

Learning and listening for mutual action

**Surfacing and building the evidence
base to support Black African,
Black Caribbean, Asian and other
Minoritised Ethnic led voluntary
sector organisations**

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Introduction

This has not been an equal pandemic for all. Much has been written with passion about how Covid-19 has disproportionately affected certain groups in the United Kingdom¹² and in particular Black African, Black Caribbean, Asian and other Minoritised Ethnic (for example, Gypsy Roma) individuals. Over the past year, we have seen that an important lifeline for these groups and individuals are the many frontline and 'infrastructure' or 'intermediary' voluntary sector organisations (VSOs) who represent them and their needs. How we properly resource and support these VSOs, particularly those 'by and for' led organisations is an urgent question. In order to help provide context to answering this question from a 'capacity building' support perspective, Pilotlight was interested in surfacing early answers to the prompt: what are the organisational support needs of Black African, Black Caribbean, Asian and other Minoritised Ethnic³ 'by and for' VSOs?

This short paper provides initial insights into answering this question. It reviews:

What we know, in so far as:

1. History is somewhat informative
2. Structural inequality and racism persist
3. Jargon, terminology, definition and language is problematic
4. Current (and global) best practices are emerging

What we don't know, in so far as:

5. There are major gaps in evidenced based, cultural and equity informed, best practices

¹ One example is the well documented Rapid Review (version one and two) by The Ubele Initiative <https://www.ubele.org/our-research>

² Office for National Statistics. (2020). *Coronavirus (COVID-19) related deaths by ethnic group, England and Wales: 2 March 2020 to 10 April 2020*. London: Office for National Statistics.

³ We are very aware of the issues surrounding the use of BAME as an abbreviation or shorthand for these groups of people. We use it in this research not to perpetuate current and historical racial injustices but mindful of all of this in practice.

and also provide considerations or prompts for,

What next, in terms of opportunities to learn and listen through:

6. Deeper qualitative research, including a co-designed survey, or a potential
7. Convening of 'by and for' led leaders in a listening, learning, and action forum

The main ambition of this short review is to begin contextualising and framing current knowledge and evidence so that we might build, today, the future we all want to see: one that is truly healing from history and the trauma brought on by the current pandemic; a future that is diverse, equitable, inclusive, and thus thriving.

What we know

1. History is somewhat informative

There remains little recent collated public literature, evidence or data, about what works and what does not when it comes to current⁴ organisational support needs of what many have coined as "BAME" led voluntary sector organisations⁵. What may come close to a synthesized study, or retrospective, was an evaluation of the Council of Ethnic Minority Voluntary Sector Organisations' (CEMVO) London pilot programme on 'Capacity Building Black and Minority Ethnic Voluntary and Community Organisations' by Jean Ellis and Shehnaaz Latif in 2006⁶.

The CEMVO pilot was a £2.5m programme which sought to introduce a 'tailor-made MBA [style] ethnic minority capacity building course in partnership with the University of East London'(UEL). The course trained 'capacity building officers' (CBOs), who, after

⁴ Using "current", loosely here, to mean the period 2015-2025

⁵ Historically categorised as BAME – Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Communities. This especially centres around communities from Black African and Caribbean, Middle East, East and South Asia, or other Minoritised Ethnic (e.g., Gypsy Roma, Jewish) communities.

⁶ *Capacity building black and minority ethnic voluntary and community organisations*, Jean Ellis and Shehnaaz Latif, 2006
<https://www.issuelab.org/resources/20679/20679.pdf>

a year-long 'taught' programme, would work in Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) led, by and for VSOs to 'capacity build 40 organisations over four years (2000-2004), reaching a total of 600 organisations across the London region'. It was a positive response to the government's public service agenda to strengthen infrastructure organisations, but especially BAME led ones that were at risk of being left out of local strategic partnerships or 'Neighbourhood Renewal Funds' because BAME groups experienced "acute barriers" to engagement, funding, and success in delivering services "to support government targets".

Consequently, "capacity building"⁷ [was] a means to 'engage in service delivery effectively', defining this as being 'about ensuring that [VSOs] have the skills, knowledge, structures and resources to realise their full potential" (Ellis and Latif, 2006). The challenges facing BAME led VSOs were well documented and emphasized in the CEMVO pilot. They include:

- A lack of resources (premises, staff, skills, time, funding and networks)
- Limited access to support
- Low involvement in civic matters, regeneration and key partnerships
- Racism and discrimination

The hypothesis of the CEMVO was based on the assumption that if BAME organisations were to "flourish within this environment they would need to adopt businesslike approaches and become more outward looking" (e.g., mainstream). Accordingly, a CEMVO model and standard was created and piloted with UEL that focused on professionalisation, standardised model of diagnosis (diagnostic toolkit), and accreditation. Key learnings from the CEMVO pilot include:

