Capacity building in the minority ethnic voluntary sector: for whom, how and for what purpose?

Abstract
In countries undergoing welfare reform including the UK, dynamic changes in relationships between states and voluntary organisations have taken place, with calls for ‘active citizenship’ and reduced state dependency. Partnerships have been viewed as a powerful means of legitimating public programmes. However, community organisations often lack the knowledge and experience to be equal partners. This has provided the rationale for government investment in ‘capacity building initiatives’, including within the minority voluntary sector. Analysts have argued that these activities reflect the needs of professionalized welfare groups rather than those of community organisations, with limited benefits to community organisations. This paper draws on an evaluative study of a capacity building programme for minority ethnic organisations in Scotland. This involved interviews with 19 organisations, four of which served as case studies for more in-depth examination. The study revealed understandings of ‘capacity building’, and the extent and ways in which organisations benefited from the programme, linked to their stage of development and factors which either facilitated or hindered progress. The discussion considers the need for approaches which take into account the diversity of organisations in the sector; identified facilitators and barriers to such activities; more pro-active approaches by statutory agencies to engage such organisations in decision-making processes; and the need for initiatives which enable statutory organisations and public agencies to build capacity in terms of working with minority ethnic community organisations.
Key words: capacity building, voluntary organisations, active citizenship, minority ethnic, partnerships

In countries undergoing welfare reform such as the UK, the role of voluntary organisations and their relationships to the state need to be viewed within the context of the dynamic change in relationships between states and citizens. Citizens are expected (or themselves expect) to play more active roles in handling risks and promoting their own welfare (Johansson and Hvinden 2005). Similarly, voluntary organizations are increasingly under pressure to adopt a more business-like approach in fulfilling their aims and objectives. The blurring of boundaries between voluntary organisations and entrepreneurship is manifested in the language of ‘social entrepreneurship.’ In this discourse, voluntary organisations are encouraged to combine a visionary approach to making a difference to society with business-like efficiency at an operational level (Waddock and Post, 1991). Moves toward ‘active citizenship’, increased autonomy and entrepreneurship can increase the complexity and diversity of the relationship between states, voluntary organisations and citizens and open up new strategies for all. However, it has also been noted that some strategies of this kind can intensify the marginalisation or exclusion of certain groups, including along ethnicity-based divisions (Johansson and Hvinden, 2005; Newman, 2005). Key trends in post-modern societies – the fragmentation of state power, the rising importance of markets, changing patterns of work, family and community, shifting social patterns that produce new forms of identity and agency – are likely to dismantle the relationships between ‘race’ and citizenship, work and care while potentially opening up new patterns of racial inequality, in parallel with other dimensions of inequality such as gender (Newman, 2005).
The term ‘capacity building’ became increasingly used in the 1990s to describe the wide range of activities funded by regeneration monies in the UK to tackle disadvantage and poverty (Ellis and Latif, 2006). Analysts have become increasingly critical of the use of the term ‘capacity building,’ arguing that the activities carried out under this banner reflect government’s failure to engage in ‘bottom-up’ development and properly engage with communities’ own skills, knowledge and interests (Craig, 2007). Similarly, Diamond (2003) argues that ‘preferred’ models of capacity building are likely to reflect the needs of professionalized welfare groups as opposed to the need of community organisations. As a result, community organisations’ ‘invisible’ forms of capacity such as strong networks or social entrepreneurship in the informal economy might be ignored because they do not fit established networks. Scope exists here for potential conflict between the goals of community organisations for themselves and the goals of government for such organisations. This is reinforced by Taylor’s (2000) finding that there remain significant barriers to the genuine sharing of power in the move towards partnership and community leadership in UK urban regeneration policies. Such imbalances in power are likely to result in limited access to funding and sources of expertise for community organisations on their own terms. This may be particularly the case for minority ethnic organizations, given their typically smaller sizes, number and lack of visibility (Author A et al, 2001). These analyses highlight the need to be cautious of what is meant by ‘capacity-building’ and whose interests it is intended to serve.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the extent to which capacity building initiatives in the minority ethnic sector further the aims of such organisations and the ways in which they do so. A number of factors will be considered, including understandings of ‘capacity building,’ the profile of individual organisations and stage of development. It will be argued that the findings call for a more nuanced approach for appraising the purpose, nature and targeting of capacity building initiatives that takes into account the diversity of the organisations in the sector and the racialized, socio-political context in which they are embedded. ‘Organisational capacity building’ is defined as activities targeted towards people, culture, systems and processes developed to meet specific organisational goals (ODPM, 2003). The term ‘minority ethnic’ is used to refer to those organisations which are closely associated with minority ethnic communities, including refugees, asylum-seekers and Gypsies/Travellers. It is worth stressing that the choice of terminology here is indicative of shifts in ongoing debates about identity, language and
ethnicity. The term ‘mainstream’ is used to refer to agencies and organisations that are not primarily concerned with catering to the needs of minority ethnic groups. This term too, is subject to attendant, ongoing shifts of meaning and interpretation.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. Section 1 will consider the increasingly business-like operational nature of voluntary organisations, including minority ethnic organisations. It will also consider the growing body of literature on minority ethnic businesses, and consider what can be learnt from the strategies adopted by such organisations and their applicability to minority ethnic voluntary organisations. Section 2 will provide contextual information relating to the socio-economic and political context of Scotland, the geographical location of the study. Section 3 will describe the case study and the methods used for the qualitative research which this paper is based on. In Section 4, the findings of the research will be discussed. Finally, Section 5 will draw together the context of the study and the empirical findings and conclude the paper.

