



Routes to Solidarity, England

Impact Assessment

Executive Summary



Oxfam GB

Citizen Voice Outcome Indicator

External Evaluation, March 2012

Full report: Cambridge Policy Consultants

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Routes to Solidarity, launched in April 2009, was a UK-based initiative, aimed at supporting and *empowering* BME women and women's groups. The project was funded through the Department for Communities and Local Government. Key Routes to Solidarity activities included the Routes to Solidarity training events, one-to-one mentoring of BME women's groups and the provision of seed funding to support organisational development. There was an overall (generic) ambition to encourage policies and practices that were sensitive to the needs of BME women but no specific policy change objectives were identified; instead, the project clearly opted to focus on empowering BME women's groups and allowing the groups themselves to decide which areas they wanted to work on.

2. This report presents an evaluation of the Routes to Solidarity project. The evaluation team was explicitly asked by Oxfam Great Britain to apply the organisation's 'process tracing' methodology, which tries to assess the impacts of an initiative by looking at a range of possible explanations for a particular impact, including both activities by Oxfam Great Britain and external influences, and drawing conclusions as to how important, if at all, the Oxfam contribution to this impact has been. The evaluation applied the process tracing methodology to six case studies:

- The development and launch of the Why Refugee Women charter, setting out minimum standards for service delivery to refugee women, developed by the Why Refugee Women group with support from Routes to Solidarity staff;
- The development and launch of the Black Manifesto as a broad coalition of BME organisations – the Black Manifesto aimed to help set the agenda for achieving race equality for the next UK Government in the run-up to the 2010 general election; Oxfam aimed to strengthen the base;
- The development of mechanisms to improve Leeds City Council intelligence and data gathering on poverty, gender and ethnicity – an organisation called the Leeds BME Women Forum, established with support from Routes to Solidarity, was the main organisation engaging with the Leeds City Council on this;
- The introduction of ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes for Somali women – these classes were organised for and at the request of the Manchester Somali Women Forum, a BME women's group supported through Routes to Solidarity;
- Establishment of the Women Solidarity Forum – a group of women who had participated in the Routes to Solidarity training; and,
- Securing of Big Lottery funding by Westwood & Coldhurst Women Association – WCWA was one of the BME women's groups receiving one to- one mentoring support through Routes to Solidarity.

3. Applying the process tracing methodology ideally implies the development of a 'causal' story, starting from a clearly defined *intended* outcome, discussing the steps were taken to achieve this outcome and assessing the available evidence basis as to whether or not the intended outcome was achieved and, if so, which factors (including both Routes to Solidarity and others) contributed to this outcome. This was difficult for the Routes to Solidarity case studies.

The case study outcomes, as described above, are highly specific but few if any can really be presented as ‘intended’ outcomes: Routes to Solidarity did not *explicitly* set out to improve minimum standards in service delivery for refugee women; to secure Big Lottery funding for Westwood & Coldhurst Women Association; to bring about ESOL classes for Somali women and so on. There was a clear overall ambition to improve service delivery and policy-making affecting BME women, but no detailed policy or practice change objectives were specified in advance. The table below distinguishes between (generic) intended outcomes and (specific) unintended outcomes in the six case studies. Because this distinction does not fit Routes to Solidarity’s way of working, ‘intended’ and ‘unintended’ are used (throughout the report) between inverted commas.

