MEM-VOL Migrant and Ethnic Minority Volunteering

Summary: Final Report United Kingdom

**A Transnational Exchange Programme
in Austria, Denmark, France, Germany,
The Netherlands and United Kingdom**

**in the framework of the
Community Action Programme to Combat
Social Exclusion (2002 - 2006)**

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Contents

1.   Background to the project

Across Europe volunteering is increasingly being seen to have a large role to play in social policy. It is being variously seen as a mechanism for self-expression for the individual, an important element in thinking how welfare is to be delivered and as an important contributor to social capital.

The MEM-VOL project focuses on volunteering by people from black and minority ethnic communities. The premise of the projects is that volunteering can benefit people through helping integration into society either directly by helping to find paid employment, or by assisting in other aspects of cultural and societal integration.

It was felt that not enough is known about volunteering by people from black and minority ethnic communities at a European level; consequently MEM-VOL co-ordinated partners from Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom to review what is known about black and minority ethnic volunteering.

The aims of the project were:
- To compile known findings of research into black and minority ethnic volunteering;
- To identify where this research has highlighted good practice;
- To identify a small selection of organisations to further investigate incidences of good practice;
- To bring together these organisations with other stakeholders and policy makers in a seminar to examine issues
- To report this back to the MEM-VOL project

This report summarises the project in England and was written by The Institute for Volunteering Research (IVR), a specialist agency researching and evaluating volunteering.

2. Immigration into the UK

2.1 Definitions

The use of 'ethnic minority' as a broad label is deliberate, to signify reference to a wide variety of ethnic minority groups, based on Census classifications.

2.2 Brief History of immigration

Britain has seen the inward migration of people attracted by work, the prospect of a better life or to escape unrest and persecution at home. In the fourteenth century new technical skills arrived with French weavers and German engineers. In the sixteenth century refugees from France, Belgium and the Netherlands escaping religious intolerance arrived. The 1830s and 1850s there were large numbers of Irish immigrants driven from their homes by rural poverty and famine. The building of the British Empire and increasing world trade increased the numbers of new people coming to Britain, and by the end of the eighteenth century there were about 20,000 black people living in London.

The Second World War saw the arrival of large numbers of people from the Caribbean who came to live and work in the UK. Immigrants from India and Pakistan arrived mainly during the 1960's. Refugees from Uganda arrived in 1970's. Most Chinese and Bangladeshi people came to Britain during the 1980's. Many black Africans also came during the 1980's and 1990's.

By the end of the 1970s Britain had introduced much stricter controls on immigration. Black and other minority ethnic citizens continue to establish themselves into the fabric of UK society, while the political debate about immigration has shifted somewhat to look more at new arrivals in terms of being refugees and asylum seekers. London attracts around 85 per cent of asylum seekers entering the country. Over 450 organisations in Greater London provide services for refugees and asylum seekers.

2.3 Socio-economic data about Black and Minority Ethnic Communities in the UK

The 2001 Census found that around 8 per cent of the total UK population belonged to an Ethnic Minorities (4.6 million). The largest group was Indian (22.7 per cent), followed by Pakistanis (16.1 per cent), those definded as Mixed Ethnic backgrounds (14.6 per cent), Black Caribbean (12.2 per cent), Black African (10.5 per cent) and Bangladeshi (6.1 per cent). The remaining ethnic groups each accounted for less than 0.5 per cent but together accounted for 1.4 per cent of the UK population. For the first time the 2001 Census allowed people to describe themselves as mixed ethnicity, and 677,177 people chose to identify themselves as mixed ethnicity.

A report by the Social Exclusion Unit (Cabinet Office 2000) stated "there is a significant lack of information about minority ethnic groups in society, and about the impacts of policies and programmes on them". However, it went on to say that although much variation within and between ethnic groups peo-

ple, these groups were more likely to be poor and unemployed, regardless of age, gender qualifications or place of residence. For example the report notes that people from minority ethnic communities are disproportionately represented in deprived areas. Figures show that 28 per cent of people in England and Wales live in households with incomes of less than half the national average; however, this increases to 34 per cent for Chinese people, over 40 per cent for Afro-Caribbean and Indian people, and over 80 per cent for Pakistani and Bangladeshi people.

