

DIVERSITY IN ACTION PROJECT
FINDINGS SUMMARY

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FINDINGS SUMMARY

INCORE's Diversity In Action (DiA) project commenced in December 2006 and finished in September 2008. It was funded by the EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation within Measure 2:1, Reconciliation for Sustainable Peace, via the European Directorate of the Community Relations Council. The aim of the DiA project was to help build the capacity of Northern Ireland's minority ethnic sector, with a particular focus on the North West area. The objectives of the project were as follows:

- To assist minority ethnic groups and those working with and representing minority ethnic communities in developing the skills required to deal with bias and harassment through appropriate training programmes;
- To promote ongoing collaboration between majority and minority communities, policymakers and community practitioners;
- To provide opportunities for focused interaction between majority and minority communities;
- To produce models of good diversity practice; and
- To develop a forum to bring local minority ethnic groups together.

The DiA project achieved the above objectives by:

- Delivering an Ending Hate in our Communities Training Programme;
- Organising a series of seminars to explore a range of issues relevant to minority ethnic groups; and
- Working closely with local minority ethnic groups to develop the Foyle Multicultural Forum

This document summarises the findings of the DiA project and highlights the issues facing minority ethnic communities under a number of identified themes. It also includes a set of recommendations which aim to further support the work of minority ethnic communities and ensure their full participation in Northern Ireland society. It is hoped that this information will be a practical and useful resource for minority ethnic community groups and those working with and representing minority ethnic communities in further developing and deepening their advocacy and practice work in the future.

KEY FINDINGS

The following findings have been compiled through discussion and debate taking place during the DiA project in its delivery of seminars, conferences and meetings with the Foyle Multicultural Forum.

Information

- Frontline staff from key statutory agencies and service providers are still not fully equipped to deal with members of the minority ethnic community who have a limited command of the English language. This is a major barrier for many members of minority ethnic communities in communicating effectively with agencies and service providers and securing appropriate information, advice and entitlements.
- Many agencies and service providers have endeavoured to translate information into different languages. However basic information is still not reaching members of minority ethnic communities, e.g. information on accessing health services and employment rights.
- Many minority ethnic communities are not aware of their rights and entitlements in areas such as housing, health, education and employment. Those who are familiar with relevant legislation continue to lack the confidence to confront or challenge discrimination and exploitation in, for example, the workplace.
- The media is often the prime source of information for members of the majority community. Members of minority ethnic communities are often negatively portrayed within various media outlets, including television, radio and newspapers. This has a significant impact on both individuals and minority ethnic communities and can act as a major barrier to feeling welcomed and accepted within Northern Ireland society. Despite efforts, it has been difficult to engage directly with the media to explore these issues and much work remains to be done to ensure a balanced approach to reporting on issues related to minority ethnic communities.

Capacity building

- Smaller and newly formed minority ethnic community groups struggle to establish themselves to become fully functioning organisations, due to a lack of capacity, skills and local knowledge. Many groups are heavily reliant on volunteers who may have other commitments and may not have the time required to devote to developing the organisation.

- There continues to be a lack of capacity and confidence within minority ethnic community groups to conduct lobbying and advocacy work on issues pertinent to their community.

Funding

- In the present financial climate, it has become increasingly difficult for minority ethnic community groups to source funding to sustain and develop their work. Groups are feeling isolated because of constant financial insecurity and the lack of sustainable and long-term funding sources to support their work.
- Many minority ethnic groups are competing with the wider community and voluntary sector for funding from a limited number of sources such as Peace III.
- Other funding difficulties include: a lack of clear information on funding options; complicated funding procedures and the lack of capacity in smaller and newer minority ethnic groups to complete application forms.

Bias and prejudice

- Members of minority ethnic communities are regularly subjected to bias, prejudice, and verbal and physical harassment. There is great concern with regard to the significant level of hate incidents and hate crime in the community. Many members of the minority ethnic community find it difficult to come forward and report incidents because of negative experiences in their own country with authoritative bodies such as the police.
- Members of minority ethnic communities are subjected to regular discrimination and exploitation in areas such as employment and housing. Individuals are reliant on community groups to challenge discrimination on their behalf and groups are limited in their capacity to ensure that instances of exploitation and discrimination do not recur.

Policy

- Groups in the North West region are significantly under-represented in, and have significantly less access to, existing mechanisms for influencing diversity such as the Racial Equality Forum. The 'hubs' for diversity events tend to centre around Belfast and are difficult to access and attend for those based in the North West.
- There is significant evidence to suggest that many experiences and issues which minority ethnic communities are facing are not being acknowledged or documented. Minority ethnic community groups often find themselves 'fire-fighting' on issues to do with immigration, health, housing, and employment and do not have the capacity to record individual experiences.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the work of the DiA project the following recommendations can be made:

Information

- While some statutory agencies have endeavoured to provide staff diversity awareness training, there is a need for agencies to provide a more permanent training programme. This should be rolled-out to all relevant staff and would address a broad range of themes, including cultural and religious differences. Agencies should also ensure that all new staff members have the opportunity to avail of diversity awareness training to ensure a consistent agency-wide approach.
- Statutory agencies should endeavour to employ front-line staff with language competency in common minority ethnic languages, as well as providing readily available interpretation and translation services where required.

Capacity building

- The capacity-building work and support for minority ethnic communities through funded projects such as DiA should continue to be supported in the short to medium-term. There is a need to build skills and confidence within minority ethnic communities so, in the long-term, they can speak for themselves and can become their own representatives, advocates and champions.
- Long term funding support should be provided to wider networking bodies such as the Foyle Multicultural Forum, to ensure continued collaborative working and to provide an accessible vehicle for lobbying and advocacy work for minority ethnic communities in the North West.

Funding

- There is a need to provide funding workshops for minority ethnic communities in order to develop their capacity around applying for funding and sourcing alternative opportunities for funding. This might usefully be provided through funded projects similar to the DiA project.
- Established minority ethnic organisations should explore partnership working with other comparable groups, as well as those organisations within the wider community sector working on common issues, to open up more funding opportunities and ensure sustainability of the sector.

Bias and prejudice

- Increased third-party reporting on hate crime and hate incidents should be encouraged through interagency working involving for example community groups, public bodies and the Police Service for Northern Ireland (PSNI).
- Continued training to raise awareness of the impact of bias and harassment is required in order to curb the levels of prejudice and racism within Northern Ireland society. This might usefully be provided through funded projects similar to the DiA project.

Policy

- More formal engagement between groups in the North West and policy-makers is required in order to influence policy. Organisations like the Foyle Multicultural Forum are ideally placed to act as an interface between community practitioners and policymakers.
- Minority ethnic communities and those working with, and representing, minority ethnic community groups should further promote the positive initiatives which are taking place within the community and voluntary sector. There is a need to emphasise good practice so as to promote the North West as a convivial place to live. Many communities and groups have worked extremely hard to make the North West a welcoming place for those from minority ethnic backgrounds.
- A North West focused scoping exercise to identify pressing issues with regard to living conditions, employment, health, housing, accommodation and overall quality of life would provide detailed insight into the experiences of minority ethnic communities who live and work in the region and provide empirical evidence of need and issues to be targeted and addressed.

CONCLUSION

The key findings and recommendations documented above are consistently raised with regard to minority ethnic communities. These matters continue to require attention and remain unresolved. The demand for the continuation of activities similar to those delivered by the DiA project is evident in the above findings. This is further re-inforced by an independent evaluation of the project which underlined the value of supporting future work with minority ethnic communities in the North West and across Northern Ireland to develop and support this growing - and increasingly important - sector.

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