1. The growing entrepreneurship of the minority ethnic voluntary sector

As indicated above, voluntary organisations, including minority ethnic organisations, are under increasing pressure to adopt a more business-like approach in fulfilling their aims and objectives. Two main drivers may be identified as underpinning this shift. The first relates to the UK government’s drive to expand the role of voluntary and community sectors in the delivery of public services. The second closely relates to this: the introduction of market mechanisms into public services such as compulsory competitive tendering (CCT), the development of a mixed ‘economy of care’ in the 1980s and early 1990s, and a drive towards more ‘customer-focused’ services (Leach and Percy-Smith, 2001). Although CCT has now come to be replaced by the Best Value regime, the principles underpinning the new framework continue to emphasise economy and efficiency, along with effectiveness and quality of services. Local authorities, one of the main funders of many voluntary organisations, commonly require ‘a business plan’ to be included in applications for funding, and organisations’ financial performance is continually reviewed. These policy shifts have necessarily involved changes in organisational culture, management, operation and funding mechanisms, with many organisations typically accountable to a number of funders.
Voluntary organisations, including minority ethnic organisations, obviously differ from commercial enterprises in their not-for-profit goals and objectives. However, given the increasing pressure of minority ethnic organisations to adopt a more entrepreneurial approach, it is instructive to consider the literature on minority ethnic businesses. This indicates that ethnic minority entrepreneurs share the same broad motivations as other entrepreneurs (Jones and Ram, 2007). Further, they are also governed by essentially the same constraints as their mainstream counterparts (Jones and Ram, 2007). However, the extent to which they might face additional pressures such as prejudice, negative stereotyping and racism is not clear. Jones and Ram (2007) convincingly argue against ‘an ethnic resources’ model that presents minority ethnicity as a unique generator of business resources. Instead, they stress the salience of values such as independence, which are ‘universal to all entrepreneurs and leave little room for ethnicized notions of entrepreneurial identity.’ (2007: 441).

However, ‘independence’ has been shown to be a social construct which can be variously interpreted in different settings. Illustrating this by an example drawn from a different context, Bignall and Butt (2000) found that among black disabled young people making the transition to adulthood, independence is affected by race, religion and culture. Similarly, how independence is interpreted by minority ethnic entrepreneurs and community organisations may, with closer scrutiny, also differ across and within ethnic, religious and cultural groups. Further, like other voluntary organisations, minority ethnic organisations also need to attract funding and be accountable to funding bodies which may place limitations on the extent to which they can exercise autonomy. In doing so, it is likely that in some cases, they might wish to highlight the distinctive nature of their activity in catering to the interests and needs of minority ethnic communities. In other situations they may wish to downplay this, to achieve a better ‘fit’ with funders wider attempts to tackle social exclusion and poverty. This leads us to consider previous research relating to minority ethnic engagement in capacity building initiatives, which may be viewed as a means of achieving this ‘fit.’

