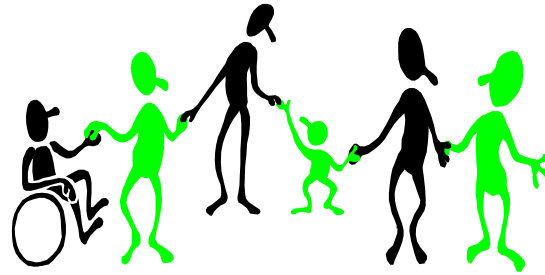


Appendix 5 Part of the original research



Coalition **for Equality Merseyside**

**Report on the
Coalition for Equality and Human Rights Merseyside
Workshop on**

Culture and Economic Practice

Life bank Kensington 2008 John Smith

1. Introduction to CEHRM by Edward Murphy Director of Merseyside Network for Change, MNFC.

MNFC has a long and valued history in working to overcome racial discrimination and in community empowerment development. Using these strengths MNFC combining with Merseyside Council of Faiths and the Merseyside Refugee Support Network have created CEHRM. The new organisation's remit is to work with any group or community confronted with equality issues although the initial focus will be on economic development. Merseyside can show a mix of some successes but with long standing issues remaining to be addressed in regards to equality and economic development. In many fields of economic activity minorities are under represented in the sub region. While there has, in recent times, been an increase in effort there is still much to be done and it is the effort required that underlines CEHRM decision to concentrate on equality in economic development.
2. Overview to what CEHRM is trying to achieve with its diversity and economic development programme – CEHRM Project Director John Smith.

CEHRM consider that generally there is too little attention paid to the attributes, skills and aspirations of disadvantaged groups in the economic development of the sub region. What CEHRM will accordingly concentrate on is an exploration of how ethnicity, cultural practice, beliefs and other attributes of identity may better define practice and aspirations in economic activity. In part this means supporting existing programmes through signposting and networking. But there is also recognition that there are gaps and so CEHRM hopes to create new initiatives, partnerships and networks ensuring confidence and assertiveness is built and in turn new forms of economic activity developed. CEHRM believes in delivering this it can impact positively on social cohesion as well as economic well-being.
3. Following these brief introductions a number of points were raised:
 - It was agreed that there is a continuing need, despite progress, for the diversity of Merseyside's community to be reflected in its workforce and business development. For while such schemes as the Jobs Employment and Training, JET service, have gone some way in achieving this there are some deep rooted problems to be resolved which at present mitigate against further success.
 - Role models can be used but more evidence is needed to show how this works in practice. There is often reluctance from suitable candidates to put themselves forward.
 - Perceptions, which simply reflect stereotypical responses, need to be overcome as they are regarded as limiting potential.
 - Although it can be argued that historically Liverpool fortunes have rested on migration this can also mitigate against cohesion. As a means of overcoming the barriers limiting the benefits, safety nets which have been put in place, are sometimes inadequate and if inappropriately applied limit migrants' ability to take risks. Mechanisms need to be established which offer both support and flexibility. In order for this approach to work well governance at many levels needs to be improved. While poor governance is unlikely to be specifically targeted at migrant groups they, like other disadvantaged communities, are likely to be on the sharper end of its failures.

- Tokenism can and does act against migrant groups establishing themselves as mainstream players in the local economy.
 - There was the recognition that local data for example knowledge of local GDP's and market potential was woefully inadequate
4. After this discussion participants broke into three groups to consider the following themes.

a. How can cultural diversity be reflected economically

Starting by asking the question what is 'cultural diversity'? the group recognised that there are a number of meanings to this much used term. It was understood in the context of this workshop to mean a coming together to share different and new ideas thus bringing cross fertilization for economic benefit. To bring this about there needs to be recognition of allies and barriers and crucially identifying and sharing best practice

While there are real barriers there is never the less a need to overcome perceptions of victimhood. While all cultural groupings have inbuilt power structures these may need to be diffused in order that there is an opening up of the economic opportunities to complement beliefs and values. Experiences will be different and therefore so will contributions.

An economy incorporating ethnic and other forms of diversity will recognise and utilise the specific values that drive people to become skilled and thus value those skills as a statement of cultural strength and expectations. All this needs the right type of support mechanisms from both within and provided to the different communities. These, for example, may include bursary programmes to address poverty issues. Equally, among the young are issues around loans, borrowing and parents expectations. There needs to be some flexibility on attitudes to school leaving and investment in trades and local apprenticeships. The group recognised there should always be an encouragement for people to be aware of the security education and training brings to work.

