

Creating Spaces

Community development approaches to building stronger communities

Lessons learnt from projects funded through the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund and Connecting Communities Plus, Community Grants

By Vipin Chauhan



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By Vipin Chauhan



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Foreword

I am delighted this report is being published when political and public debates on tolerance, cohesion and integration are gaining momentum. Ways of dealing with community tensions and extremist behaviour are being reviewed and reconsidered, and this report adds a timely reminder of the contribution of community development to these challenges.

Creating Spaces provides examples of community projects funded through the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund (FCCBF) and Connecting Communities Plus, Community Grants (CCPlus) from across Britain. These funds have supported a range of community activities that have helped to achieve better community relations. This report draws on their learning as it examines the challenges and opportunities the projects experienced and the impact they achieved.

The report is rich with the first-hand experiences of front-line community workers and volunteers who carried out the project activities. It shows that local people and communities can find for themselves local solutions to improving understanding and relations between different communities and managing underlying tensions.

Creating Spaces confirms that community development approaches and methods are invaluable to those of us who are working to strengthen communities across Britain. They can equip communities themselves to manage tensions, create spaces and work through many challenges together.

This new report will be helpful to policy makers, practitioners and anyone who is working on community cohesion or community engagement. It will be particularly useful to those people working in a faith or inter faith context. It gives many ideas for what works in practice and offers recommendations for policy makers and practitioners.

I hope you find the lessons and ideas presented in this publication inspiring and helpful in your work.



Alison Seabrooke
Chief Executive, Community Development Foundation

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3 December 2008

Community Development Foundation

CDF is the leading source of intelligence, guidance and delivery on community development in England and across the UK. Our mission is to lead community development analysis and strategy to empower people to influence decisions that affect their lives.

CDF's key aim is to spread ways of building engaged, cohesive and stronger communities and a more effective community sector:

- by advising government and other bodies on community development
- by analysing policy to identify good community development practices
- by conducting research and evaluation
- by supporting community development work through networks,
- links with practitioners and work with partner organisations
- by managing funding schemes for local projects
- through training, events, publications, and consultancy.

We work with government departments, regional and local public agencies and community and voluntary sectors. We also operate at a European and international level. We are a non-departmental public body sponsored by Communities and Local Government (CLG) and a charity registered in England and Wales and recognised in Scotland.

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Introduction

Over recent years, issues about community cohesion and strengthening communities have been prominent in many political, public and media debates in Britain. The public reactions, political responses and policy initiatives that followed 7/7 fuelled further debates about how modern day British society handles issues of tolerance, integration, diversity, multiculturalism, national identity and so on. However, for sections of our society, such issues have been ‘live’ for much longer, especially for those people who have relations in other parts of the world and/or have migrated to Great Britain.

Apart from concerns being raised in the media and within local communities, a number of policy initiatives have emerged over the last five to seven years to tackle some of these issues. Some have been generic whilst others have been targeted at particular sections of society such as faith-based organisations, young people and certain faith communities. Examples include:

- *Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society: The Government’s strategy to increase race equality and community cohesion* (Home Office, 2005), which aimed to promote greater race equality and community cohesion by identifying and responding to the specific needs of different sections of society
- *Preventing Violent Extremism: Winning hearts and minds* (CLG, 2007a), based on the premise that a security response on its own was not enough to dissuade or divert people who would be most at risk from violent extremist influences. Key to this was the desire to build communities resilient to violent extremism, underpinned by four key approaches: promoting shared values, supporting local solutions, building civic capacity and leadership, and strengthening the role of faith institutions and leaders
- *Preventing Violent Extremism Pathfinder Fund* (CLG, 2007b), established to further Government’s objectives around community cohesion, strengthening communities and countering violent extremism.

The Government’s strategy for improving race equality and community cohesion (Home Office, 2005) outlined its plans to introduce the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund (FCCBF) and Connecting Community Plus, Community Grants (CCPlus) to support implementation of the strategy.

Such initiatives have been seen to be of strategic significance in strengthening communities and tackling social exclusion. As part of such strategic interventions, it is recognised by Government that spaces need to be created for local communities to

engage voluntarily in mutual dialogue, sharing life experiences and acting on issues of common concern; hence the title of this report *Creating Spaces*.