It should also be noted that there are differences within communities, for example rates of economic activity show very different profiles within the Asian group.

People from Britain's ethnic minorities are integral to the economy of the country and can be found in all sectors doing a wide variety of jobs. There are areas that show concentrations, 23 per cent of Britain's doctors were born overseas, and while a similar proportion of restaurant employees (24 per cent) were born outside the UK. Over two-thirds of independently owned local shops belong to people from ethnic minorities (CRE 2003)

Health is also an area where people from minority ethnic communities appear to be at a disadvantage – but again the picture does not show that all people form these communities suffer worse health than their white counterparts. People from Indian, African and Chinese communities have similar levels of self-reported health to white people, but Pakistani, Bangladeshi and African-Caribbean people report more ill-health. Explanations for this variation focuses on the relationship between socio-economic status and the ability of health services to reach people in need (SEU 2000).

3. Volunteering in the UK

3.1 Definition of volunteering

The definition of volunteering used, relates to: '*any activity which involves spending time, unpaid, doing something which aims to benefit someone (individuals or groups) other than or in addition to, close relatives, or to benefit the environment*'. (Davis Smith, 1998)

3.2 Historical overview

The history of volunteering in the UK is a long one, but with the charitable explosion of the nineteenth century taken to be its most recognisable recent starting point. During the twentieth century the role of volunteering underwent a transformation. Before the outbreak of World War Two many welfare services were delivered at the local level through voluntary organisations and voluntary action, but after 1945, and the establishment of the welfare state, volunteering and charitable action was expected to diminish. The assumption that the state was to take a far greater role in looking after people suggested to many that the voluntary sector – and volunteering- might wither away.

This denuding of voluntary action never happened; growing dissatisfaction with public services and the identification of new social needs were spurs for a re-invigoration of voluntary action, and it remained as important as ever.

Government has long been interested in supporting volunteering, to a greater or lesser extent, to help achieve its own aims. From 1997, with the election of the Blair New Labour government, the UK government has shown great interest in supporting volunteering and this appears to be something all parties agree on.

Today figures suggest that somewhere between a third and a half of the adult population volunteer during the year. A National survey of volunteering in 1991 (Lynn and Davis Smith 1999) found that 51 per cent of the adult population volunteer. When this survey was repeated in 1997 (Davis Smith 1998) this figure had dropped to 48 per cent; however this drop was more than made up for in an increased number of hours people where giving to voluntary work.

In 2001 the Home Office – the part of the UK government with responsibility for volunteering – completed a Citizenship survey (Attwood et al 2003). This survey researched participation in civic participation, social participation and volunteering. It found that 39 per cent of the population had volunteered – considerably less than the last national survey of volunteering reported. The Citizenship survey did use questions from the 1997 National Survey of volunteering, but given that volunteering surveys are highly sensitive to timing, the question asked and the context in which it is asked (Lyons et al 1998), it is important that another national survey of volunteering is conducted to carry-on the time-line of dedicated volunteer surveys. However, in the absence of such data we use the Citizenship Survey (Attwood et al 2003) not least because it contained a large sample for black and minority ethnic people.

3.3 Black and Minority Ethnic communities participation in volunteering

The 1997 *National Survey of Volunteering* (Davis Smith, 1998) suggested that levels of volunteering were lower among black and minority ethnic groups than they were among their white counterparts (49% of people of white British origin volunteered; 41% of Black and Asian; and 36% of other ethnic groups). It is worth noting, however, that the non-white sample size for the survey was quite small and as such firm conclusions were not possible.

A number of other studies have provided further evidence on the under-representation of black and minority ethnic groups from formal volunteering. The National Coalition of Black Voluntary Organisations' (2000) survey of 95 charities that together involved 263,000 volunteers, found that only 3% of all volunteers were black, and a third of all groups had no black volunteers at all. Further, 43% of charities had no black trustees, and of those charities that did involve black trustees, black trustee accounted for just 9% of all trustees.

