

# **BEMIS**

**BLACK AND ETHNIC MINORITY  
INFRASTRUCTURE IN SCOTLAND**



## *Listening to the VOICE*

*Executive Summary*

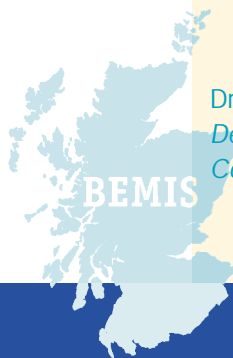
## *Foreword*

The Commission for Racial Equality is delighted to have been able to support the development of Black and Ethnic Minority Infrastructure in Scotland (BEMIS) to date. Progress has been considerable. The following Executive Summary provides a flavour of what has been achieved. However, without detracting from the commitment and effort of its individual members, this progress clearly demonstrates the current absence of and the absolute need for an effective national voice for black and ethnic minority voluntary and community organisations in Scotland. These are challenging times. Unprecedented opportunities for discussion and action to address racism, racial discrimination and disadvantage exist. But the challenge for too many black and ethnic minority organisations is survival. Short-term funding, reductions in grants, lack of support and sustainability programmes are affecting all organisations striving and achieving positive results for ethnic minority communities.

A national infrastructure organisation in Scotland is long-overdue. Whether to provide more effective support, capacity building or ensure better funding. A critical role will be to provide a stronger, more unified voice at both national and local level for a fairer deal. The CRE and Racial Equality Councils in Scotland have already placed funding and sustainability on their Agenda for the Scottish Parliament, *'Racial Equality Matters'*. We look forward to assisting BEMIS establish itself and in the short-term would encourage all institutions to examine this report carefully.



Dr Moussa Jogee  
*Deputy Chairman*  
*Commission for Racial Equality*



## ***Preface***

As chair of BEMIS Working Group, it is my pleasure to present *"Listening to the VOICE: Executive Summary"*.

The feasibility study commissioned by BEMIS confirms the vulnerability of the black and ethnic minority voluntary sector and reinforces what many in the sector have been saying for a long time. The study also reflects the determination of black and ethnic minority organisations in meeting the needs of the communities despite the lack of resources, funding and political support. It is therefore not surprising that the study demonstrates both the need and support for an agency to provide both infrastructure support and a voice for the black and ethnic minority organisations.

I would hope that the research and the work of BEMIS will provide the foundations from which the sector will be supported and enabled to grow and to continue the important work in providing services for the black and ethnic minority communities.

On behalf of the working group I would like to acknowledge the work of Gillian Little of SCVO and Andy Egan in undertaking the research; Lloyds TSB Foundation, Comic Relief and Housing Association Charitable Trust (HACT) for providing the necessary funding; and SCVO for their support.

I would also like to thank my colleagues on the working group and especially those on the Feasibility Study Sub-group for all of their hard work.



Vijay Patel  
Chair  
BEMIS



## *Listening to the VOICE: Executive Summary*

### **1. Introduction**

BEMIS (Black and Ethnic Minority Infrastructure in Scotland) was established in 1997 by a network of black and ethnic minority organisations to address the gap which exists in support for the Black and Ethnic Minority (BEM) voluntary sector in Scotland. A working group was formed to promote the development of appropriate and effective forms of infrastructure for the BEM voluntary sector. The BEMIS Working Group prepared and adopted an interim mission statement for the organisation.

### **Statement of Intent**

BEMIS recognises that we work in a context of inequality. It aims to address these inequalities by empowering communities. It will work towards an inclusive society by establishing structures which recognise diversity and empowers black and ethnic minority communities.

### **Mission Statement**

BEMIS will adopt an inclusive approach to benefit from the specific skills, experiences and backgrounds of black and ethnic minority communities, regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, religion, nationality, disability and geographical residence.

**BEMIS** will support organisations/individuals defined as being:

i. Discriminated on grounds of:

- Race
- Culture
- Colour
- Language
- Faith

ii. Have a history of being excluded

iii. Have difficulties in accessing mainstream services and decision making process.



**1.1 This executive summary is based on a more detailed report, 'Listening to the Voice'.** The latter presents in detail the findings of a Feasibility Study commissioned by BEMIS to explore the infrastructure needs of the black and ethnic minority voluntary sector in Scotland

**1.2 The purpose of the feasibility study was to:**

- i. Identify the needs of black and ethnic minority community or voluntary organisations especially in relation to funding, training and access to local and national government.
- ii. Explore different models of infrastructure support for black and minority ethnic organisations in Scotland.