2. Capacity building in the minority ethnic voluntary sector
Consideration of the need for capacity building in the minority ethnic voluntary sector needs to take account of both its strengths and weaknesses. The strengths of the sector were identified in Author A (2001). These include its ability to counter the discrimination
that people from minority ethnic communities face by supporting and enabling them to access public services; provide accessible services to these communities, respond to specific cultural, religious and language needs of their clients and adopt a holistic approach to considering the position of minority ethnic people. However, the vulnerability of the sector is also well-documented. In their review of the challenges faced by the sector, Ellis and Latif state that:

‘Minority ethnic organisations share ‘a collective experience that points to a level of disadvantage not experienced by … mainstream voluntary sector organisations.’ (2006: 3).

This claim is substantiated by a number of research reports which have revealed the challenges faced by the sector. Among the major challenges faced by minority ethnic organisations are a lack of adequate funding strategies. Although this is more generally shared by other voluntary sector organisations, it is exacerbated by the small size of many of these organisations, and their low incomes and asset base (Ellis and Latif, 2006). Other weaknesses are the lack of a political voice and infrastructure for the sector as a whole (Author A et al, 2001).

Chouhan et al (2004) found that although the sector plays an important role in the civic building and social inclusion of minority ethnic communities, this tends not to be recognised by many funders which focus primarily on service delivery. Other weaknesses that have been identified are a lack of partnership working between organisations in order to make strategic responses to policy debates and discussions (Craig et al, 2002). Linked to this, research has found that such organisations were mainly used by mainstream and statutory agencies to deliver the latters’ goals and targets rather than being active participants in strategic debates.

Like other organisations dependent on public funding, the sustainability of minority ethnic organisations is reliant on recognition of the need for their existence not only among the communities they most directly serve, but also among other key stakeholders in the wider society, notably potential funders. Thus, the effectiveness of capacity-building initiatives in the sector cannot be divorced from wider political perspectives relating to the extent to which minority ethnic communities are viewed as being part of civic society,
and willingness to confront inequalities in service delivery and resource allocation (Husband, 1996). It is to this that we now turn, in considering the nature of multiculturalism in Scotland, the socio-economic and geographic context for this study.

3. Multiculturalism in Scotland
In the UK, asylum and immigration are reserved matters, responsibility for which resides under the Westminster government. However, the Scottish Government has devolved responsibility for integration, social inclusion and key policy areas, including housing, education, health, social care, the arts and sports. There are mixed views on the extent to which Scotland, itself historically a nation of emigrants, has been viewed as inclusionary and accepting of migrants. For instance, Wren (2007) and Stewart (2009) have argued that demographic trends that prompted the Scottish Executive/Government initiatives to attract new migrants through the Fresh Talent initiative have meant that public discourses on asylum in Scotland have been less exclusionary than in England. However, others have taken a different view of Scottish multiculturalism, claiming that it is characterised by complacency and a reluctance to recognise racism as a problem. This has been attributed to the dominance of the national question, where England continues to be the significant Other (Miles and Dunlop, 1987; Netto, 2008; Williams and de Lima, 2006). Racial disadvantage has been evidenced by a major audit of research commissioned by the then Scottish Executive on minority ethnic issues (Netto et al, 2001). Recurrent themes included difficulties in accessing and using public services, racial disadvantage, discrimination and harassment, inequalities in the recruitment, retention and progression of minority ethnic people in the workforce and multiple discrimination. Author A (2008) argued the case for a distinctive brand of Scottish multiculturalism in the devolved context, where the extent to which minority ethnic claims for public space were realized crucially depended on recognition of their rights within a wider drive to promote separate nationhood.

In Scotland, the majority of community organisations are located in Glasgow and Edinburgh (where the minority ethnic population is most concentrated), with a smaller number of organisations in Aberdeen and Dundee, and an even smaller number of organisations or informal groups in rural areas, where minority ethnic individuals are dispersed in small numbers across all 32 local authorities. The minority ethnic population
in Scotland is just over 100,000 or 2 percent of the total population (Scottish Executive, 2004). Analysis of the 2001 Census data reveals that the three largest groups are the Pakistani, Chinese and Indian population (Scottish Executive, 2004). Other groups are Black African, Black Caribbean and Black Other populations (terms used by the Census) and smaller groups such as Fijians and Mauritians and those of mixed race parentage, asylum seekers, Gypsies Travellers and refugees. Large differences exist in the economic rates between ethnic groups, with Pakistani and Other South Asian people demonstrating the lowest activity rate (53% compared to 76% for both White Scottish and Other White British). Similarly, large variations in educational qualifications exist, with all the minority ethnic groups in Scotland at least as or more likely to have degrees (or equivalent) than White Scottish people. In sum, these findings present some significant differences in the position of minority ethnic communities and the majority population, as well as considerable diversity between these communities, which influence the nature of the activity undertaken by organisations which have been set up to serve them. We now turn to the evaluative case study that is the focus of this paper.