Feedback from young people was consistent: they are looking for somebody who will listen. They are against stereotyping and believe the media are largely to blame for this. They need “safe places” in which they can express themselves freely and be heard. They feel that “the Government only listens to drastic actions” – hence the inevitability of another 7/7. They have plenty of advice too for religious leaders and the “elders” in their different communities. Some young people feel they are being pushed out of society because “we don’t fit in”. The resulting feelings of isolation and anger can fuel extremism.’

Adapted from a funded project report

This report outlines the lessons learnt from projects funded through FCCBF and CCPlus. It is based on a study that examined community development approaches and methods used by projects to engage and strengthen local communities and help prevent violent extremism by improving understanding between different communities and managing any underlying tensions. This report analyses the experiences of the workers and volunteers who delivered the projects and outlines the key issues, challenges and achievements faced by them and the wider impact of their work.

The Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund (FCCBF)

The Community Development Foundation (CDF) administered and evaluated the Fund on behalf of the Cohesion and Faiths Division of Communities and Local Government (CLG). FCCBF, which operated in England and Wales, had two key categories: capacity building and inter faith activity. The first round closed to applicants on 2 December 2005; 2,016 applications were received. Five hundred and seventy-three organisations were funded to a total of £7.6m. The second round was open for applications between 7 August and 1 November 2006; there were 1,229 applications. Three hundred and fifty organisations were funded to a total of £4.4m.

Connecting Communities Plus, Community Grants (CCPlus)

CCPlus was a £3m grant programme distributed over three years (2006-09), sponsored by the Race Equality and Diversity Division of CLG. It aimed to reach small, locally managed and run community and voluntary organisations in England (CDF and Home Office, 2006). CDF administered and evaluated the programme.

The programme had four priorities:

A improving the experience of people from black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds in relation to access to and outcomes from public services – education, employment, health, housing and the criminal justice system

- B increasing the confidence of people from BME backgrounds that public services are delivered in a fair and equitable way
- C tackling racism and extremism
- D bringing together communities from different races and faiths, and promoting a shared sense of belonging.

The first round closed on 5 July 2006; more than 940 applications were received. One hundred and forty organisations were offered funding that totalled £1.3m. The second round closed on 29 March 2007; over 1,200 applications were received. One hundred and eight organisations were offered funding totalling £991,000. The third round closed on 8 January 2008. Eight hundred and five applications were received and 68 organisations were offered funding that totalled £663,441.

Methodology

This short-scale study took place between April and mid-May 2008. The participating projects were identified from CDF's databases of groups funded under the FCCBF and CCPlus programmes. They were selected on the basis of their intentions, as stated in their funding application forms, to work on the themes of community cohesion, extremism and/or tackling racism.

Thirty-four projects were contacted and paid workers and volunteers from 19 projects were interviewed: ten from CCPlus and nine from FCCBF. Although no project declined to participate, the tight timeframe for completion of the study and the inability to make direct and repeat contacts with some individuals meant that it was not possible to include more projects. The projects were spread around England.¹ Using an interview guide (see Appendix 2), semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted with 16 projects and face-to-face interviews with a further three. Original funding applications, monitoring forms and other evidence were also examined.

For reasons of confidentiality, the sensitivity of the issues involved and the small sample size, quotes used in this report have been kept anonymous, apart from indicating the funding received by the projects.

Report structure

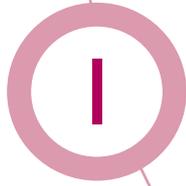
The first chapter outlines the main issues and themes arising from the survey. It summarises the most significant achievements made by the surveyed projects and includes the outcomes for project participants and the wider community.

Chapter 2 highlights the main learning points and practice implications for workers and volunteers of surveyed projects and summarises some of the main approaches and strategies deployed. It is aimed particularly at frontline practitioners involved in community cohesion work.

1. East Midlands (four projects); London (seven); Yorkshire and Humberside (three); North West (three); West Midlands (two).

Chapter 3 outlines the main learning points to have emerged for further consideration when planning social policy and/or funding programmes.

The final chapter summarises the main conclusions to have emerged from this study.



Main findings

Introduction

This chapter outlines the main issues and themes to have arisen from the study. Each project was unique in terms of the context within which it carried out its work and what it managed to achieve within its own locality. Most projects were able to achieve their original objectives and many even surpassed them. Below is a summary of the projects' most significant achievements and the outcomes both for project participants and the wider community.

Why projects were started

Starting from strengths

For some projects, the reason for bidding for the funds was based on a desire to build on existing positive, proactive work. The projects were already well-established within their communities, had track records of doing similar work and believed they were best placed to do further work.

