THE PARTICIPATORY ROLES OF BLACK AND MINORITY ETHNIC (BME) IN COMMUNITY REGENERATION

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Many studies have been conducted in the field of community cohesion, participation and engagement and there seems to be a consensus that community engagement and participation aids the achievement of a good and sustainable regeneration in our communities. Past research have also shown that without a sense of cohesion among the members of the community, the urge to be a part of community activities will reduce, hence community participation will be low. However, contrasting to the fact that members of Black and Minority Ethnic (BMEs) groups participate less in community activities is the fact that recent citizens survey by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) shows that members of the BME groups are more likely to see their community as being cohesive than Non BMEs, also, people from most ethnic minority groups were more likely than White people to agree that they could influence decisions in their local area. For this reason, a question of what triggers participation and why BMEs participate less than Non BMEs arises. This paper aims to investigate factors that trigger community participation, and explores the level of participation that is expected from the BMEs by investigating what other factors are there that can contribute to the BMEs community participation experience. Government publications and relevant literatures is also reviewed to get the current state of the art and the initial results from pilot interviews will be analyzed and focused initial findings will be discussed. The paper concludes by drawing inferences on the implication of some of the factors that can make BMEs attain their utmost community engagement potential.

Keywords: black and minority ethnic group, community engagement, community participation, community regeneration.

INTRODUCTION

There is a sizeable number of UK residents popularly referred to as Black and Ethnic Minorities (BMEs). According to the 2009 statistics from the ONS (Office for National Statistics 2009). From the labour force survey by Platt (2008), it was discovered that almost 20% of children under the age of 16 in the country are from BME families and 50% of those that described themselves as White British are over 40 years of age. As a result of this, there is a growing sense of reason to involve these BME members of the community in any form of regeneration activities going on in their area. But the result from regeneration providers is that the level of participation from these members of the community is lower than that of the British born citizens. Community regeneration can be in many forms but the focus of this paper will be on housing related community regeneration initiatives, i.e. such activities relating to

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housing provision, refurbishments, environmental improvements etc. According to Communities and Local Government (2007), 53% of Black African people, 50% of Bangladeshi people, 48% of Black Caribbean people and Indian people, 43% of Pakistani people, and 46% of people of Mixed Race agreed that they could influence decisions in the local area compared with 37% of White people.

However, there are other barriers preventing BMEs from active participation in their communities. Housing conditions, which according to the Beresford (2007) is one of the main reasons for housing unsuitability, can impact on sense of inclusion, lack of effective communication, cultural barriers, lack of trust in the system and indeed communication fatigue which is synonymous with too much information can all impact the community participation experience of BMEs. With this understanding, this paper aims to address the various other reasons why BMEs even with their community satisfaction achievements are still not participating effectively in the community, even when previous research suggested that cohesion and sense of belonging facilitates participation. To achieve this aim, the following research questions will be asked:

- What is 'community participation' and what does it mean to participate?
- What are the indicators of a participating community?
- What are the factors that can contribute to BME participation in regeneration?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Community cohesion and participation

Community cohesion can be described as what must happen in every community to enable different groups of people to get on well together (Communities and Local Government 2007) It is a multi-faceted concept requiring cross cutting and multi pronged approaches according to the department for communities and local government (2007) and it also involves particular focus on socio-economic well being and empowerment of the members of the community. Forrest and Kearnes (2000) (in Home Office 2002) suggested that there is a need for high degree of social interaction within communities and families, tolerance, respect for differences and inter-group co-operation, they went on to also suggest that the simplest observable measure of community cohesion 'would be of groups who live in a local area getting together to promote or defend some common local interest. In her "our shared future" speech in 2007, Hazel Blears (the former secretary of state for communities and local government) affirmed that "… diversity has brought Britain enormous economic and social benefits – local authorities and their partners have the important role of ensuring that communities realize these benefits whilst addressing risks to cohesion". To prevent this risks, the department for communities and local government (2007a) highlighted three key principles that must be upheld; they are that people from different backgrounds having similar life opportunities, people knowing their rights and responsibilities and people trusting one another and trusting local institutions to act fairly. Home office (2002) identifies a cohesive community as one where:

- there is a common vision and a sense of belonging for all communities;
- the diversity of people's backgrounds and circumstances is appreciated and positively valued;
- those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities; and

- strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds and circumstances in the workplace, in schools and in neighbourhood.