4. The case study: the organisational capacity building programme and evaluative framework and methods used

The capacity building programme (CBP) that was evaluated was designed and produced by an umbrella organisation which has a strategic remit to build and support an infrastructure for minority ethnic organisations. The model employed exemplifies capacity building approaches which seek to develop ‘bottom-up’ approaches rather than narrowly imposing ‘top-down’ guidelines from a predetermined official template. The main aims of the programme were to strengthen the organisational structures, systems and processes of minority ethnic voluntary organisations as a means of enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of the governance, management and operations of these organisations. Other aims were to help such organisations to obtain mainstream funding from public bodies and diversify into other funding strands. The programme also aimed to increase the skills and knowledge of staff and management committees of minority
ethnic voluntary organisations in managing and developing their organisations. Organisational sustainability was viewed as instrumental for community regeneration and engagement between the communities associated with these organisations, and policy-makers.

The programme was divided into three stages. In its first year, three minority ethnic professionals were recruited and sponsored on a bespoke Masters in Business Administration (MBA). The programme was designed to ensure that the individuals were equipped with the skills and knowledge in business and management to assist in capacity building. Upon completion of the MBA, the individuals concerned were contracted to the Scotland-based umbrella organisation for two years to work as Capacity Building Officers (CBOs). Their individual work involved supporting 10 to 15 ethnic minority voluntary organisations per year to build organisational capacity. This involved an initial assessment of the organisations with the help of a specially designed Diagnostic Toolkit (DTK). CBOs analysed the needs, strengths and weaknesses of the organisation in nine key areas of organisational capacity, including constitution and legal structures, governance, business and action planning, management systems, financial systems, funding, marketing and communications, partnership and networking and information and communications technology. They then drew up an action plan of key activities that enabled organisations to meet identified needs following the initial assessment and recommendations. Finally, the CBOs assisted organisations with implementing the action plan.

The overall aim for the evaluation of this programme was to assess the effectiveness of the capacity building model, including the suitability of its structure, component parts and processes, as well as the support provided by the CBOs involved. The evaluation also aimed to assess the extent to which the processes had increased the capacity of participating organisations and individuals, and to identify what aspects of the programme had worked well, and what did not, including facilitating factors, barriers to capacity building and indicators of enhanced organisational capacity. Key issues in the evaluation include understandings of the nature of capacity building, the accessibility of the CBP to minority ethnic voluntary organisations, the extent to which it was sensitive to the needs of participating organisations, its impact on participating organisations, and
significantly, the extent to which it had contributed to the sustainability of participating organisations.

Quantitative criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of the programme included increases in funding secured by participating organisations, in the number of staff and volunteers employed and in the number of service users. Qualitative criteria included the extent to which organisations involved in the programme had expanded their services as a result of participating in the programme, increased staff competence and confidence, enhanced user involvement in the development of services and increased involvement in key strategic relationships, local relationships and partnerships. Other criteria included the extent to which organisations had formalised their status, policies and procedures, diversified their funding streams and become involved in influencing and shaping policy. Criteria for assessing the sustainability of the organisations participating in the programme included the extent to which these organisations had become embedded in strategic partnerships and alliances, increased their potential to attract funding and been enabled to pursue their continuing development.

**Methods**

Two minority ethnic volunteers (Authors C and D) were actively involved as members of the research team and provided with mentoring support throughout the research, thus providing an element of individual capacity building within the research team. Interviews and focus groups were undertaken with the director and capacity building officers of the umbrella organisation. Nineteen organisations that had participated in the programme approached to take part in the evaluation, resulting in interviews with organisational representatives. These tended to be individuals who had lead responsibility for the operational running of the organisation. In a few cases, members of the management committee were also interviewed. Organisational documents, such as annual reports and publicity material were also reviewed.