For us the funding through CDF opened up an opportunity. We saw the potential of working with different religions, building on the positive relationships we already had and to further these.

FCCBF grant recipient

One project had positive, established working relations with local schools and saw the funding as an opportunity to strengthen this relationship as well as carry out work with young people, a critical target group for community cohesion. Another project involved a local university, which had a strong interest in engaging local communities through sport. Projects were therefore able to strengthen existing relationships as well as build new ones with different sections of the community, helping create stronger bonds and a greater sense of community.

A few years ago, there were riots in our area. Compared to many other establishments we had no links with the local community. They might come in and hire us for weddings and suchlike but that's

all. We wanted to use the funds to strengthen our links with local communities.'

CCPlus grant recipient

Appreciating the local context

Many of the communities in which the projects were set up had longstanding concerns about how disadvantage, racism, xenophobia and discrimination undermined the life chances of local people. Most areas had exacerbating factors such as:

- poverty, economic deprivation and limited life chances
- educational disadvantage
- overt and covert racism, stereotyping and discrimination, including religious hatred
- poor and/or inappropriate public services
- global politics impacting on life in this country as well as on the lives of friends and relations in other parts of the world
- the tensions between maintaining cultural, religious and linguistic traditions and lifestyles and 'integrating' in British society
- poor community cohesion and communities feeling excluded.

In some cases, these concerns existed before FCCBF and CCPlus funding came on stream. The funding provided an opportunity to start or develop work on prevailing issues of concern, including the need to build community cohesion. The underpinning message was about the importance of understanding and appreciating the community dynamics within which projects were run and the issues involved in engaging communities in difficult social and political issues.

Strengthening community cohesion was seen not just as a straightforward process of bringing different people together but one that required communities, public institutions, community leaders, local workers and activists to be conscious of deep-seated local issues.

Community relations here are pretty comfortable even though we are only a short distance away from a town where riots took place a few years ago and even though we did not see any of the funding that followed the riots.

FCCBF grant recipient

Poor community relations

Some areas had a history of poor relations between different communities, and projects attempted to create better and more sustainable relationships between these communities. In one project, such work was seen as important in helping to reduce local community tensions, which sometimes resulted in violence between different groups of young people when one group perceived the other to have strayed into its 'territory'.

We were slow to start as we needed to build up trust and confidence between the African-Caribbean and Asian young people ... We wanted to counteract stereotypes that portrayed all African-Caribbean people as drug users or dealers or that all Asians were religious zealots and wannabe gangsters.

CCPlus grant recipient

In some areas, projects were started to counteract the consequences of far-right activities (for example, by political parties such as the British National Party) which often resulted in the stirring up of racial and religious hatred. The active and often visible presence of such movements and their activists created community environments hallmarked by suspicion, limited inter-community relations, physical and verbal violence and racist graffiti.

Many projects took the decision to bid for the funds as an opportunity to engage with local communities about what was becoming a very politically charged issue.

We wanted to offer a more mainstream view of Islam and to an extent this was also the Communities and Local Government Department's agenda, but we wanted to do it as a community. We wanted to talk about rights, obeying the law, good inter faith relations, not being insular, citizenship and so on – about living in society and informing local people about this.

FCCBF grant recipient

For others, the increase in racism, and especially Islamophobia, was of concern and, as locally based projects, they believed they needed to intervene and find ways of challenging these issues and educating local communities about them.

Some people we worked with were frustrated by factors such as British foreign policy and the attitude that all Muslims were terrorists and this included Muslim young people.

FCCBF grant recipient

For others, the arrival of new communities into their neighbourhoods and the demographic changes taking place often resulted in increased and more overt hostility, conflict and suspicion, which needed to be countered.

Nurturing leadership and active citizenship

Some projects saw FCCBF and CCPlus funding as an opportunity to explore how issues of exclusion could be tackled. In particular, many projects were interested in looking at ways of engaging whole communities or sections of communities in civic life and participating in democratic structures. One project aimed to improve the involvement of women in civic life. It did this by providing them with opportunities to be with other women, express their views and exchange life experiences about issues such as domestic violence, inter-generational relations and their children's schooling.

We found that there was no one around or any facilities to tackle some of these issues. We had programmes such as formal dinners but only a limited amount of informal education or discussion was going on about issues that affected our communities. We also found that there were gaps in services for women and no significant work was being done with them. Where work had occurred in the past this was on a stop-start basis due to the nature of our funding.