Table 1 The six case studies – ‘intended’ and ‘unintended’ outcomes

Routes to Solidarity objectives	‘Intended’ outcome	‘Unintended’ outcomes	
		Impacts on BME women	Impacts on policy/practice
Empowerment of BME women Improved networking among BME women Policy-making and service development that takes into account BME women’s needs	Empowerment of BME women in Yorkshire and the Humber	Establishment of the Why Refugee Women group <i>Case study 1:</i> The development and launch of the Why Refugee Women charter	Awareness-raising around refugee women support needs among individuals (including policy-makers and service providers) attending the launch of the Why Refugee Women charter
Improved networking among BME groups	<i>Case study 2:</i> Widening the ownership of the Black Manifesto (strengthening/maintaining the coalition)	/	/
Organisational capacity-building of BME women’s groups Policy-making and service development that takes into account BME women’s needs	Organisational capacity-building of Leeds BME Women Forum	Leeds BME Women’s Forum’s engagement in advocacy with Leeds City Council	<i>Case study 3:</i> The decision by Leeds City Council to start collecting statistics on gender and ethnicity
Organisational capacity-building of BME women’s groups Policy-making and service development that takes into account BME women’s needs	Capacity-building of the Manchester Somali Women Forum	Identification of lack of suitable local ESOL classes as a key need	<i>Case study 4:</i> The introduction of ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes for Somali women
Empowerment of BME women Policy-making and service development that takes into account BME women’s needs	Empowerment of BME women in the North West	<i>Case study 5:</i> Establishment of the Women Solidarity Forum	Impacts through Equality Office consultation responses and through lobbying of North West Policy Forum
Organisational capacity-building of BME women’s groups	Organisational capacity-building of Westwood & Coldhurst Women Association	<i>Case study 6:</i> Securing of Big Lottery funding by Westwood & Coldhurst Women Association	N/A

4. The available evidence clearly suggests that the Leeds BME Women's group, the Why Refugee Women's group and the Women's Solidarity Forum would not have come about without the Routes to Solidarity programme. The Routes to Solidarity training was seen as having been instrumental in establishing these networks in the first place – simply by putting women who did not previously know each other in touch with one another; by enthusing women who already knew each other to really “do something collectively”; or more generally by empowering trainees. Following the training, Routes to Solidarity follow-up mentoring support was described as important in helping with the early organisational development of each of the three networks. Routes to Solidarity was not the only driver – for example, some of the Why Refugee Women already knew each other through the Northern Refugee Centre; there was already a ‘loose’ network in place between key women who were to form the Women's Solidarity Forum – but stakeholders were clear that Routes to Solidarity had been a *necessary* player.

5. If Routes to Solidarity indeed was a necessary player in getting the networks up and running in the first place, it logically follows that Routes to Solidarity can claim some credit for any outputs generated by these networks, including the Why Refugee Women charter; the 2011 Government Equality Office consultation event organised in the North West by the Women's Solidarity Forum; and the advocacy work on race and gender data collection targeting Leeds City Council. Moreover, Oxfam's contribution to these outputs goes beyond organisational development support: Oxfam staff were credited with having directly contributed to the Why Refugee Women charter, the consultation event and the advocacy work with Leeds City Council through practical support and tactical advice on how to go about targeting the right players, reaching out to audiences and organising launch and consultation events.

6. With regard to the three other case studies – the development of the Black Manifesto; the introduction of ESOL training for Somali women and the Big Lottery funding for Westwood and Coldhurst Women's Association – the picture is still very positive, if slightly more complex. There had already been a Black Manifesto in 2005 without any Oxfam involvement and some stakeholders (not all) believed that there may well have been a 2010 Black Manifesto without Oxfam; interaction between Gingerbread and an ESOL training provider who was actively on the look-out for an opportunity to link up with a community group to provide ESOL training appears to have been particularly important in bringing about the ESOL training; WCWA had already applied for Big Lottery Funding prior to their involvement in Routes to Solidarity. That being said, in all three cases, Oxfam's Routes to Solidarity programme was seen as having played an important role. Even if something may have happened without Routes to Solidarity, stakeholders were clear that Routes to Solidarity greatly *facilitated* the process:

- In the case of the Black Manifesto, Oxfam was seen as having been instrumental in having a wider coalition of BME organisations than would otherwise have been the case and in keeping this coalition together;
- Oxfam was seen as having played an important role in getting the Somali women to identify the lack of suitable ESOL classes in their area as a pressing issue they wanted to act upon in the first place; Oxfam was also

seen as having been crucial in making sure that things got done and the momentum was not lost;

- In the case of the WCWA Big Lottery funding application, earlier financial support by Oxfam had enabled the organisation to build a strong evidence base which they used in their funding application. More generally, WCWA referred to and used their partnership with Oxfam as an extra asset in their application.

