosted by INCORE & CRESCO. Notes available online: <http://www.incore.ulst.ac.uk/policy/lilp/comdevdisco.html>

¹² Jarman, Neil and Tenant, Alex. 2003. *An Acceptable Prejudice? Homophobic Violence and Harassment in Northern Ireland*. Belfast: Institute for Conflict Research. Available online: http://www.conflictresearch.org.uk/publications/icrpubs/ICR_Homoph.pdf

Connectedness/Cohesion

There is no agreed definition of what constitutes 'strong' or 'healthy' communities. However, there is broad agreement that community connectedness and cohesion is an important factor in community development. During interviews, a significant number of organisations centred around race/ethnicity noted that generation gaps within their communities have implications for their community development practice:

"The expectations of the younger generation are different. They are more concerned with the future and education...the older generation is more work-focused and traditional, while the younger generation is more westernised and more Northern Irish in their thinking – so there is a generation gap which needs to be bridged."

"The community includes the old and the young so it's necessary to target these groups separately...there are good community leaders in place however, some have been in post for a long time and there seems to be a lack of younger leaders and new perspectives"

"Many first generation Chinese still feel like they are second class citizens and are segregated both economically and socially into the catering trade and Chinese community."

"It is slightly different with the second generation of the Indian community here – their beliefs are often a bit more diluted and declining."

"There is a growing amount of people within the community doing things. There are more people speaking out and taking on a leadership role, and the more these people speak out the more others will do the same."

Migration amplifies variations in lived experiences between generations through language loss, the influence of peer groups, and introduction of different cultural reference points and values. These variations make it difficult for young people and adults to recognise each other's opportunities, constraints and unique experiences, and therefore for young people and adults to work together to address social needs – sometimes referred to as the Intergenerational Approach to community development.¹³ Whilst communities centred around sexual orientation may not experience such clearly defined generation gaps, interviewees noted that gay/lesbian/bisexual teenagers experience tremendous isolation in Northern Ireland with there being few centres for them to go to, or role models to aspire to.

Political Engagement & Representation

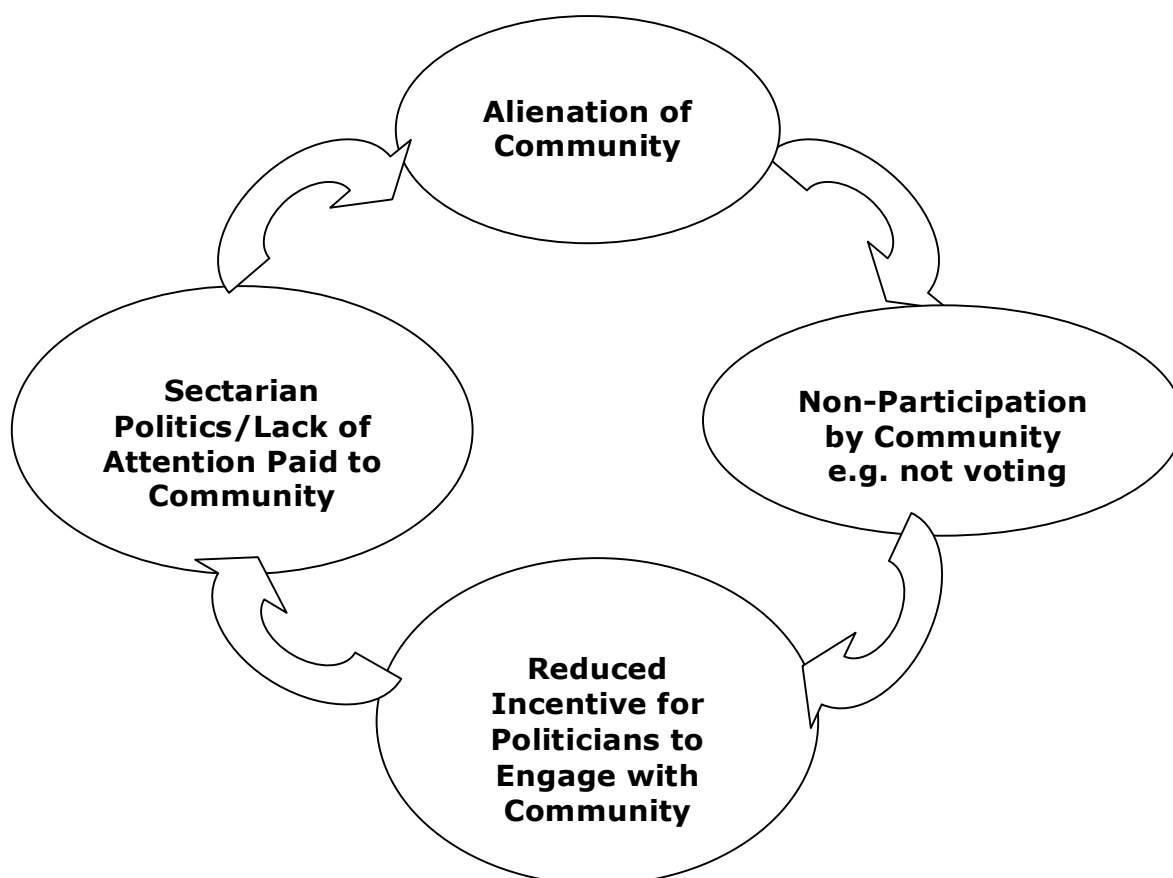
Political engagement and representation gives communities the ability to influence the decisions that affect them, their community and their local area. However, seventy per cent of organisations interviewed for this study called for greater political support for their work and their communities and, in particular, for politicians to go beyond moral condemnation of racist attacks and to deliver policies and resources on the ground.