For the members of the community to feel this cohesion, they must be involved in the governing activities of their communities, otherwise referred to as community participation. Having briefly described what community cohesion entails, the following section will focus more on community participation as a factor that contributes to cohesion and also explore what a participating community looks like.

Community participation is a current buzz word for developments at both local and national levels (Mathers 2006). According to Lawson and Kearnes (2009), it has become a main issue for public policy in the UK especially under the new labour government since 1997. Community participation has been defined in many ways. Taking cue from World Health Organization (2002), they separated the 2 words in order to make more sense of the phenomenon. Community according to them is "a group of people who share an interest, neighbourhood or a common set of circumstances"; they may or may not acknowledge membership of this community. Meegan and Mitchel (2001), however disagree with the interchangeable use of the terms 'neighbourhood' and 'community'. They argue that a neighbourhood is spatial whereas, community is relational. According to Davies and Herbert, 1993 in Meegan and Mitchel (2001 p. 6), "usually neighbourhood is much more restricted in spatial dimensions. It relates to the area around a residence within which people engage in neighbouring, which is usually viewed as a set of informal, face-to-face interactions based on residential proximity.

The concept of participation can be linked with empowerment (Madubuko and Ingrige 2008). Following Durkheim's theory of the individual and society in Speers *et al.* (2001), social integration is an essential component of a healthy society. As the social fabric is frayed, people fall out of relationship with one another leading to greater social isolation, declining civic trust, and lower levels of participation. On the contrary, the more opportunities people have to make a difference, the better they feel about the services they have helped to shape – and the better they feel about the institutions providing them (LGA 2007). Community representation is widely accepted as crucial to successful regeneration partnerships (Purdue 2000) but according to Falkirk district council (2008), the level of community representation is low; even much lower for the BME communities (ALG 2008) and also there have been gaps in our understanding about how to promote community representation in ways that take account of diversity and population change (Blake *et al.* 2008). Black and minority Ethnic group members, being 11% of the country's population needs to have their needs addressed as a lapse in this form will create a very big hole in the governments drive to establish cohesive communities.

There have been many researches on BMEs, their needs in terms of community regeneration, empowerment initiatives and benefits of empowering them. Many of the research have negative implications and results for example, the statistics on race and criminal justice system 2007/2008 shows that there are nearly eight times more stops and searches of Black people per head of population than of White people, there are four times more arrests of Black people per head of population than of White people, and there are five times more Black people in prison per head of population than White people.

According to Pemberton *et al.* (2006) as there is also increasing concern about the widening gap between different minority ethnic groups and disadvantage in employment, there is a lower likelihood of BME enterprises using mainstream support services (Fadahunsi *et al.* 2000, Smallbone *et al.* 2001). Evidence at the national level relating to educational performance also shows differences by BME groups in terms of examination success with Indian, Chinese, White and Asian pupils being more likely to gain 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C (Key Stage 4) compared to other ethnic groups, such as Black Caribbean (DfES 2005). And of course in terms of housing, Beresford, 1996; Beresford and Oldman, 2002 in Beresford (2007) reported that compared with white families, significantly more black and minority ethnic families live in homes that are not suitable and that black and minority ethnic families are more likely than white families to experience multiple problems with their housing.

Also in construction related jobs, there is an acute shortage of BMEs. According to a research by the University of Salford (Dr Ahmed) only 2% of the 2 million people in construction industry are from BME backgrounds. This is so unrepresentative of BMEs considering that they make 8% of the country's workforce. Some of the reasons for this shortage according to the research can be attributed to cultural differences and assumptions by BMEs and lack of information about other cultures by Non BMEs. This situation is a clear indication of a community lacking cohesion because one of the benefits of a cohesive community is that strong relationships and awareness are built and this in turn helps dispels rumours and myths (Mathers 2008)

Unsuitable housing (i.e. houses not meeting the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) 2006) is also a problem facing BMEs. A national survey of over 2500 families by Chamba *et al.* in 1999 (reported in Beresford 2007) found that a third of black and minority ethnic families reported at least three different ways in which their homes were unsuitable; this contrasts with one in five white families experiencing this range of housing difficulties. Therefore, with so much investment on regeneration, cohesion, integration and making homes decent, BMEs should really be consulted, this will ensure that the different viewpoints of BMEs are included and integrated into community plans and thereby reduce the level of exclusion whilst improving the living conditions.