**1.3 Two pieces of work were commissioned:**

- i. SCVO Research Unit to set up a comprehensive database of all black and ethnic minority community and voluntary organisations in Scotland.
- ii. A consultant to conduct qualitative interviews with a sample of thirty black and ethnic minority organisations representing the diversity of the sector and five regional focus groups.

What follows below is a summary of the key points and recommendations arising from the feasibility study.

**2. Findings**

**2.1 BEM voluntary activity**

BEM involvement in voluntary activity is not a new or recent phenomenon; it can be traced as far back as the late 19th century. Evidence exists of community based associations established to look after the welfare of their members, e.g. Indian Association (1937), Muslim Mission (1940) and so on.

However, whilst the BEM population has experienced a steady growth, this has not been reflected by a similar growth of community and voluntary organisations, until perhaps in the last decade or so. BEM organisations, where they exist, have been established autonomously with little or no support from the statutory or the larger voluntary sectors. These organisations have sought to provide services not provided by the statutory or the voluntary sector. Over the past two decades they have done much to gather evidence and to highlight the extent of institutional racism and racial exclusion in Scotland.

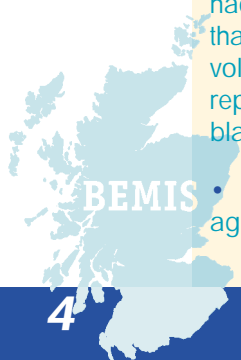


As the BEM voluntary sector in the last decade has steadily grown, it is apparent that they have needs as organisations. Many lack the resources and capacity to ensure their own sustainability, thus making their survival precarious. Furthermore, BEM voluntary organisations have not been perceived to be of sufficient strategic importance by both local authorities and government to merit appropriate long-term support. It is also apparent that the Scottish BEM organisations have not been well served by English based UK infrastructure agencies.

Against this background it is important to recognise that the BEM voluntary sector in Scotland has distinct needs. There is an urgent need to address how an infrastructure can be developed to enhance the capacity of the sector in ways which are sustainable and effective.

## 2.2 Profile of the BEM Sector

- 558 organisations were identified by the SCVO database of which 165 responded to the questionnaire (149 could be included under the definition of BEM-led ie. the majority of the members of the governing body are black and ethnic minority people).
- The majority of the BEM-led organisations were based in Edinburgh or Glasgow.
- There is a correlation between rural areas and lack of black and ethnic minority organisations. The Borders, Highlands and Islands are under represented in terms of organisations per head of population.
- Of the 150 organisations returning information appropriate to BEMIS, 33%(50) had come into existence in the last nine years. 11%(17) were no longer active, six organisations ceased functioning between 1995 to 1998.
- Out of the 112 that provided information on income, no agency had an income of £1 million plus, 47% had an annual income of less than £25,000. A very rough estimate would suggest that the black voluntary sector has an annual income of £12 million, which represents 0.6% of the income of the voluntary sector in Scotland. The black voluntary sector is estimated to make up 1.25% of the sector.
- 26%(40) of the total respondents had paid staff, the largest agency had eleven full time staff. 81% of all paid staff were female.



- 40%(61) of all respondents used volunteers with 62% of volunteers defining themselves as coming from a black and ethnic minority community.
- The agencies also catered for a variety of linguistic needs from the obvious such as Urdu to Russian and Serbo Croat.

## 2.3 Information from interviews and focus groups

### 2.3.1 Funding

- 26 of the 30 agencies interviewed provided information on income.
- 7%(2) of agencies had no core funding, 27%(7) relied on membership fees, 46%(12) relied on the local authority and 11%(3) on the Scottish Office for core costs. Funders such as NLCB and others counted for another 11%(3).
- Most agencies are reliant on one funder for core funding. 46% relied on funding on an annual basis, 35% had no secure funding. The insecurity of funding is a crucial issue :

*"Our funding is inadequate and insecure.... We are unable to plan strategically"*

*"Funding is an issue for development work, which we need to meet identified need...It is an issue of survival for the organisations.... Local government reorganisation caused fragmentation and loss of funding from 3 areas, although we still provide a service in these areas."*

- 25% stated they received no support from other agencies. Only REC's were rated relatively highly in relation to support, otherwise the picture was generally very poor, " We help the local council, they don't help us", " the council were positively unhelpful. Sia are good but limited."