- The need to set realistic timeframes for activities – the CEMVO delivery time was one-year – not enough time to set-up, let alone reach a critical organisational point to develop or encourage sustainability

⁷ 'organisational support needs' and 'capacity building' is used synonymously in this review

- The need to design with and for the user. The framework to assess organisational needs, the diagnostic toolkit, was not designed to be available to the VSOs to revisit “their own profile and development” which limited continuous improvement, their own learning and future sustainability
- An overemphasis on achieving a result (accreditation and certificate) at the expense of learning from the ‘process’
- A recognition of “considerable advantages” to “co-operative working and sharing of networks and experiences” and small local initiatives running concurrently
- The need for more realistic budget-setting for certain activities, matched with more flexible and outcomes focused funding regimes
- Intensive one to one support had significant results
- An off the shelf ‘model’ does not work. It excludes the need to be inclusive of BAME “cultural, political and internal personal dynamics”
- Need for better coordination, collaboration, and information sharing among BAME led organisations and ‘capacity building’ providers
- Timing is key – capacity building is more effective if it’s the ‘right time’ in the organisation’s lifetime and may be more appropriate for ‘semi-developed’ organisations
- Personality and learning style ought to match between provider and BAME Leader(s)
- Governance and senior leadership commitment to ‘capacity building’ was essential
- Not all BAME organisations want to apply a ‘public service’ model to their work or services

Most of what was documented in the CEMVO evaluation is still relevant today. From a quick review of recent literature⁸, BAME led organisations are still experiencing the same challenges and capacity building needs and are still required to assimilate and

⁸ https://voice4change-england.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/acevo_voice4change_home_truths_report_final.pdf

change to become 'mainstream'. This remains in opposition to what the CEMVO report authors, and the organisations who participated in the pilot called for; for example, there was a real desire for "alternative approaches which honour multi-culturalism or 'middle-way' approaches that focus on integration", or put another way, where 'mainstream' approaches are 'bridging' or inclusive, representative, flexible, or even dismantled (e.g., multi-cultural), to meet the specific needs of BAME VSOs⁹.

How do we really learn from history and build on it or dismantle it? Especially as it appears like we continue to repeat it. What is the role of mainstream support organisations such as Pilotlight in ensuring we don't repeat history?

2. Structural inequality and racism persist

The 2006 CEMVO report effectively summed up the structural racism and inequality of the time and the 'acute barriers' faced by BAME leaders. It also acknowledged the very real problem of '[lack of] representation of people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds' in funding or other powerful positions. Flash forward 16 years and in 2021, we know from much of the current literature that voluntary sector organisations led by, for, and with these communities continue to experience individual and structural racism and 'antagonism', more than their white peers or other "mainstream VSOs" (*Home Truths*, 2020)¹⁰. Lack of diversity, equity, and inclusion on boards¹¹, in charity leadership¹², in trusts and foundations¹³, in FTSE companies¹⁴, elected officials and the civil service^{15,16} remain a challenge and as reported urgently, everywhere, the

⁹ This stems from much of literature around assimilation, multi-culturalism, and integration in immigrant theory and practice. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/292743163_Immigrant_Integration_Acculturation_and_Social_Integration

¹⁰ https://voice4change-england.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/acevo_voice4change_home_truths_report_final.pdf

¹¹ <https://www.inclusiveboards.co.uk>

¹² <https://charitysowhite.org/>

¹³ <https://www.alliancemagazine.org/blog/new-coalition-of-13-uk-foundations-to-tackle-diversity-equity-and-inclusion/>

¹⁴ <https://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/news/articles/ftse-boards-will-struggle-to-hit-one-by-2021-ethnic-diversity-target>

¹⁵ <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/explainers/ethnicity-civil-service>

¹⁶ <https://www.obv.org.uk/about-us>

current coronavirus health crisis has exacerbated these inequalities, especially in these communities.^{17 18 19 20}

What is the role of mainstream support organisations in taking action to speed up this important structural change?

3. Jargon, terminology, definition and language is problematic

Language, terminology, and definitions play an important role in truly unpacking and addressing structural inequity and the organisational support needs of 'by and for' led VSOs. All of these issues are as problematic now as it was in 2006 or going back even further post the 1981 Brixton Riots.

On the problem of terminology, in 2006, the Home Office and other public and voluntary sector bodies referred to these communities using acronyms like BAME, or BME. Therefore, BME or BAME led organisations were "led and managed mainly or entirely by Black and/or other minority ethnic groups which serves mainly Black or minority ethnic people" (Ellis and Latif, 2006). The full scope of 'BAME' has been understood as Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities that have historically experienced marginalisation, oppression and prejudice. Therefore, also in scope, are Jewish communities, Gypsy & Traveller communities and some migrant communities²¹. There is growing resentment and calls to cease use of BME or BAME altogether as it wrongly or rightly centres or decentres groups of people who are distinct in history, experiences and culture^{22 23 24}.