Indicators of participation
So far, cohesion within communities has been found to be very important and participation of community members is a factor that facilitates it. This section discusses what a participating community looks like, and what it means to participate. As discovered in a report commissioned by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) in 2008, to participate for some members of the community might be just to be heard. Blake *et al.* in the JRF (2008) report found out that "new communities want their views to be heard, and they want to participate, for many new arrivals, 'being heard' means being recognized, having a safe space to meet, providing mutual support and gaining the knowledge, confidence and skills to engage more widely. 'Being heard' also means being listened to with respect, knowing that resources are being allocated with visible fairness.

Active community participation is important to building an empowered community. As the Social Exclusion Unit (2000) puts it, the most powerful resource in turning around neighbourhoods should be the community itself. Community engagement is a powerful tool for encouraging trust between the government and the communities; according to the Australian Community Engagement Unit (2010), community

participation especially from minority communities promotes and facilitates the formation of policy and delivery of services, enhances community's capacity to take actions that produces positive and sustainable changes locally in areas that affects their lives most.

The idea of community participation is diverse, but while it varies from one place to another, participating communities share several characteristics. According to Reid (2000):

- First, in participating communities, many people are involved in the community's activities. Business is not simply run by an elite leadership, but it is the work of everyone.

- Second, participating communities are open to involvement by all groups, and responsibilities are divided up so that the special talents and interests of contributing organizations are engaged. Power and responsibility are decentralized. Participating communities have many centres of activity, and community action engages the natural enthusiasm and talents of citizens.

- Third, participating communities conduct their business openly and publicize it widely. Citizens are well informed about the community's work and about their opportunities for personal involvement in meaningful roles.

- Fourth, in participating communities, there is no such thing as a bad idea. All ideas are treated with respect and welcomed as a source of inspirations with potential value for the entire community. Participating communities encourage citizens to offer their best for the common good.

- Fifth, participating communities make no distinctions among various groups and types of personalities who offer themselves to community involvement. All persons are actively welcomed, regardless of colour, age, race, prior community involvement, level of education, occupation, personal reputation, handicap, religion, or any other factor.

- Finally, participating communities operate openly and with an open mind. They are not controlled by any single organization, group, or philosophy, and their leadership is used to facilitate discussion of a diversity of viewpoints, rather than to push its own agenda. Leaders are not ego-driven but focused on operating a high-quality, open decision-making process.

All the above indicators identifies what an aspiring cohesive community can use as a guide in ensuring that every member of the community is engaged in community matters especially regeneration initiatives everybody should be encouraged to bring their ideas forward as there is no such thing as bad idea. When citizens see that their thoughts and feedbacks are appreciated, they will be better motivated to get engaged. This will further help in discovering better means of identifying factors that can contribute to participation, especially for the BMEs within the community.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses three different sources of data i.e. literature review, semi structured interviews and questionnaires. There is a vast array of literature, research and publications on community participations, regeneration and BMEs, these have been reviewed to a good extent and some of the gap in knowledge identified.

It was discovered from literature that the problems confronting BMEs are multi facetted in nature and so it cannot be dealt with generically, to critically understand this contextually, semi structure interviews was conducted among members of the regeneration profession, especially community involvement officers, regeneration managers, regeneration officers, neighbourhood community workers and some ethnicity and inclusion officers, a total of 15 interviews (4 pilot and 11 main interviews) were conducted in the last quarter of 2009. The interviewees were divided into 2 broad categories; 7 interviews were conducted with regeneration providers professionals', this referred to the government funded agencies providing the regeneration to communities and 4 interviews was with 'regeneration enablers' who are the voluntary/ community agencies especially those who focus on BMEs. These interviews are the main focus of this paper. Some of the emerging themes from these interviews are discussed in the later part of this paper. In order to give the research balance and to ensure that the community members, BMEs especially as key stakeholders in community regeneration are engaged in the process of the research, questionnaires are distributed to a wide BME community with a view of seeking their views and expectations. The completed questionnaires will be analyses statistically using SPSS while the contents of the interviews are analysed qualitatively using Nvivo 8 content analysis tool.

This paper reviews the first part of the research which is the qualitative interviews. The focus will be on the emerging themes which are mainly on the current state of the art of the level of participation of BMEs and the main issues involved at these levels.