Four of the participating organisations served as case studies for more in-depth examination of their involvement in the CBP. These organisations were selected, using criteria such as spread of geographical location, distinctness in the nature of the work undertaken and the client group served, and the agreement of key individuals to further involvement in the research. This involved further interviews with the individuals
concerned and more in-depth review of organisational documents, including business plans, organisational policies and procedures, documents relating to specific initiatives and in some cases, discussions with service users, funders and board members. Further focussed discussions were conducted with the CBOs concerned to identify their perceptions of the extent to which these four organisations had developed since their involvement in the CBP.

Through these methods we managed to collect data from a wide range of sources. All interviews and focus group discussions were recorded and notes written up. Elements of grounded theories and procedures were used to analyse emerging trends based on codification of the material until data had been saturated (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Quotes used in the remainder of the paper have been extracted from interview data with key individuals in participating organisations. Further details have not been provided to ensure the anonymity of the organisations and individuals concerned.

Participating organisations were geographically located across Scotland. Although these were mainly concentrated in Glasgow (11) and Edinburgh (4), the sample also included organisations in smaller cities and towns: Dundee, Perth, Inverness and Livingstone, where minority ethnic individuals are present in smaller numbers. The nature of the work undertaken by organisations was very diverse. A number of organisations provided advice and information to enable individuals to access essential services, such as housing, health, social care, benefits and education. Other organisations facilitated minority ethnic access and participation in the arts, sports or radio broadcasting. Some organisations were involved in supporting minority ethnic individuals into employment through training, education and liaison with public agencies. Yet other organisations had a more strategic or lobbying remit. For example, one organisation aimed to support minority ethnic recruitment, employment and retention in the Scottish Police force, while another organisation was part of a strategic alliance to counter xenophobia in employment in the UK and selected European countries.

The nature of the client groups served by these organisations was also diverse. Some worked with a specific ethnic or other group, such as asylum-seekers, while others worked with individuals from a wide range of ethnic groups. The client groups of some organisations were additionally organised along other dimensions, including gender,
disability and age. Organisations were typically small, with more than half of the organisations in the sample employing less than ten members of staff and about a third none at all, being run entirely by volunteers. More than half of the organisations had been in existence for less than ten years, including four that had been operating for less than five years. However, the sample also included well-established organisations that had lasted for more than twenty years. Yearly turnover for organisations tended to be low; eight organisations had a turnover of less than 50K, and a further five had a turnover of between 50 and 100K.

Evaluation of the CBP

Understandings of capacity building
Organisations had varying understandings of the term ‘capacity building’ and expectations of the CBP, including support with the professional running of the organisation, raising funds and support with achieving organisational objectives. The quotes below illustrate some of the expectations:

‘We are a very service-led organisation…it was all in our minds, we needed to get it down on paper and follow it through proper structures and procedures, we wanted to be sure that we were running properly…we were hoping to get the key structures in place, the key elements, getting real issues from grassroots level to policy-makers and mainstream organisations.’

‘The organisation was going through significant growth and creaking at its seams. The constitution was significantly outdated, no longer relevant. The process of addressing the constitution gave the organisation an opportunity to develop a model constitution for our work’

Awareness of the lack of formalized structures, policies and procedures and recognition of the value of addressing these shortcomings was clearly a motivating factor for organisations to participate in the CBP. Representatives of organisations in the early stages of development viewed the CBP as providing them with the means to ensure that they were properly set up and running professionally:
'I needed an understanding of what procedures, structures needed to be in place, how to set up a company, how the board needs to conduct itself and how to conduct the board. What was required for a successful organisation to perform well.'

More developed organisations expected the CBP to get them 'to the next level' by providing support with the professional running of the organisation, developing its infrastructure and achieving their objectives. Established organisations found that the CBP provided a useful health check to examine its own infrastructure, policies and processes. Our findings reveal that far from being passive recipients of the programme, participating organisations were actively involved in driving forward an organisational agenda for change, closely related to their main objectives and goals. This was confirmed by the CBOs who highlighted that while the nine organisational areas in the DTK were viewed as equally important, it was down to participating organisations to determine which areas they wished to focus on, contributing to the empowering processes of the programme. The other finding worth noting here is that the developmental stages of organisations constituted a significant variable in what was sought from capacity building programmes, with flexibility in the delivery and use of the programme being a key factor for ensuring satisfaction among participants.

