



LILP - Challenging Sectarianism & Racism Meeting
28th June 2004

Attendees:

- Lekan Abasi - Black Youth Network
- Fay - Black Youth Network
- Leish Cox - Chinese Welfare Association
- Robin Dempsey – PSNI
- Ward Erwin - Community Safety Unit
- Ken Fraser - OFM/DFM
- Chris Gilligan - University of Ulster
- Jacqueline Irwin – CRC
- Jamal Iweida - Belfast Islamic Centre
- Joe Lenaghan - Equality Commission
- Helen Lewis – INCORE
- Fiona McMahon - Disability Action
- Roisin O'Hagan – INCORE
- Mrs Sharada - Indian Community Centre
- David White - Trainer

Purpose

The purpose of this meeting was to establish how INCORE could contribute to the area of 'Challenging Sectarianism & Racism'. A brief background was given on the work of INCORE and specifically INCORE's Local International Learning Project (LILP).

The group highlighted their frustration at attending lots of meetings to discuss the 'same old' issues. It was suggested that the group focus on achieving real results and define its aims and objectives as soon as possible. It was indicated that INCORE's involvement would be driven by the group's needs.

Members of the group felt that in order to 'Challenge Sectarianism and Racism,' we need to tackle the broader culture of intolerance and fear of difference in Northern Ireland.

Capacity-building.

Reference was made to the 'Durban Declaration' that urges states to establish and implement National Action Plans aimed at combating racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. The group discussed the difficulty of implementing such action plans when there is insufficient capacity within local communities.

It was pointed out that capacity can be difficult to sustain. We need to put structures in

place that will enable local groups to

- 1) support their various communities, and
- 2) take the lead in addressing the issues that affect them.

Many black and minority ethnic groups need support in developing fund-raising capacity to be able to compete with the community and voluntary sector. It was noted that capacity is not just about funding and resources. Capacity also refers to a group's management and leadership skills, to its ability to partner and collaborate with other organizations, to its relationship with the community, and to its ability to assess the impact of its work. To date, little has been done to measure these aspects of capacity.

Members of the group voiced their frustration at the lack of impact of anti-racism work in Northern Ireland. It was pointed out that black people born in Northern Ireland are often neither accepted here, nor within their own 'African Community,' giving rise to feelings of living in a 'no man's land'.

If there were more black and minority ethnic group activists then we would be better able to

- 1) influence the indigenous community in Northern Ireland
- 2) raise awareness of the work that is being done.

Mapping exercise

It was suggested that INCORE carry out a mapping exercise of groups that work at the community level to combat racism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance. It was recommended that:

- The focus of the mapping be on the various community groups' capacities and capacity building needs.
- The exercise involve visiting/interviewing the groups.
- The exercise be 'modest.' It should have clear parameters and be carried out within limits on time and resources. Any mapping document produced should not claim to be final or comprehensive but be viewed as a starting point for further research.
- From the beginning, we should think about how we will take the results of the mapping forward.
- The exercise could perhaps result in a directory of groups - detailing their various resources and capacities.
- The exercise should allow the full diversity of issues, voices and needs to emerge. A summary document may not be able to capture all of these issues, voices and needs. However, we must make sure that those left out are 'housed' elsewhere.
- The exercise should provide opportunities for groups to learn from one another.
- We should avoid 'going over old ground' and build on what is already there e.g. the Multi-Cultural Resource Centre has previously carried out a brief mapping exercise.

- The exercise should be sensitive to different concepts of racism e.g. do the groups take a multicultural or equality approach? Do the groups take the view that ethnic minorities can be racist, or do they reject such a view?

Good Practice

It was suggested that INCORE examine and challenge assumptions regarding 'good practice' in combating racism. We should question what 'good practice' is and avoid equating 'good practice' with practice that simply already exists.

It was pointed out that the disability sector has a wealth of experience relevant to minority ethnic groups and others involved in combating forms of intolerance. We should provide opportunities for this knowledge and experience to be shared across sectors.

Funding

It was noted that funding is not growing in proportion to the growth of groups involved in combating racism and other forms of intolerance. There was much discussion around this lack of funding. Members of the group highlighted how difficult it can be to sustain good work on a voluntary basis.

It was suggested that funding only seems to become available when serious incidents happen. However, the recent rise in racist attacks does not seem to have resulted in an increased level of funding.

There is a need to consider future policy regarding funding. If the government could guarantee the sustainability of funding it would be much easier for groups to plan for the future e.g. by being able to offer long-term contracts/job security for staff.

At the same time, it was noted that many black and minority ethnic groups would not be in existence today without the current funding that is being received. We cannot simply keep looking to OFM/DFM for money.

It was also noted that there are occasions when groups struggle to deploy the funding they do have. We need to maximise funding by assessing performance. In addition, groups with very different agendas often find it difficult to coordinate their work. If these groups were to collaborate and work in partnership, they might be able to leverage greater funding.

It was noted that while there is plenty of good work being done in Northern Ireland, we still do not have the same level of resources as compared to the Republic of Ireland or Scotland.

Conclusion

It was suggested that Northern Ireland could potentially be a model for combating racism

and other forms of intolerance. Northern Ireland could also learn from different international approaches to bias, bigotry and racism.

INCORE agreed to carry out a brief mapping exercise and reconvene the group to discuss the results. The group will hopefully then be able to

- 1) identify critical learning and capacity-building needs, and
- 2) consider what programmes might best address these needs.

If you would like to make additions or amendments to this document please contact:

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