EARLY FINDINGS

The first sets of interviews were the pilot interviews and the main aims of the pilot was to help in understanding better how to frame questions, collect background information from the field and to adapt a research approach pilot the study. The next stage was the main interviews which could be broadly categorized into 2 parts. The first section discusses the current situation of BMEs in community regeneration while the second focused more on the proposed solutions. During the interview process, open ended questions were asked in relation to suggestions and opinions of why BMEs are not participating optimally as well as what could be done to facilitate this elusive situation. The first part also covers aspects of who a BME is, what are the housing/ community needs of BMEs, the current levels of BME participation and the importance of participation of BMEs in achieving community cohesion.

The current state of the art is that BMEs and government agencies still lacks adequate information about each other. When asked about the level of information available to BMEs at the moment, a regeneration manager from Birmingham responded that "gradually, the focus of regeneration is returning to 'hard outputs' and this is putting a strain on social issues like information for the community. There is a budget squeeze which limits the available funds that we can spend on consultations and engagement".

The interviewees were unanimous about the fact that BMEs are at an unacceptably low level of participation this corroborates the findings from literature, however, some of the reasons for this could according to some of the professionals is that it is very difficult for members of the public to see the big picture before the commencement or near completion of a project or initiative. This they argued often leads to community members rejecting a proposal without proper understanding or consideration. This was though in contrast to some of the responses by some other professionals who opined

that early consultation is the best approach as this builds trust. Some of the current situations regarding BME participation are highlighted below:

- BMEs usually participate more when there is a giving

- Participation is never enough for the provider

- Government wants hard outputs which puts a strain on the social side of regeneration

- Currently, BMEs are between the 'information' and 'consultation' levels of participation

- Local people have local intelligence and knowledge

- 'Community engagement' is a good level of participation for BMEs because at that level, relationship can only improve

- Some projects are very unpopular at the inception but by the time the community has a clearer picture, they appreciate it better

Suggestions were also sought from the respondents as to the broad solutions to the problems. These solutions are currently generic and hence needs further articulation, but below are some of the main themes that emerged:

- Providers need to be clear about what they are offering the community (no jargons), and where there is no choice, they must make the community know this. This will build community trust in the system

- The community needs to take ownership of the place otherwise the regeneration will not be successful or sustainable on the long term

- Providers should not do things to the community, they should do it with the community; this relates to bottom up decision making

- Consultation should be at the early stages of regeneration and not after regeneration

- Community acceptance should be delayed till after the project as they can have a better picture by then

- BMEs should aspire to positions like membership of boards and also apply for regeneration or other housing related jobs and positions

- There is no room for generalizations: no one size fits all in relation to BME community needs or subsequent solutions

- Local people should be used for the regeneration because they will have more passion for the job

- Local people should even have a say in which companies or consultants they want in their community

CONCLUSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH

There are some generally accepted ideas of regeneration that cuts across all the interviews, for example, community participation is generally thought to be of high importance, it is a concept that has been adapted to many fields, while there are some that differs depending on the opinion of the interviewees, an example is the timing of the beginning of the community consultation process. There are many signs that can

show if a community is cohesive or if the members are participating effectively. As it came out from literature, the triggers of participation are mainly people oriented and the measures are both qualitative and quantitative. Many people need to be involved so that more voices are heard and wider communities represented, also the consultative process needs to open and ego free so that mutual trust and lasting relationships can be established. From the interviews, it emerged that more BMEs getting into main stream regeneration positions will enhance the overall participation experience of BMEs; this will help alleviate the current situation of lack of BMEs in the construction industry. Also regeneration officers and managers should strive to get the level of BME participation to the level where they are engaged, not just been informed, although this is still a low level of participation considering the fact that there are higher levels like 'joint decision making' and 'supporting independent community initiatives' nevertheless, at the level of engagement, if properly managed, relationships can only get better. This might imply bigger budgeting, but it will prevent the reoccurrence of the reasons and situations that lead to the regeneration in the first place

Although the findings at this stage give an indication of the general opinion of some of the professionals, nevertheless the findings should be interpreted with caution as the interviews was limited in scope because the views of BMEs themselves have not yet been explored. To this light, the next step for the research will be to conduct some content analysis of the interviews using the Nvivo8 software to identify the relationships between the responses and also embark on the quantitative data section which will involve qualitative analysis of the questionnaires using SPSS. A comparison of the findings from both the qualitative and quantitative data sets will then be used in developing a framework which will address the community engagement and participation challenges of BMEs.

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