"Most political parties support publicly, for publicity purposes. Ministers when they are appointed become detached from their political parties, but locally the elected representatives are more supportive."

¹³ ICRW. 2003. *The Intergenerational Approach to Development: Bridging the Generation Gap*. Available online: http://www.icrw.org/docs/ig_approach_1003.pdf

All interviewees who represented, or worked with, just one community of interest described their community as being entirely alienated and removed from politics in Northern Ireland. A number of reasons were cited for this alienation including, 1) members of communities of interest being reluctant to engage in what they perceive to be sectarian politics in Northern Ireland and thereby 'take sides,' 2) members of communities of interest being unable to participate, for example, disabled people have encountered problems with voter registration, and 3) lack of attention to the concerns of communities centred around race/ethnicity, disability or sexual orientation by political elites. The situation seems to have become something of a vicious circle:

Politics & Communities of Interest in Northern Ireland



“Many (politicians) are sympathetic and speak supportively, but on the ground there is no support...We need real support delivered on the ground. Politics in Northern Ireland is sectarian and not about policies as it is elsewhere in the world. There is not enough space for the Muslim community to become involved. Sectarian politics is the main agenda in Northern Ireland.”

“There is alienation between our community and political processes – we have had to fight to get in.”

“We are in a very polarised political position as the gay ethos is perceived as being against the traditional Christian attitude.”

“Politicians are perhaps not interested in the Muslim community because they don’t see them as having big enough voting power...at the moment, running for election is beyond our imagination...we are trying to make people aware about voting, registration and their rights so that they can feel like real citizens of this country.”

“Political support is often tokenistic. There are few real champions for the Chinese community as there seems to be little interest in obtaining their votes.”

“A large number of the traveller community do not vote”

“We haven’t been approached by any politicians, then again, we haven’t approached them.”

“Racism needs to be on political parties’ agendas and manifestos.”

“because of the political divide the political leaders only look after their own’ end’ of the community...political leaders seem to be able to incite racist comments and get away with it.”

Recommendations

- Programmes provided by organisations working with communities centred around race/ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation should promote intergenerational approaches to development and community cohesion where possible.
- Resources need to be devoted to building the foundations of political engagement in communities centred around race/ethnicity, disability or sexual orientation. For example, increasing knowledge and interest in politics, encouraging action and participation, and bringing about efficacy and satisfaction from political engagement. A starting point may be to establish mechanisms whereby members of communities of interest can present their complaints and viewpoints to politicians.
- Further research needs to be conducted into voter engagement among communities centred around race/ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation in Northern Ireland. This research could contribute to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee’s ongoing investigation into *“Worrying Trends in New Arrangements for Voter Registrations.”*
- Politicians need to be challenged and asked questions over and over again concerning their attitudes and actions on racism, xenophobia and discrimination in Northern Ireland.
- Politicians need to be encouraged to focus not only on laws and regulations, but also to work on the ground to educate and change people’s attitudes in relation to communities of interest in Northern Ireland.
- Community organisations should work together to challenge the different political parties to, 1) make sure they incorporate anti-racism strategies in their party programmes, 2) lobby the parties during election periods, and 3) follow up after the election to secure implementation of promises made.

CONCLUSION

As Northern Ireland inexorably becomes a more diverse place, organisations that work with 'communities of interest' will play an increasingly important role in society. Indeed, OFM/DFM's recently published 'Race Equality Strategy Consultation Document' highlights the:

"need for capacity building measures and resources required to enable minority ethnic people to participate in public, economic, social and cultural life. However this is not just or even primarily about the provision of funding. It includes aspects of training and organisational and personal development and resource building. It may also involve working with communities to develop the capacity of members of those communities to help themselves."¹⁴

This study suggests that this type of capacity building work is already being carried out by local organisations taking action for the improvement of communities centred *not only around race/ethnicity, but also around disability and sexual orientation*. While the work of these organisations obviously varies according to the needs of each community of interest concerned; these organisations are all committed to greater self-determination of marginalized communities, challenging injustice and inequality, and promoting the distinctiveness of communities whilst celebrating diversity.

Organisations working with communities centred around race/ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation therefore have much to offer each other and broader society in terms of sharing their learning and experience. Indeed, as Bronagh Hinds suggests, "leadership for the vision of a new, inclusive Northern Ireland is to be found in groups representing the most marginalized among which there is willingness to celebrate diversity, transcend differences and build common cause in their search for equality and parity of esteem."¹⁵

However, such leadership is unlikely to be forthcoming as long as organisations working with communities centred around race/ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation: face chronic shortages in core funding and capital investment; have inadequate resources to research and disseminate 'good practice;' are unable to exert influence over policy-making; fail to be adequately represented in public bodies; have insufficient resources to develop community confidence, connectedness and cohesion; and experience little political support for their work on the ground.

"we believe that every one of us is a human being and as such we are entitled to the same rights. We believe in participation and working with people, not for people."

¹⁴ OFM/DFM. *Race Equality Strategy - Consultation Document*. Available online: <http://www.newtsnni.gov.uk/race/index.htm>

¹⁵ Hinds, Bronagh. "Perspective – Dealing with Difference." BBC NI – Eyewitness. Available online: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/northernireland/eyewitnesess/difference/perspectives/index.shtml>

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APPENDIX

Interviewees

Amnesty International
Belfast Islamic Centre
Belfast Travellers Education & Development Group
Jewish Community Centre
Ballymena Community Centre
Chinese Welfare Association
Disability Action
Diversity Matters
Indian Community Centre
Intercomm
Multicultural Resource Centre (MCRC)
Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM)
Rainbow Project
S.T.E.E.R(Support Training Education Employment Research)
Wah Hep Chinese Community Association