However, a number of studies have highlighted different participation rates among BME groups across different forms of voluntary action. As Niyazi notes, (1996; see also Leigh, 2000; Davis Smith, 1998), BME communities have a long tradition of community involvement, but the voluntary action that takes place tends to be informal rather than formal involvement in mainstream voluntary organisations. Levels of participation may be much higher if informal community-based participation is the focus of research. As such, it is important to be careful when interpreting generalised research results.

Examining the 2001 *Home Office Citizenship Survey* suggests that while there appeared to be a further decline in numbers to 39 per cent, there was no decline in volunteering within some Black and Minority Ethnic communities; so, in effect, black participation in volunteering has remained constant while some other groups have declined.

Despite this, the report still shows that people from deprived areas are the least likely to volunteer and, as we have seen, there is a concentration of people from ethnic communities in the poorest districts of the UK.

4. Research into the barriers to black and minority ethnic volunteering

A number of research studies have been undertaken to explore the reasons why those from minority ethnic groups are less likely to become involved as volunteers in mainstream organisations, and in particular outside of their own communities. Some of the barriers identified by Niyazi (1996) and Foster and Mizra (1997) included the lack of outreach work by mainstream organisations to black and minority ethnic people, as well as the need to offer interesting and challenging volunteer work. Issues relating to language–both in terms of access to information about volunteering were also identified.

More specifically, Akpeki (1995) identified barriers to participation of BME groups as trustees. These included the use of inappropriate marketing strategies; a lack of commitment by mainstream organisations to involving black trustees; a lack of strategies to recruit, support and retain trustees; an absence of monitoring systems; no support of equal opportunities policy; no exit interviews. Isolation felt by lone black volunteers and a lack of clarity in voluntary organisations about why black trustees were being recruited were also identified as important.

Stemming from such research findings, a number of recommendations have been made that could overcome these barriers and increase levels of participation among minority ethnic communities (see for example, Niyazi 1996; Britton, 1999; Foster and Mirza, 1997; Akpeki, 1995; Bhasin, 1997). Some of their recommendations included the need for targeted recruitment campaigns, the use of appropriate terminology within recruitment materials. Recruitment procedures should be less bureaucratic and equal opportunities should be fundamental to an organisation's philosophy, unnecessary police checks should be removed. Volunteers should be encouraged to utilise and develop their skills, expenses should be paid up front, flexible hours and childcare facilities or expenses should be provided.

Although drawing on evidence from a broad cross-section of voluntary action within general volunteer-involving organisations, the barriers and recommendations identified in the research provide useful insights and guidance for increasing the representatives of volunteer involving organisations and to identify methods to overcome such issues.

5. National programmes to facilitate black and minority ethnic volunteering

Recently new research has been carried out in the form of an evaluation into a government funded project that sought to twin BME organisations with mainstream organisations in a project called *The Black and Minority Ethnic Twinning Initiative* (Gaskin 2003). In 1999 £700,000 was given to six projects involving 19 organisations, nine of which were BME organisations. The purpose was for BME and mainstream organisations to learn from each other and to:

- Raise national awareness of current good volunteering practice in BME communities;
- Improve the quantity and quality of opportunities for BME volunteers;
- Increase the participation of people from BME groups in mainstream voluntary organisations; and
- To provide BME organisations with access to mainstream and strategic funding

The project was intended to look at capacity building of BME voluntary organisations, but had much to say about volunteering. Over the course of the project organisations taking part developed better ways to involve volunteers, and managed to attract in many first-time volunteers. In particular the project noted that:

- Organisations need to recognise the limits of 'word of mouth' recruitment and be proactive about finding volunteers;
- This includes recognising that different people are attracted by different messages. BME organisations found that stressing the potential of volunteering to improve skills was important;
- However there is also a need to recognise that many people may want to volunteer to help others but may lack confidence. In such instances organisations need to emphasise that their experience is of great value.(Gaskin 2003)

With the exception of *The Black and Minority Ethnic Twinning Initiative*, there have been no programmes initiated by national government specifically focussing on migrant and ethnic minority volunteering. The twinning project was a relatively small programme designed to uncover innovation and promote good practice between BME and mainstream organisations rather than being a large-scale national programme. Even then, volunteering was only one aspect of the project.