**Accessibility of the programme**

To a large extent, the programme was accessible to relevant organisations since a pro-active and personal approach was taken by the capacity building organisation to publicise and explain the nature of the programme to organisations that were known to them. A small minority had heard about the programme through word of mouth. The free of charge nature of the service also increased organisations’ ability to participate in the programme, with many organisational representatives commenting favourably on the high quality of the service available to them at no cost to themselves.

However, involvement in the programme was challenging for those organisations that were largely or entirely run by volunteers, which as discussed above, constituted a significant number. Key individuals associated with these organisations often found it difficult to meet with the CBOs due to the lack of compatibility in working hours. These
findings suggest that the ‘fit’ between the delivery of the CBP and the availability of those likely to benefit from the programme is a key factor in ensuring that capacity is built. Further, there might be particular challenges to be faced, where there is most need for it, confirming other research which has found that smaller organisations tend to be particularly disadvantaged in regeneration initiatives (Ellis and Latif, 2006; Taylor, 2000).

**Strengths and weaknesses of participating organisations and expectations of the CBP**
One of the main strengths of participating organisations was the drive, passion and commitment of key individuals to its cause and objectives, including members of the management committee, staff, volunteers and service users:

‘A lot of them (executive committee) were committed to change…wanted to see a big change. Raw passion was a big strength…we wanted the service to be more inclusive.’

Other strengths were occupying a niche market in terms of the client group served or the service provided at a national, regional or local level.

‘I had been working in printing and design. I knew there was a demand for (specific minority ethnic) arts and that there was nowhere for artists to go to.

Another organisation reported that it was the only one that supported disabled people from minority ethnic communities in Scotland, while a third was unique in providing a broadcasting service to the Asian community. In this sense, such organisations were clearly playing to strengths which were directly related to their ethnic identity, and drawing on ‘ethnic resources’ in the form of the communities they were associated with.

However, many organisations admitted to a lack of organisational skills, formal structures, policies and procedures. Lack of funding and staff was also a recurrent theme, which hindered organisations’ ability to develop further. Other weaknesses were a lack of clarity of organisational roles and responsibilities between staff, and between staff and the management committee that impeded the work of the organisation.
We suggest that although ethnic identity might have been instrumental in the setting up of minority ethnic voluntary organisations and formed a key part in formulating organisational aims and objectives, in striving to further develop their organisations, minority ethnic organisations were less motivated less by their ethnically derived genesis. Instead, more by pragmatic considerations of what was needed to achieve their objectives and operate within the parameters of the voluntary sector appeared to drive their capacity building initiatives. This is consistent with Jones and Ram’s (2008) finding that although the genesis of many minority ethnic businesses might in many cases derive from their ethnic identity, entrepreneurs must ultimately abide by the demands of the sector they work in.

**Impact of the programme**

Many organisations reported that they had benefited enormously from participating in the programme, with increased funding or increased ability to attract funding viewed as a significant outcome of participation in the programme. Other changes reported were clarification of the organisations’ aims and objectives and the development of a business plan, viewed as instrumental in securing funding. Several organisations reported that they had developed a range of policies and procedures which helped to inspire confidence among potential funders. Some felt that putting into place these processes and procedures had been extremely beneficial:

‘She (CBO) helped to build a proper structure for the organisation, to deal with human resource, volunteers and a business plan.’

‘The CBO had structures to facilitate the process…we had the framework and context within which to work.’

However, it was also telling that organisational change appeared to be at least partly motivated by the desire to meet the criteria for funding required by government and statutory agencies.

‘Funding applications ask about board members, policies and procedures. If we did not do that we would not have got funding. Stating that we had been through the CBP gave added assurance.’
Awareness of the potential for discrimination also emerged as a motivating factor. One organisation commented that minority ethnic organisations had to work harder to project a ‘professional image’ and develop a sound organisational structure in order to be taken as seriously as mainstream voluntary organisations working in the same area although the latter might also be lacking in key policies or procedures.

While external perceptions of the organisation were clearly viewed as important for attracting funding and sustainable development, for some, participation in the programme also facilitated better working conditions. Many organisations reported that they had developed a better understanding of organisational roles and responsibilities among board members as well as staff. Elaborating on this, some participants commented that the CBOs had played a useful facilitative role in overcoming internal power dynamics:

‘[The CBO] said things that needed saying…she had the willingness to show where they (the management committee) were going wrong.’

