



Commission on Integration and Cohesion: Consultation

A submission from Oxfam's UK Poverty Programme

January 2007

About the UK Poverty Programme

Oxfam GB established a UK Poverty Programme (UKPP) in the mid 1990s in response to a concern that it should begin to address poverty 'at home' in a more systematic way. Oxfam believes that poverty, social exclusion and discrimination represent a denial of human rights, preventing people from exercising their full rights (e.g. to housing, adequate health care, education, to an adequate standard of living). In our view, human rights-based approaches are essential in tackling poverty, social exclusion and discrimination.

The UKPP's work is organised around the key programme themes of sustainable livelihoods, asylum, and equalities. We have piloted gender analysis within service delivery as a means of highlighting gender assumptions, identifying inequalities, and developing action in response. We are developing a race equality programme to tackle the causes of poverty, and supporting black and minority ethnic communities in seeking solutions. Race, disadvantage and poverty are closely linked, and the different and disproportionate effects on black and ethnic minority communities and individuals are often overlooked. We run an asylum programme working on protection issues and public attitudes to asylum, recognizing that asylum seekers and refugees experience disproportionate degrees of poverty, discrimination and difficulty in accessing basic services. Recently, we initiated a project working directly with migrants in the North of England.

For further information about the UKPP's work, see www.oxfamgb.org/ukpp/

Introduction to Oxfam's submission

Oxfam welcomes the establishment of the independent Commission for Integration and Social Cohesion.

Our response draws upon our experience set out above, and also that of our programme partners – grassroots organisations engaged in regeneration, community cohesion and anti-poverty work in England, Scotland and Wales. Our experience, both in the UK and globally, shows that community cohesion cannot be engineered; that successful cohesion comes from community members and sub-groups within communities coming together and engaging in decision-making on their own terms.

The main body of this submission covers our key concerns, in answer to the seven key questions for national bodies. These are, broadly,

- The need to ensure that marginalized communities and individuals are fully able to participate in local and national decision-making;
- That poverty and economic disadvantage are acknowledged as key factors in causing segregation and isolation of communities;
- That discrimination and racism are experienced daily by many in the UK, further isolating disadvantaged communities and individuals;
- That the devolution of powers and the spreading of roles amongst many organisations and local bodies requires proper support from, and oversight by, the Department for Communities and Local Government, and other appropriate Government departments; and
- That equal access to, and provision of, services is key to successful cohesion of mixed communities of new and established residents.

Context

In addition to our answers to the key questions set out in the consultation document, we have a number of concerns regarding the context of this Commission and of the Government's current focus on community cohesion:

The impact of anti-terrorism measures: There are fears that Government policy to prevent extremism is likely to undermine cohesion. Black and ethnic minority communities have reported increased racism since the London bombings on July 7 2005 and the measures taken to counter terrorism by the Government T.¹ Many of these groups feel that anti-terrorism policy is directed against ethnic minority, and particularly Muslim, communities, and this may result in resistance to efforts at community cohesion.

Over-emphasis on assimilation: Many ethnic minority communities feel that the current focus on community cohesion overemphasises integration and assimilation. There is a perception that these communities are being held responsible for successful cohesion, rather than all communities, regardless of faith or race, being held jointly responsible.

Downplaying of other structural issues: The focus on race in the community cohesion agenda is in danger of overshadowing the effects of other structural factors influencing exclusion and isolation, particularly gender and poverty.

Re-orientation of funding: Re-directing funding criteria for grassroots and community groups is putting specialist intra-community service providers at risk. A number of community groups such as BME women's projects have reported that funding criteria now require them to provide services to all in the community, reducing their ability to provide services to their original client base and undermining their specialist provision. This concern has been cogently expressed by equalities organisations.²

Question 1: What does 'cohesion' mean to you? What does 'integration' mean to you? What might a community which is both integrated and cohesive look like?

A cohesive community is one where all people feel valued and respected, and where barriers arising from discrimination are effectively tackled and all people are able to access decision-making structures. In a cohesive community, power is shared

equally and the vulnerable and voiceless feel they have a stake in and influence over the decisions that are made. The reality is that too often people in poverty do not get heard, particularly women and those from BME communities. Women, especially black and minority ethnic women, remain the majority of the poorest groups in Britain, such as pensioners, lone parents, and part-time workers. Women receive on average 54 pence for every £1 of income received by men³. Women are still under-represented in decision-making nationally and locally, and BME women, despite being “heavily involved with community, religious and non-governmental organisations ... are severely under-represented in British politics”⁴.