7. In terms of what has enabled these outcomes to be achieved, there are a number of common themes:

- The Routes to Solidarity training has been an important part of the support. There is extensive evidence (also confirmed in the analysis of the training feedback forms) that the training has had a genuinely empowering effect. That being said, all case studies have included an element of active follow-up mentoring support following the training – and stakeholders across the case studies have confirmed the importance of this additional and proactive follow-up support;
- The ‘style’ and way of working of Oxfam Routes to Solidarity staff appear to have been equally important. Organisational development and coalition building can be challenging processes and Oxfam staff appear to have navigated these challenges with skill. In particular, staff were credited with working in a genuinely empowering way – encouraging and supporting but letting the BME women themselves lead and set the agenda;
- Routes to Solidarity ran during a period of a real squeeze in funds and many groups were fighting for their survival. This presented a number of challenges to the initiative in that it proved at times harder to engage organisations in advocacy. That being said, there is evidence that the Routes to Solidarity capacity-building has been a real help for some organisations by building their confidence to contact funders and decision makers; making them think about how to evidence the need for their services and be generally better in case-making;
- Encouragingly, the different groups established through Routes to Solidarity seem optimistic about their future and the sustainability of their network. That being said, they all identified the possible discontinuation of the Routes to Solidarity support as a serious challenge. Where it has not been possible to provide follow-up support (as for example in the case of the Black Manifesto), longer term impacts appear to have suffered.

8. The main findings with regard to the application of the process tracing methodology are as follows:

- The ‘process tracing’ methodology, whereby case studies are used to explore in depth the different factors and actors bringing about a particular result, has proved useful in the Routes to Solidarity evaluation, mainly because Oxfam staff were able to suggest a number of relevant outcomes and because by and large enough contact details were available to allow an in-depth exploration of what brought about the outcomes.
- However, the biggest weakness in applying the ‘process tracing’ methodology in the Routes to Solidarity evaluation was, perhaps ironically, the same as the

methodology's main strength: its clear focus on exploring the circumstances which brought about a highly specific result. Arguably the main outcome of the Routes to Solidarity programme – strong empowerment of BME women – has almost become a secondary theme running across the evaluation report, whereas it would have taken centre stage in a more traditional project evaluation.

- The process tracing protocol suggests clearly distinguishing between intended and unintended outcomes. The idea is that a causal story can be developed, starting from a specific *targeted* outcome, exploring to what extent this outcome has been achieved and to what extent Oxfam activity contributed to this outcome. Applying this distinction (intended/ unintended) in the Routes to Solidarity evaluation was less straightforward. The actual targeted (intended) outcomes of the project were fairly generic: there was an overall ambition to encourage policies and practices that were sensitive to the needs of BME women; however, identifying the exact nature of the policy and practice changes that were required was left to the BME women's groups concerned.
- The fact that the process tracing methodology focuses exclusively on impacts means that a wealth of potentially very useful *process* information is being missed. In the words of one Routes to Solidarity member of staff, "*the wider work and efforts of the Routes to Solidarity project is ... lost when only described through the description of the six case studies*".
- The requirement to give a numerical score to each case study outcome is potentially one of the most interesting elements of the process tracing methodology. The scoring key provided by Oxfam makes this scoring process (against our initial expectations) surprisingly straightforward. The only challenge in the context of the Routes to Solidarity evaluation was that the 'extent observed' scores were a given; the basis for selecting the case studies was precisely the fact that a particular outcome had been achieved.

9. Precisely because of the limits of the process tracing methodology in assessing the Routes to Solidarity project, more 'traditional' research questions and data collection methods were used to complement the process tracing component. The key findings are as follows:

- The project provided training 225 women from 77 different groups and more intensive mentoring support to 22 groups;
- Routes to Solidarity training participants feel that they have increased their knowledge base – on BME women issues; on the political decision-making process and advocacy techniques – and they report increased confidence, motivation, optimism and clarity about advocacy and lobbying. Importantly, they report a clear increase in their sense of belonging to a wider BME women sector, which is something the project explicitly set out to address;
- Several policy-makers suggest that they are now more aware, more likely to consider, more likely to take action or urge others to take action around BME women's issues.

In short, the evidence suggests that Routes to Solidarity has achieved positive outcomes in the key areas the project set out to address.