‘Staff members did raise it (need for a project manager within the organisation) but it was good to hear it from someone else.’

Yet other specific changes reported were improvements in communication within the organisation and advances in information technology. Some organisations reported that they had developed links with other organisations and were involved in strategic partnerships either at the national or local level.

‘Community building was a big part…we got to know other organisations through them (CBOs).’

‘We are getting more open with other organisations to collectively make a difference at a higher level.’

‘We are now definitely participating more effectively in local networks…There is the Community Regeneration Partnership, that was apparently running for years
that we had no idea of, but since the programme…we have an input in…what goes on around the area.’

These comments are indicative of participating organisations’ desire to engage with other organisations and influence policy and strategy, and to be active participants of the regeneration agenda. While the effects of minority ethnic engagement in local relationships and partnerships are difficult to ascertain, it is likely that embedding such organisations in the wider social, economic and political context will contribute to organisational sustainability.

Factors which facilitated involvement in the CBP
It is worth noting that several factors facilitated organisations’ ability to participate in the CBP, with timing emerging as particularly significant. Among organisations which reported benefiting significantly from the programme, the accessibility of the programme at a critical stage of organisational development was crucial, for instance, in the early stages of setting up the organisation, or when there was a change in governance, or a desire to expand the role of the organisation. At these points, there appeared to be particularly close convergence between what those actively involved in the organisations were seeking and what the programme could offer. Other facilitating factors were a sound understanding of the nature of the programme being offered and a commitment and ability to invest in the programme. The knowledge, expertise and accessibility of the CBOs were also identified as a facilitating factor, with many participating organisations commenting that the individualized, specialist support of the CBOs was particularly helpful:

‘As soon as they (the CBOs) were identifying gaps, they were filling them as well…it helped that they shared the same agenda.’

‘She (CBO) has a feeling for the organisation, for the people who work in it. You can see the commitment…it works both ways.’

These views indicate that the combination of pragmatic and moral support offered by the CBOs was catalytic in enabling project leaders to identify and address organisational shortcomings. This highlights the value of individuals who are adept at working
horizontally, across and within organisations to stimulate knowledge exchange and make connections between potential allies across boundaries. For a minority of organisations, the ability of CBOs to communicate in languages other than English was instrumental in enabling them to participate in the programme. Other identified facilitating factors were the willingness of all those involved to fully participate in the process, including the board or management committee, and the systematic approach and structure afforded by the CBP.

Factors which hindered involvement in the programme

Among the main factors identified which hindered involvement in the programme were a general lack of resources, including staff resources, to take on the additional work of being involved in the capacity building process. This included difficulties in balancing ongoing work commitments, with the additional work that capacity building involves in seeking to address longer term needs and goals. Organisations which were entirely run by volunteers faced particular problems in investing the effort required to ensure that appropriate policies and procedures were in place. In some cases, the turnover in key staff working with the CBOs also hindered organisational capacity building. As Ellis and Latif (2006) recognised, it is perhaps inevitable that in some organisations, the very factors which the CBP was intended to address, such as lack of funding and resources, limited the extent to which capacity could be built.

Other barriers to capacity building, as identified by CBOs, were a lack of willingness to openly share organisational needs or problems or acknowledge weaknesses, and an inability to perceive the relevance of the CBP. This, combined with a failure to participate fully in the capacity building process or an expectation that CBOs would do all the work, meant that some organisations were not able to fully reap the benefits of involvement in the programme. These findings suggest that in addition to pragmatic constraints such as lack of resources, attitudinal factors can also influence the effectiveness of organisational capacity building.

Many organisations reported that the time span of the programme, typically a year long, had been ‘just right’ in that it allowed them to work intensively on developing the organisation within a limited period. However, it was clear that some organisations found it difficult to accomplish the work required during a year due to lack of staff resources.
‘The quality was there but we needed time’

The big change has not happened yet…the CBP has covered what we needed. We just need a person to do things that should be done.’

Although some of these organisations continued to maintain contact with the CBOs, there was a view that further sustained support was needed. Further, participating organisations were unanimous in their view that there was a need for an organisational capacity building programme to enable minority ethnic organisations to develop more formal systems, policies and procedures and to function more effectively.

