



# Engaging London's BME Communities in Environmental Participation

Opportunities, Difficulties, Barriers  
& Cultural Factors

# Ways & Means of Communicating & Motivating

- **Stimulating Information**
- **Culturally friendly & engaging, &**
- **Inspiring & equipping communities to take action**
- **Institutional Racism (see next slide)**

# 'Institutional Racism'

- **"it is the subtle presence of racism in our normal activities, coupled with our failure to make the connections between the personal, institutional and cultural levels of racism which make it so hard for white people to recognise its existence in their particular behaviour and combat it effectively". Dominelli (1992: 165).**
- **“The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people.” Macpherson Report, 1999**



# What Factors & Learning have emerged?

1. Communities need **clear, simple, digestable information**. Not technical, sanitised concepts & jargon!
2. What does 'sustainability', 'environment' and 'global warming' mean?
3. **Communication, Concepts & Language** needs to be community friendly - Cultural terminology, cultural concepts and cultural examples.
4. Communities respond positively to **use of cultural connections** between 'environmental' and their community life. Draw upon **cultural examples** from community life and countries of origin, community religion, community traditions, etc – caring for the land, earth, etc. Make connections with day to day life circumstances – waste, food, travel, consumption, packaging, energy, etcetera.

# PRACTICAL METHODS



- **Use visual images** which connect communities with environmental subject – posters, leaflets & presentations.
- **Organise visits to ‘environmental’ places & projects** – organic farms (Muslim Organic Farm, Oxford), community allotment/food projects (e.g. Spitalfields City Farm), waste recycling centres, solar energy centres, community eco-friendly buildings (Swaminarayan Hindu Temple), eco-friendly homes (e.g. Bedzed in Croydon), eco-villages (e.g. Tinker’s Bubble in Somerset and Springhead Trust in Dorset).
- **Organise talks & discussions** on topics with community members – lively, relevant and informative and motivating (e.g. impact of air pollution on Londoners; contaminants & bad fats in mainstream food; benefits of natural foods ; health & environmental benefits of cycling & walking).
- **Focus groups and surveys of communities** about their understanding and thoughts about the ‘environment’. What is the best way of engaging their interest and encouraging them to re-consider their life practises?
- **Organise thematic events** as part of mainstream BME events and at BME venues (e.g. Black History Month, Vaisakhi, Diwali, Ramadan). Talk engagingly with BME audiences, not at them.
- **Link BME cultural and lifestyle aspects** with environment issues.
- **Invite and integrate BME in community wide** environmental meetings & gatherings. Include BME specific topics, speakers & displays. Do not let BME communities feel ignored and marginalised.



# LONDON 21

# MENTORING PROGRAMME

- 8 Community Development Mentors
- Mentoring 14 Community Groups over 12 months (October 2005 – October 2006)
- Providing advice & guidance, and building capacity of community group



# MENTORING OBJECTIVE:

- a) help community group identify local social, health & environmental concerns issues
- b) help group formulate an **ACTION PLAN** to address these over following 3 years.

# COMMUNITY GROUPS ACROSS GREATER LONDON



1. Sizanni Africa (African youngsters in Redbridge)
2. Melting Pot (BME elderly in Redbridge)
3. JAAGO (Panjaabi ladies group in Harrow)
4. London Tamil Centre (Tamil community, in Brent)
5. Hounslow Environment Watch (multi-ethnic residents forum)
6. British Sikh Women's Organisation (Hounslow region)
7. Great Lakes African Women's Network (female African residents of Southwark & Lambeth)
8. Black & Ethnic Minority Health Initiative (mixed BME health group in Lewisham).
9. Allotment 21 for Refugees in Hillingdon
10. Brunel University Recycling Campaign (involving mixed diversity of BME students and staff).
11. Cariss Young Adult Group (African & Caribbean youngsters in Hackney)
12. Shoreditch Youth Football Club (mixed BME youngsters in Hackney)
13. Taru Brazil (mixed BME arts group in Greenwich)
14. Fashion & Development Centre (mixed BME female vocational training group in Southall)
15. Negusa Negast (Rasfarian community group in Lambeth)
16. Group of South Asian tenants in Southall of Asra Housing Association

# MOTIVATING BME COMMUNITIES IN LONDON –



## Experiences & learnings from Mentoring Scheme:

1. Difficulties at **initial stages** with **engaging groups** on ‘**environmental sustainability**’ issues. Groups not familiar, not associated, not previously engaged on this. Feelings of exclusion from mainstream ‘white’ sector (e.g. local councils, policy-makers, allotments, farmers markets, ‘organic’ foods).
2. Need for **2-3 committed/focussed members** to move forward with themes & topics.
3. Groups need **resourcing** in order to run with environmental sustainability issues. No **funds**, no activity! Both in immediate and long-term. **Group does not feel equipped to act.**
4. Groups need to **understand and appreciate connection between ‘environmental’** and them. Substantial awareness/information gaps at grassroot level. This is a springboard.
5. **Information** needs to be **engaging and relevant**, combined with practical pointers and examples for action. Information on its own is no good.
6. Issue of **priorities in the life of BME communities**. Why is sustainability, waste recycling, climate change, etc., so important? BME communities focussed on financial stability, race equality, housing, social, cultural and inter-generational issues. ‘Environmental sustainability’ not a current priority, nor even a general interest at this stage.

# MOTIVATING BME COMMUNITIES IN LONDON - Experiences & learnings from Mentoring Scheme:



- a) Need to **sustain group interest**. Need to show **purpose and benefit** to group as a result of the mentoring – light at the end of the tunnel.
- b) Not to **spoon-feed** groups. Empowering groups to think and act!
- c) Focussing on and engendering a **connection between community groups and their local quality of life** – local environment, local facilities, local social community. Many BME communities found it difficult to make an immediate grasp between them and their local environmental matters.
- d) Identifying and embracing the **local environmental concerns** of the communities, rather than superimposing. Communities needed to be helped along.
- e) Getting communities to appreciate that they are **able to push for change**, and the benefits of an organised campaign for change (e.g. cleaner roads, lesser traffic, access to better local food). Communities previously unexperienced in this and unfamiliar.
- f) Forming **ACTION PLANS** for future progressive action by community groups to improve/change their local environment. This needed more time and concentrated effort. Most groups need more than 12 months year of MENTORING
- g) Difficulty in concluding mentoring with groups after 12 months – Are they **ready**