This under-representation leads to inappropriate public service provision – and a resulting increase in isolation. For example, women from East Manchester Beacon Women’s Network, part-funded by Oxfam, reported that “There is no direct transport service to new amenities in the area... Most of the bus routes are city centre routes. Imagine... going off to work, but failing to collect children from school; never being on time due to lack of local bus routes.”⁵ Oxfam’s work on regeneration and gender has shown that women often have little understanding of what regeneration is and no confidence that they can engage with decision makers and decision making structures⁶.

As national projects such as Get Heard⁷ have demonstrated, ‘real’ participation takes place in ‘created space’ – i.e. that which has been developed and is managed by participants within the space so that they have autonomy over the space. This involves establishing forums where men and women at the grassroots are in control of the agenda; this can lead to their being able to engage more effectively in consultative forums set up by statutory authorities and other official bodies (known as ‘invited space’, where participation is on the terms of those with power). For these forums to be effective, decision-making structures and processes must be transparent to all, and designed and implemented with the full involvement of representative community members.

Question 2: What do you think are the main tensions between different groups in our communities? What factors do you think contribute to these and what are your thoughts about how to tackle them? What role can local leaders play in tackling them?

Poverty undermines solidarity. Although the main differences between communities are often visible, the underlying cause of community tension is most often economic disadvantage. Research into attitudes towards asylum seekers and experiences of immigration in neighbourhoods⁸ has shown that negative perceptions are more entrenched in communities and amongst groups of people most worried about lack of social resources, such as health services, housing and social welfare. Tensions between asylum seekers and host communities are more likely, where asylum seekers have been dispersed into communities that are under-prepared to receive new arrivals, and where local institutions and resources are already stretched..

Racism and other forms of discrimination lead to isolation of black and ethnic minority communities and individuals. Many BME participants in Get Heard, including both long-settled community members and new migrants and asylum seekers, described racism as a regular feature of daily life. “Discrimination prevents employment – discrimination against our names, religion, accent, appearance; change all this and we will get a job today.”⁹

Recently, Oxfam has begun working with the PeaceMaker project in Oldham, which was founded to overcome prejudice, fear and segregation along ethnic lines, to

support the development of inclusive communities, and to challenge racism. PeaceMaker will bring together Pakistani and Bangladeshi residents of Glodwick, where civil disturbances took place in 2001, to engage with statutory and non-statutory service providers in order to identify solutions to the poverty and disadvantage that is still experienced by ethnic minority groups in the area. Government reports into the disturbances pointed to the social and physical segregation of different ethnic communities that resulted in groups leading 'parallel' lives.¹⁰ Despite various Government initiatives and regeneration investment across Oldham, the area of Glodwick (where there is a higher concentration of Pakistani and Bangladeshi families) continues to experience multiple disadvantages, impacting more severely on young people and ethnic minority women. The PeaceMaker initiative will focus on the discrimination that exists within service provision and the collective failure of service providers to engage meaningfully with these communities. We believe there will be learning from this local initiative/project which will be relevant to other communities facing similar circumstances.

Question 4: Why do you think people from different backgrounds may live parallel or separate lives? Is this positive or negative?

Economic disadvantage most often lies at the root of separation. Oxfam's programme of work with migrants in the North West of England has shown that many migrants do not know any resident British people; their work in low-paid, low-status jobs segregates them from the wider population, they often live in housing where their only neighbours are other migrants, and their experience of racism leads them to feel too unsafe to socialise outside of work. As Get Heard¹¹ and other projects have shown, indigenous communities in Britain also experience isolation due to poverty, poor housing, lack of public transport, and unemployment.

Increasing emphasis on the importance of choice in public services also threatens to reinforce separation within communities as those who cannot exercise any choices, due to a lack of capacity and resources, are left behind by those who can.

People naturally socialise within their own communities of identity, and, although these communities may coexist in overlapping geographical space, they may not share the space in a way that promotes contact between different groups. Positive action is required to bring communities together, but this needs to be done sensitively and on the terms of the participants. The Friends and Neighbours groups operating in Cardiff provide spaces for newcomers and residents of local communities to come together to exchange language learning and share local knowledge, and provide an opportunity for different groups to come together and begin to build shared community space. The Friends and Neighbours groups show that it is possible to create spaces where members of very different communities can find common interests and exchange knowledge and share experiences, with the purpose of breaking down barriers between established and new residents from very different backgrounds.