### 2.3.2. Purpose and Activities

- There were a number of common reasons given for the establishment of organisations, including the following:
  - 4 meet unmet needs
  - 4 develop culturally sensitive services
  - 4 provide advice, support and information
  - 4 maintain heritage.



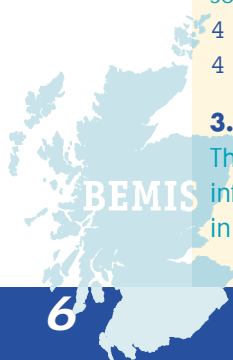
- 97%(29) of agencies provided advice and information and 60% also were involved in community development.

## 2.4 Issues to be addressed

- Respondents highlighted funding, institutional racism and low political priority as being key issues.
- 80% want support for funding, and another 57% would want access to advice and information.
- The respondents want an agency that understands the issues, *“An organisation that is specifically for the black and minority ethnic voluntary sector”*. *“A black-led umbrella organisation with more knowledge, empathy and skills.”*
- 90% saw a need for a national infrastructure agency specifically for the BEM voluntary sector, *“we need a dedicated organisation with specific time and expertise to help solve problems facing black and minority ethnic community groups.”*
- There was a consensus on the following aims for a national infrastructure agency :
  - 4 to act as the voice for the BEM voluntary sector
  - 4 to provide advice and information
  - 4 to lobby
  - 4 to take on a co-ordinating role.
- It was generally felt the membership should reflect the BEM voluntary sector but also be open to other bodies to affiliate.
- Respondents prioritised the following activities as follows:
  - 4 liaison with local and national government bodies as a key service (90%)
  - 4 organisational development support (83%)
  - 4 liaison with funders (80%).

## 3. Conclusions

The Feasibility Study has highlighted the need for a national infrastructure body for the black and ethnic minority voluntary sector in Scotland. The study engaged with black and ethnic minority





voluntary organisations and their experience of development needs.

The insecure position that organisations are facing and a need for a stronger co-ordinated voice emerged as strong issues. In particular capacity building, a voice at Scottish national level and developing structures to engage with the Scottish Parliament and COSLA were viewed as important.

It is also clear from the study that organisations are accessing mainstream support organisations in a piece-meal fashion. This could be because organisations:

- do not have enough information as to what support organisations such as SCVO have to offer; and / or
- find it difficult to engage in dialogues which are pertinent to the voluntary sector but do not deal directly with the particular issues of relevance for the black and ethnic minority voluntary sector.

The need for greater infrastructure has been recognised in a number of contexts including the Social Inclusion Agenda and from the 'Head and Heart' report produced by the Commission on the Future of the Voluntary Sector in Scotland (1997).

#### 4. Recommendations

There was a consensus on the idea of establishing a BEM led agency which will:

- strengthen the capacity of the BEM voluntary sector.
- raise the profile of BEM voluntary sector and its needs at a strategic national level.
- co-ordinate the voice of the BEM voluntary sector and ensure pertinent issues are raised with the relevant bodies.
- take a lead on policy issues and debates that are of concern to the black and ethnic minority communities at a national level.

More specifically the following recommendations arise from the



feasibility study and the various consultations which took place across Scotland with the BEM voluntary sector:

### **Capacity Building:**

- To develop an organisation which will strengthen the capacity of the BEM voluntary sector to build up skills, expertise and knowledge.
- To support the development of voluntary organisations which would enable organisations to build up their own skills and expertise which in turn would filter through to emerging organisations as well as established voluntary organisations.

### **Co-ordination**

- To ensure that generic issues particularly facing the BEM voluntary sector are raised and highlighted and that further structures are developed to ensure that there is co-ordination.

### **Strategic Influence**

- To lead on policy issues and debates which are of concern to the black and ethnic minority communities at a national and strategic level.

### **Infrastructure Organisation**

- To develop democratic processes in its constitutional structure and organisational structure, taking into account the diverse nature of the BEM voluntary sector.
- To pay particular attention to the support needs of organisations in rural areas.
- To identify and develop partnerships with other relevant private, public and voluntary organisations.



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For a full report of The Feasibility Study, please contact:

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