Discussion
This study demonstrates the continued relevance of capacity-building programmes for organisations which work with minority ethnic communities in the face of sustained cynicism, if not criticism, of such activities. The case study approach employed demonstrated that well-designed and competently delivered capacity building programmes can effectively support minority ethnic organisations in furthering their aims as well as ensure greater accountability to service users and funding bodies. It is perhaps inevitable, that to some extent, community organisations will use capacity building processes to better enable them to meet the requirements placed on them by funding organisations to demonstrate transparency, value for money and accountability. However, the study has also demonstrated the value of such activities to the community organisations themselves in supporting them to achieve organisational objectives, promote better working conditions, and engage in strategic alliances and partnerships. In addition to these broad conclusions, four main implications for future capacity building initiatives can be identified.

The first strand of implications relate to the diversity of the organisations involved in the study in terms of orientation to policy at differential spatial levels, services delivered, client groups served, size, stage of development and turnover. This suggests that capacity building initiatives need to be informed not only by expertise in organisational development and governance, but by in-depth understanding of the issues faced by such organisations in their distinct areas of work. A number of capacity building
approaches may be appropriate, including those that relate to specific policy areas or specialist functions. It also suggests that some of these approaches may straddle across the mainstream and minority voluntary sector, and given the increasingly business-like approach adopted among voluntary organisations, include the private sector.

The second strand of implications relate to the design and delivery of effective capacity building initiatives. Key elements identified as contributing to the effectiveness of such programmes include the generic areas covered in the programme, the targeted and tailored approach as reflected in the bespoke design of the programme, its delivery by informed and committed staff and its flexibility. Similarly, the barriers to effective capacity building identified in this study, including the lack of sufficient resources to engage in such activities and lack of willingness to admit to organisational weaknesses, serve as a salutary reminder of the need for diversified approaches and of the challenges of overcoming attitudinal barriers at an individual level.

The third strand of implications relates to the roles of minority ethnic organisations in civic society, and how these might be furthered by capacity building initiatives. The study revealed a number of roles that they play in relation to the specific communities that they serve, often in areas of work that closely overlap with ethnic identity. It also demonstrated mobilisation of ethnic identity as a key component of organisations’ strategies to identify a ‘niche market’ and achieve public recognition in the context of government attempts to tackle social poverty and exclusion. Despite this, the study found that ethnic identity had only limited utility in minority ethnic organisations’ struggle to compete with other organisations in meeting the wider demands of the sector. Key organisational actors were aware of the need to ensure the relevance of their work to other stakeholders in wider society, and of the desirability of engaging in strategic alliances, where possible. This suggests the need for more pro-active approaches by statutory agencies and other public bodies in engaging such organisations in decision-making processes and policy formulation within wider measures to tackle poverty and social exclusion.

The fourth strand of implications relate to the wider context in which minority ethnic voluntary organisations are positioned. As has been argued elsewhere (Author A, 2008),
the extent to which such agencies’ efforts to gain public support for their aspirations and activities will succeed is closely related to key public organisations’ willingness to define civic society in multicultural terms. One of the criticisms levelled at multiculturalism is unilaterality of recognition by the majority population of the minority population, rather than in the opposite direction, limiting opportunities for integration and civic incorporation of the minority ethnic communities (Joppke, 2004). However, this study revealed that representatives of participating organisations consulted unanimously expressed a need for capacity building programmes in the sector. This reveals an understanding of capacity building that is congruent with wider understandings of the term. It also reveals willingness to both work with, and compete against other organisations in accomplishing this. In doing so, these organisations demonstrate a willingness to both mobilise and negotiate ethnic identity in order to play an active role in public life, while submitting to wider sectoral demands. However, ultimately, the extent to which capacity building initiatives can genuinely transform such organisations’ engagement in civic life, resides in the willingness of other public bodies to recognize their claim for equal access and treatment. Where the claimed benefits of diversity are not, in practice, perceived as important, there might be active resistance by ‘mainstream’ organisations to maintain their existing culture and hold on to their real and perceived power (Author B and Fearful, 2006). This suggests that these organisations too may benefit from capacity building initiatives in terms of building understanding and knowledge of the specific nature of the work undertaken by minority ethnic organisations and the challenges they face.

References


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