Question 5: What role in contributing to community cohesion and integration do you see for organisations and institutions?

All local bodies can play an important role in supporting diversity and encouraging intercultural engagement, including arts and leisure organisations, voluntary sector service providers and businesses and the private sector – as both employers and service providers. Often, however the leadership needs to come from Government, in

the form of good practice by Government departments, positive language from Government ministers, and the active promotion of positive initiatives.

The focus on community cohesion overlooks the potential that workplaces provide for meaningful, natural positive encounters between members of different communities, and the possibilities these create to build relationships and trust between communities. Some recent research suggests that workplaces may be the best sites for this type of contact¹²; Muslim women who met with the Prime Minister in May 2006 themselves identified the need to improve work opportunities for Muslim women, as this is “where different groups are most likely to mix”.¹³

Local authorities have several roles to play. The proposed devolution of powers to local authorities in the current White Paper ‘Strong and Prosperous Communities’ emphasises the need to engage with local leaders. But this focus on involvement of local leaders can result in the exclusion of women and other marginalized community members from local decision making. Women, especially ethnic minority women, are rarely represented in local community leadership.

Low paid work must be tackled, both because economic disadvantage separates communities and isolates individuals; and because the phenomenon of new migrants accepting lower rates of pay than established community members can increase local tension. As the Living Wage campaign by London Citizens has shown, the private sector has a particular role to play in committing to paying higher wages; private companies are being persuaded of the business case for fair wages – such as increased staff retention, increased reliability of employees – as well as the moral case. A considerable need exists for more proactive enforcement of the national minimum wage (NMW), by central government (for example, HM Revenue & Customs, the Department for the Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, and the agricultural agencies in Scotland and Northern Ireland)¹⁴. We welcome the recent announcements by the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions of tougher enforcement of the NMW, and believe this must be extended to include enforcement of other statutory workplace rights.

**Question 6: What help do new people to a community need when they arrive?
What help do existing residents need to cope with change in their community?**

Poverty coexists with a greater need for social resources. All communities need support to accommodate and welcome new residents, particularly disadvantaged communities where there is a great need for social resources which are perceived to be thinly stretched. Similarly, new arrivals to an area experiencing economic hardship will need carefully tailored support to ensure that their use of local services does not displace existing residents. As noted above, the tensions in communities where asylum seekers have been dispersed with little or no support for host communities are now well documented.

Oxfam’s work with migrants in the north west of England has clearly identified key support needs for newcomers, including employment support, full information and support for service providers and for migrants to ensure that they can access services appropriately, and properly funded English language teaching - the language barrier reinforces isolation and separation and there is a need for English language teaching be extended to enable immigrants to become active citizens and to participate more fully in the community.

New migrants are most likely to live in areas characterised by low-cost housing and low incomes. As noted above and in recent research¹⁵, tension between newcomers and established communities is highest where existing residents are economically disadvantaged, disempowered, and most concerned about the availability of economic and social resources. There is a clear need for continued and extended efforts to regenerate these areas, and ensure adequate provision of decent housing, employment opportunities and health and other services for both new and existing residents. As described above, efforts at regeneration need to involve local people from all communities affected, to ensure shared ownership of public space by new and established residents.

Question 7: What do you see as effective ways to counteract people's negative perceptions of and attitudes to people of different backgrounds?

As our developing work on attitudes and beliefs acknowledges, and as recent research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and MORI¹⁶ has found, there is increasing recognition of the need to address the prejudices that are held by the general public towards those experiencing economic disadvantage in the UK. Oxfam's work underlines our understanding that a key barrier to cohesive, integrated communities is the 'othering' that occurs when individuals and groups within communities act on their prejudices towards those different from themselves. There are a number of ways to address and break down prejudice: the Friends and Neighbours groups mentioned above have shown the advantages of one method; another is 'myth-busting', which is being undertaken by Oxfam's Migrant Workers Project in the north west of England.

Despite high-profile events and inquiries in recent years, such as the murder of Stephen Lawrence and the subsequent inquiry into the police investigation of his murder, the current debate about community cohesion fails to take into account the underlying problem of racism, a key factor in negative attitudes towards BME communities, asylum seekers and other migrants. Many individuals from ethnic minorities relate experiences of racism at the hands not only of the general public but also housing, health, police and other service providers¹⁷.