¹⁷ <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-social-sciences/social-policy/tsrc/working-papers/working-paper-141.pdf>

¹⁸ <https://www.powertochange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Power-to-Change-Full-Report.pdf>

¹⁹ https://static1.squarespace.com/static/594948a7414fb5804d2b4395/t/5ec3ee32a5b5c27385219625/1589898876817/Covid19-Report_v2_compressed.pdf

²⁰ <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/58f9e592440243412051314a/t/5eaab6e972a49d5a320cf3af/1588246258540/REPORT+Impact+of+COVID-19+on+the+BAME+Community+and+voluntary+sector%2C+30+April+2020.pdf>

²¹ <https://www.london.gov.uk/questions/2018/0064#:~:text=The%20acronym%20BAME%20stands%20for,output%20categories%20for%20ethnic%20groups>. OR <https://www.lloydsbankfoundation.org.uk/media/cjxpe2y5/lbfew-bame-partnership-brief.pdf>

²² <https://style.ons.gov.uk/house-style/race-and-ethnicity/#:~:text=BAME%20and%20BME,people%20of%20a%20Mixed%20ethnicity>

²³ <https://www.comicrelief.com/funding/funding-opportunities/the-global-majority-fund/>

²⁴ <https://civilservice.blog.gov.uk/2019/07/08/please-dont-call-me-bame-or-bme/>

Many groups like the Racial Equity Index, The Social Investment Consultancy (TSIC) and 360Giving have been collaborating with the DEI Data Group to propose a shared framework (classification, language and approach) to categorise organisations either led by or targeting and supporting groups experiencing structural inequity. The DEI Data Group is an open coalition of foundations working alongside the [DEI Coalition](#) and the [Funders Alliance for Race Equality](#). The primary use of this taxonomy will be for funders to monitor their grant programmes, but it is also anticipated that there will be wider use of a shared framework for sector analysis. One funder, Comic Relief has recently taken a position on this debate and has focused their work on “communities experiencing racial inequality” and is focusing on “organisations led and managed by the communities they serve” for their new [Global Majority Fund](#).

Similarly, there are significant sensitivities around the term and definition of ‘capacity building’ when used to refer to ‘organisational support needs’ in so far as it is often perceived as a deficit-led versus asset-led approach. This tension has come out strongly in much of The Social Innovation Partnership’s work building new programmes with ‘by and for’ leaders, including: Community Researcher²⁵, Community Led²⁶, and Violence Against Women and Girls Grassroots Grant-making Fund²⁷. In particular in early work on the latter programme co-designing the fund and potential ‘capacity building’ support activities for the grantees, the 70 ‘by and for’ grassroots participants struggled with the terms, language, and definitions – jargon – that is so prevalent in all sectors. It also recognised that the journey to come up with alternative ‘terms’ or ‘frames’, ‘of and by’ the community takes time (and much longer than the six weeks that was available to try to develop something truly authentic and sustainable).

NCVO’s definition mirrors CEMVO’s and views ‘capacity building’ or ‘capacity development’ as a “range of activities you might use to expand your organisation or

²⁵ <https://www.tsip.co.uk/blog/tag/community+research>

²⁶ <https://www.tsip.co.uk/case-studies/10/27/enabling-communities-to-play-a-bigger-role-in-research-and-funding-with-guys-and-st-thomas-charity2>

²⁷ <https://londoncf.org.uk/uploads/TSIP-VAWG-GRASSROOTS-FUND-FEEDBACK-SESSION-PRESENTATION-FOR-WEBSITE.pdf>

after change direction. The United Nations has defined capacity as “the ability of individuals, institutions, and societies to perform functions, solve problems and set and achieve objectives in a sustainable manner”²⁸.

Perhaps one of the positives that has come out of the pandemic, is that it has allowed more time for deeper reflection on these problems in the UK and elsewhere.

Interestingly, in an article recently published in *Stanford Social Innovation Review (SSIR, Fall 2020)* on ‘Transformational Capacity Building’ by April Nishimura, Roshni Sampath, Vu Le, Anbar Mahar Sheikh, and Ananda Valenzuela, the authors have argued for a more expansive definition of ‘capacity building’ (from USA perspective) that may be more current for our times:

"Capacity Building is the process of building and strengthening the systems, structures, cultures, skills, and resources and power that organisations need to serve their communities."²⁹

"Capacity Builders are the individuals and organisations that work with non-profit staff, board members, volunteers to overcome the barriers that non-profits face in fulfilling their missions."³⁰

What is Pilotlight’s role in this movement of coordinated dialogue and consensus building on definitions, terms, or language?