Among some groups there is the issue of benefits and financial security although entrepreneurial attitudes include risk taking. For example new migrants such as the Kurdish community, who regard themselves as self starters, use businesses as a meeting point, exchange of ideas as well as for commercial purposes. Likewise there is a need to develop niche markets. Specialised cultural food products, for example, could be grown by local/sub region farmers that can't compete growing ordinary cash crops.

The provision for specialist services needs to be better understood and provide opportunities to bring people to share skills work together whether through cooperatives, community and social enterprises networked through informal structures.

b. What might be regarded as culturally defined economic drivers

A driver could and in this context has been for migrant communities simply to overcome barriers. Equally being a member of a well defined group is a driver. The group asked 'What are the drivers?' and came up

with the following examples: financial security/advancement, universal education, human security (feeling safe), relative freedom and the need/desire to overcome inhibitors – perceived or actual.

Inhibitors could include race, gender, religion or more universally ignorant perception of others and low cultural expectations

Individual drivers might include becoming or being identified as membership of groups, emanating role models, having dependants and high cultural expectations

Drivers matter because at present we have unsustainable and, for many, unacceptable levels of difference in employment that negatively impacts upon economic and educational achievement.

They then considered how and suggested that it is easier to change from the inside but that you need to cultivate will for change and thus cultivate environment for change. This led to the question ‘Whose responsibility is it to educate on need for change?’ and thus it needs to be an education based on evidence, but ‘Who holds evidence?’ Finally, it was thought that there were grey fuzzy areas which are the hardest to work in because they are hard to measure and often don’t fit into the targets and boxes used to measure need or success.

c. How might different groups ‘trade’ locally

Skills in migrant groups are often not being utilised because of the need for ready cash and often work is found where there are gaps in market rather than through the skills on offer.

LETS –Local Exchange Trading Schemes might have a role but there’s a need to better recognise and support different cultures engaged in different employment. For example Muslims in Africa are business orientated because the Prophet was a businessman and so being faithful is to remain true to the tradition.

It is recognised that the so called informal economy (tax avoidance), which, goes on needs to be brought into the mainstream, in order to eradicate its downside, marginalisation. Ways need to be found for integration as simply prescribing it doesn’t work and illegal employment use often exploits cultural difference. Likewise landlords and employment agencies who specialise or at least work predominantly with minority groups need to better supported to assist in there being part of the mainstream.

Music-Arts-Food are markets which have had success but there needs to be more encouragement to use existing skills in crafts which assist in the development of artisan and cottage industry style enterprises. Supporting agencies need to do more outreach work to achieve greater successes.

5. Open discussion - What’s needed – how we can go forward and what would a project to develop the theme look like.

Support services need to be well defined and are presently too often too general. For example while there appears to be a need to inform groups on how to create Social Enterprises it is necessary as a precursor to this explain what they are and the role they are intended to play. Here there were differences about their value so if a workshop were arranged it might look at both different views about them as well as some technical issues about setting them up and their sustainability.

Best practice should be better disseminated and not, as so often happens, just left as the content of an email newsletter. Its impact also needs to get into Local Government, *the key agency*, in a more meaningful way than at present, as this will better inform on policy and resource direction.

Although some sort of mapping exercise was proposed it was recognised that this needed to be better done than simply sending out surveys that had poor responses in turn leading to a lack of reliability on the map produced. Rather such an exercise should be one that is built upon over time as more initiatives come to light through the existing and expanding network. Likewise stories can be as important as data. To help this process it was thought that hubs of networks with cascading effect were preferred to one central source.

A community newsletter, as a voice for community-to-community dialogue gives power and at the same time as needing to be cheap must be attractive.

6. Final comments

It was clear that there is great interest in the issue of economic development and diversity. CEHRM now has some capacity to take this initial event forward through a programme to be developed over the coming year which will take this workshop's broad brush stroke discussion and start to explore in detail of many of the issues raised and to structure the findings into deliverable projects and initiatives.

Please contact John Smith mcf@merseysidecounciloffaiths.org 0151 702 6976 with your views and comments.



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