Mixed communities can provide positive experiences for those who live in them. In addition to negative reports that areas experiencing higher levels of segregation also experience higher levels of tension, recent research has shown the beneficial effects of integration from an early age, with children attending integrated primary schools contributing to a greater level of cohesion amongst their parents and older community members.¹⁸

Conclusion

We are concerned that the current debate about community cohesion focuses too strongly on the responsibilities of communities. Government should take a lead role in actively publicising the value of equality in creating community cohesion, and to give emphasis to the values enshrined in equalities legislation. Government needs to ensure that actions designed to ensure positive community building are properly resourced, and that economic regeneration programmes are gender- and race-sensitive.

Recommendations

1. People experiencing poverty, especially women and black and ethnic minority men and women must be fully involved in identifying barriers to social inclusion, and in planning and decision-making. This means building the capacity of marginalized groups to participate both locally – especially in regeneration planning – and through national democratic participation, as well as addressing existing structures to ensure that they enable marginalized groups to participate.
2. Local authorities should adopt a socially inclusive approach to community planning and regeneration. This will include ensuring that zoning of regeneration areas does not reinforce the separation of different communities.
3. There must be strong enforcement of anti-discrimination legislation by Government and within the private sector.
4. The community cohesion agenda must be clarified to emphasise the importance of fair provisioning of, and equal access to, services and social resources. This will involve ensuring that the rights of disadvantaged communities and individuals to access and participate in mainstream activities are adequately fulfilled.
5. Engagement with local leadership, as emphasised in the White Paper on Local Government Reform, must take account of the need to reach out beyond current local community leaders to involve those women and men who are currently not represented. Locally-based organisations and service providers need to be supported to initiate and develop their own roles as promoters of diversity within communities.
6. The compliance and enforcement regime associated with the National Minimum Wage be extended and strengthened.
7. The decision to cut funding to language programmes for new migrants should be reversed.
8. The Government must show leadership in promote positive public understanding of the rights of asylum seekers and new migrants, and the positive social and economic contributions made by migrants to the UK.

¹ Rudiger, Anja *Prisoners of Terrorism? The impact of anti-terrorism measures on refugees and asylum seekers in Britain*, internal Refugee Council report; also the findings of the Muslim Women Talk Campaign, run by Amina – The Muslim Women’s Resource Centre and funded by the Scottish Executive in 2006, for more information see [Hwww.muslimwomentalk.com](http://www.muslimwomentalk.com)H

² Article by Hudson, Isabel; Cox, Dinah; Pashley, Trish in ‘Circulation’, magazine of National Association of Councils for Voluntary Service, February / March 2006

³ Bellamy, Kate and Rake, Katherine (2005) *Money Money Money: Is it still a rich man’s world?* Fawcett Society, London

⁴ Rake, Katherine (2005) *Black & Minority Ethnic Women in the UK*, Fawcett Society, London

⁵ van der Gaag, Nikki (2004) *A Tale of Two Cities: Gender and the Reality of Regeneration*, Oxfam UK Poverty Programme, Oxford

⁶ Into the Lions Den

⁷ Get Heard ran workshops with people in poverty in order to feed their views into the latest UK National Action Plan for Social Inclusion. The project was initiated by the Social Policy Task Force

and was jointly funded by the UKPP, the DWP and the European Commission. For more information see [Hwww.ukcap.org/getheard](http://www.ukcap.org/getheard)

⁸ Lewis, Miranda (2005) *Asylum: Understanding Public Attitudes*, ippr, London; Robinson, David and Reeve, Kesia (2006) *Neighbourhood experiences of new immigration*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York

⁹ Get Heard, *ibid*

¹⁰ The Institute of Community Cohesion (2006) *Review of Community Cohesion: Challenging Local Communities to Change Oldham*, Oldham MBC

¹¹ Get Heard, *ibid*

¹² Valentine, Gill and McDonald, Ian (2004) *Understanding Prejudice*, Stonewall, London

¹³ *Engaging with Muslim Women*, Report from the Women and Equality Unit (2006) Department for Communities & Local Government

¹⁴ Oxfam's submission to the Low Pay Commission's consultation on the National Minimum Wage, September 2006

¹⁵ Spencer, Sarah (2006) *Refugees and other New Migrants: a review of the evidence on successful approaches to integration*, Centre on Migration, Policy and Society, Oxford; Lewis, Miranda *Asylum: Understanding public attitudes* (*ibid*)

¹⁶ To be published in 2007

¹⁷ Get Heard, Muslim Women Talk Campaign

¹⁸ Weller, Susie and Bruegel, Irene (2006) *Locality, School and Social Capital*, Economic and Social Research Council, Swindon