4. Current (and global) best practices are emerging

The *SSIR* article is particularly useful as it is the most recent review and thought piece written by ‘by and for’ leaders articulating what they think are the “organisational support needs of BIPOC³¹ led voluntary sector organisations”. Though written for a

²⁸ <https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/organisation/orgdev/development-1/capacitybuilding2#:~:text=The%20terms%20'capacity%20building'%20or,your%20organisation%20or%20change%20direction.&text=%20That%20is%20the%20basis%20of%20any%20well%2Dfunctioning%20organisation>.

²⁹ https://rvcseattle.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Fall2020-Feature-Nishimura-Capacity-Building_1.pdf

³⁰ https://rvcseattle.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Fall2020-Feature-Nishimura-Capacity-Building_1.pdf

³¹ BIPOC stands for black, indigenous, people of colour and is used as shorthand in the USA much like BAME is used in the UK.

USA audience it mirrors much of what is happening in the UK and has useful transatlantic lessons. The *SS/R* article, in many ways, affirms the findings of the CEMVO evaluation in that 'by and for' led organisations are asked to "assimilate to what is considered 'western' terms or standards of 'doing things' [like] individualism, over-emphasis on the written word, process/structure, needing to be 'investment ready', outdated definitions of 'sustainable' or 'effective', and over-reliance on technology or digitization"³². One interview with a BAME female led infrastructure VSO in the UK validated much of what was in this article³³.

The *SS/R* article speaks to the decade's long underinvestment in "communities of colour" – from health, education, housing and employment etc. Similar concerns have been raised in the UK. Much of the approximately £12m Covid-19 grant funding (of the approximately £330m total funding so far) to BAME intermediary organisations (see Spreadsheet) are trying to respond to these heightened concerns. Many funders are also considering what long-term investment might look like (e.g., Comic Relief Global Majority Fund and [Baobab Foundation](#))³⁴. At the moment, *Equally Ours* (supported by Future Foundations UK and Ubele) is also undertaking a key piece of research to surface what these investment/funding numbers have and currently look like in the UK.

The *SS/R* article also eloquently mirrors the findings of recent UK intelligence gathering work undertaken by TSIP, Voice4Change England, Ubele Initiative, Operation Black Vote, Race on the Agenda (ROTA), Black Training and Enterprise Group (BTEG), Black Thrive and many others. All of which provides a basis for deeper learning and listening. They include elements of:

- Trust and the need to build trustworthy and culturally resonant relationships.
- Behaviour (patterns of behaviour or lack therefore) rooted in history and culture need to be addressed (for example, why have we not learned from

³² https://rvcseattle.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Fall2020-Feature-Nishimura-Capacity-Building_1.pdf

³³ Interview with Yvonne Field of Ubele Initiative

³⁴ GrantNAV/360 Giving data – approximate figures using the search terms Covid 19 and BAME or BAME Intermediary funding

the CEMVO pilot, as much as the data and experiences in 2006 offered important lessons for change)

- Size and scale of organisations and what is considered 'right, effective or ready'
- Power and networks and who is invited to the table and in receipt of funding or as well as influencing political and systems change discussion
- Resilience building in whatever form (financial, health, and physical assets)
- Resources that BAME led VSOs need (physical and human) that require us all to reimagine what investment looks for these organisations now and, in the future

Support organisations such as Pilotlight ought to play an important role in this space; especially in bridging the 'by and for' sector with more mainstream but cultural resonant initiatives. More research is needed to understand if this is valuable or a strategic fit and what this might look like, especially given the lessons from the CEMVO pilot.

What we don't know

What remains clear from this initial and rapid review, is that much of the public literature on these issues is outdated and uncollated. There are a few BAME led infrastructure and intermediary bodies around who are trying to perform this knowledge and evidence hub but are too stretched and under-resourced to do this well and for the long-term. The sector needs more current evidence on the experiences and needs of 'by and for' led organisations. Published and emerging research by the ippr, Pro Bono Economics, Resolution Foundation, Runnymede Trust, Voice4Change England, Equally Ours, The Ubele Initiative, Baobab Foundation and many others will hopefully begin to fill this vacuum, but the sector needs more 'mainstream' organisations contributing to the research and evidence base, too.

What next

Specialist organisational development organisations or, organisations that specialise in supporting and amplifying VSOs, such as Pilotlight, have a valuable role to play in this space. Discovering what that looks like in practice, however, requires more learning, research, listening and co-design.

On learning and research, there is ample room for more in-depth qualitative research with Pilotlighters and 'by and for' leaders coming up with relevant hypothesis and new methods of survey, research, and approach or pilot design. This continued learning also necessitates greater and concerted listening either through direct hosting of convenings, contributions to existing gatherings (e.g., Ubele Forums), or deep one-to-ones with 'by and for' leaders.

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