Government has tended to focus on general programmes volunteering programmes that have included, to a greater or lesser extent in each programme, elements that draw attention to the issue of diversity and including more people from a wide range of backgrounds into volunteering. These projects have included:

- The Experience Corps was a high profile, government funded project to market volunteering to older people and find suitable volunteering opportunities for volunteers. This did have a more explicit aim of attracting volunteers from BME communities. Disappointing results have meant that funding is not being renewed; however, it is recognised that the work to involve Black and Minority Ethnic communities through engaging with local faith communities was innovative. This is a lesson learned from the Experience Corps showing faith as a key area to engage with different communities, but that such work is intensive.

- Millennium Volunteers – a government backed programme to attract young volunteers aged 16-24. This programmes has been given considerable resources (the initial amount given was £52 over three years, but more has been given to the programme). Millennium Volunteers money has provided the resources for organisations to do outreach work in communities to recruit and support young volunteers, An aim of the programme was to attract in young people who had not previously volunteered and those from disadvantaged communities. Monitoring information suggests that, overall, the programme has had considerable success in increasing the diversity in volunteer-involving organisations working with the programme (Davis Smith, Ellis and Howlett 2002).
- TimeBank is a government backed project to raise the profile of volunteering by engaging people as 'time-givers' to causes they feel strongly about. It is a virtual matching system that puts potential volunteers in-touch with local volunteer-brokering services.
- National volunteer projects such as REACH Volunteering which exists to encourage volunteering principally by the retired, semi-retired and those approaching retirement and Community Service Volunteers have projects to reach Black and Minority Ethnic Communities. Local volunteer bureaux do similar work.
- Many national charities have outreach workers recruiting from all local communities. Increasing volunteer-involving organisations are seeing the benefits of diversifying their volunteers to reflect the communities in which they work.

Although not programmes, there do exist organisations, and resources, which specifically look at the issues of BME involvement in voluntary action – these are
- The National Coalition for Black Volunteering – a charity which offers training on involving Black volunteers
- The Council for Ethnic Minority Voluntary Organisations, an umbrella body which focuses on increasing the impact of ethnic minority voluntary organisations through:
  - Mapping of the minority ethnic voluntary sector, consultations with minority ethnic voluntary organisations in the UK.
  - Establishing a BME Voluntary Sector Network; helping to access professional volunteers for trustee boards
  - and providing access to policy papers and seminars of interest to ethnic minority voluntary organisations.
- Black Volunteering Online is a new online service set-up by black volunteers for black volunteers and for Charities that want to involve them. It is a one stop volunteering shop where any BME person visiting the site can find out about volunteering positions, and be assured that because organisations that request for volunteers on the site are fully committed to recruiting from BME communities.

5.1 Increasing diversity

Organisations are recognising diversity, and the interest of government in this was confirmed when the Prime Minister addressed the issue in a speech he made about how organisations involve people from the communities in which the work, he said:

'Too many voluntary organisations have volunteers that all come from the same background, and their recruitment drives target the same people again'(*Volunteering* 2000:4)

Because there has been a lot of research into barriers to the participation of black and minority ethnic volunteers, organisations need help in seeing how they can overcome them. The Prime Minister's 'diversity challenge' prompted the National Centre for Volunteering to set up a diversity web-site with practical advice and tools for organisations to assess their diversity and to think about how to widen the community from which they draw their volunteers – the diversity web-site can be found at: http://www.diversitychallenge.org/

6.   Good practice and the MEM-VOL project in England

As indicated in the previous section, there is a developing body of research into the barriers to black and minority ethnic volunteering in England (and the UK more generally). Involvement with the MEM-Vol project allowed us to gather more views from people working within the volunteering field and to draw upon the expertise of those for whom involving people from a range of backgrounds constitutes their daily work. It allowed us to further explore whether groups recognised the barriers identified in research.

To identify organisations from which we could learn more about good practice, we chose to alert organisations to the work we were doing for this project by disseminating information about the project through the extensive networks of the National Centre for Volunteering. We invited people to come forward to tell us about the work they were doing. The response was good and the project stimulated much interest.

Eventually we chose to maintain contact with six organisations and interviewed these about their work. We decided to choose these organisations because they represented a variety of ways that organisations interact with the community and with volunteers. Our framework was to choose organisations which:

- Work directly with people in the community;
- Work as a broker encouraging people to volunteer and then find volunteer opportunities within other organisations;
- Are national organisations working at the local level;
- Are mainstream (predominantly white) organisations working to involve more BME volunteers.

A brief description of each case study organisation is outlined in the following sections.

6.1   Case Study 1
The Small Heath Community Forum
This forum was founded in 1996 as a community led organisation bringing together local people, and those with a stake in the regeneration of this part of the city of Birmingham. The forum is a membership organisation, set up originally under a Single Regeneration Budget programme for the area.

6.2   Case study 2
The Linkup project
Linkup is an initiative run by the Basic Skills Agency, the national development agency for the improvement of numeracy, literacy and language skills in the England and Wales. It is funded by the Adult Literacy, language and numeracy Strategy Unit (DfES) and the Active Community Unit (Home Office) and is part of the Government's Skills for Life Strategy to improve adult literacy. Volunteering is seen as a key way to support people who need a helping hand to improve their literacy, language and numeracy skills.

6.3. Case study 3

'Feeding the homeless'

The 'feeding the homeless' project is a joint initiative between RSVP (Retired and Senior Volunteers Project) and Sri Sathya Sai (SSS) (an international service organisation based on faith). The project was established in 2001 when a there was a realisation that homeless people in Barnet in North London were not provided with a hot meal at weekends or bank holidays.

6.4. Case Study 4

AGE Concern in Brent

Age Concern in Brent (a borough in inner London) has worked in the borough for over 30 years. Age Concern linked up with RSVP to bring local people together through volunteering and community activities. All members of Age Concern are also RSVP members and play a vital link in working with the Older People's Forum which is an integral part of the life of people on the estate.

6.5. Case study 5

Stevenage Volunteer Agency (SVA)

Stevenage Volunteer Agency (SVA) is one of about 350 volunteer bureau working in the UK to promote and increase volunteering. The agency supports around 140 local organisations involving volunteers. The agency set up a World Forum to give a collective voice to the ethnic communities in the town.

7.   Report on the workshop

A significant part of the MEM-VOL project was to bring together the case studies interviewed for the project with policy makers and stakeholders as well as MEM-VOL colleagues from Europe.

The seminar in England was held in London on Friday 4th July 2003. The Agenda for the day was based around presentations from participants followed by discussion:
- Introduction of the project and setting the scene of minority ethnic volunteering in the UK
- Outlining the process and aims of MEM-VOL
- Presentations from attending organisations
- Discussion about barriers to volunteering
- How to overcome these barriers

The discussion focussed around a number of key issues:
- Barriers to volunteering
- Organisational good practice
- The role of government

8. Conclusions

The MEM-VOL project in England has brought together existing knowledge about black and minority ethnic volunteering. It also facilitated the engagement of organisations currently trying to encourage more volunteering from black and minority ethnic communities.

Working with the case-studies, and discussion in the workshop, showed that identified barriers still hold true: recruitment is a vital area, there is a constant need to review volunteer management and there are key issues to be considered in terms of how volunteering is translated in language and cultural terms.

The project also re-affirmed that there is a role for government in encouraging volunteering and that infrastructure is vital. Many of the case study organisations were engaged in developing volunteering and broadening its appeal to diverse communities. But this took resources, and this needs to be recognised.

Additionally it must be noted that there is no 'quick-fix' to encouraging more volunteering. Case studies alluded to the power of volunteering to bring people into the community, to give them a sense of purpose and commitment as well as facilitating the learning of new skills ready for paid employment. But, it can be a slow process; outreach workers alluded to the time needed to encourage people to volunteer. And when people are interested sometimes they need their confidence built before they are ready to volunteer.

The project has shown the value of volunteering as a way of affecting change in people and communities; but it has also shown that there are many lessons to be learnt to make this more effective.

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