FCCBF grant recipient

Another project was keen to work with young people and provide them with opportunities to talk with other young people about their experiences of life in the community and what they believed needed to change.

There was the perception that young Muslims were not involved in the mainstream and civic life in general and many perhaps lack a sense of purpose and direction.

FCCBF grant recipient

Some projects saw the availability of funding through FCCBF and CCPlus as a way of consolidating their work and nurturing leadership for the future. Many found that established leadership was dominated by certain key figures and only a small band of people tended to participate actively.

We wanted to create a new generation of leaders for community cohesion and we recognised that this would involve politicising young people. We were keen to create a different sense of credibility and leadership for the future and to get young people to participate now and for the future.

FCCBF grant recipient

Bridging gaps

For some projects, especially those working with new arrivals, addressing gaps in existing services was seen as a key priority. They found that many new arrivals were unable to access services such as GP surgeries, education, housing, social security and the police. This was due to a number of factors, including lack of sufficient information, an inability to communicate proficiently in English, fear, a lack of trust and confidence and limited knowledge about entitlements. Projects were able to act as 'one-stop shops' and provide information, guidance and signposting to appropriate agencies, including interpreting and translation services when needed or when public institutions were unable to provide these facilities.

In some cases, participants did not have anywhere to meet other people, from either their own communities or other backgrounds, and/or somewhere they could get help and support (such as a youth and community centre). Many project beneficiaries had a sense of relief in being able to go somewhere to talk about and address issues such as the aftermath of 7/7.

Our area has been in the news quite a lot recently. Many of the young people we work with find it difficult to be with other people and so we decided to work with those young people, educate them not to be too aggressive and help them identify their role within the community.

CCPlus grant recipient

In some areas, although there were a number of community organisations, not many were actively tackling issues such as violent extremism and community cohesion. In some cases, such issues were being addressed superficially; in others they were avoided altogether. This was due to the sensitivity of the issues involved, the potential political backlash and the possible threat to the financial stability of individual organisations. In such instances, projects were set up to fill this void and create a space to tackle issues that other organisations were reluctant to address.

How projects were set up

Most projects were set up in one of four ways.

Firstly, by established organisations already doing similar work and wanting to use FCCBF and CCPlus funding to develop and consolidate this further.

From our evaluation we found that we needed to develop work with young people. We wanted to do drama which was different: addressing real life things that they can relate to, including countering prejudices within communities such as open conflict within Asian communities between Sri Lankan and Pakistani groups.'

CCPlus grant recipient

Secondly, by service users taking the lead and securing the support and help of their projects to help make a bid.

A group of young people were not happy with the provision for young people – the youth provision was inadequate – they set it up as an independent group after finding out what other young people wanted to do.

CCPlus grant recipient

Thirdly, by established partnership bodies such as inter faith networks and forums.

We are an established partnership organisation and run events such as conferences to bring together young people and adults from different faith backgrounds to listen to each other's perspectives, debate issues, support community leaders to engage and empower young people, promote engagement with public authorities and identify practical ways of building bridges.

(FCCBF grant recipient)

And finally, by new or emerging partnerships between individual organisations and bodies such as youth and community services getting involved in the project as an opportunity to build new or strengthen existing links.

The young people we worked with wanted to start their own inter faith forum as a way of having a voice. They went to the local secondary schools and colleges to get representation from young people of different faiths or those of no faith. They were able to establish a panel and organise activities such as a question time session with the police.

FCCBF grant recipient

When initiating the projects, workers and volunteers had to address a number of issues, including how to involve local people and the intended beneficiaries.

The most difficult task was advertising the group and getting the community to value its part in this, especially when trying to get to hard to reach people. But once we started, we were able to get people through word of mouth and also went to drop-in centres and schools.

FCCBF grant recipient

In other cases, the challenge was to secure the commitment of partner agencies and develop a more multi-agency approach to delivering the project.

We [wrote] to nearly 600 agencies to help us identify young people who were seen to be on the fringes or were not engaging. Not all agencies responded promptly – some were concerned about the Government agenda on PVE [preventing violent extremism] and were suspicious about our motives – were we working for the Government or the community? So the need to build trust at this early stage was critical.

FCCBF grant recipient

Getting the work underway

Many of the projects were well established and had been working in their local communities for some time. Despite this, they experienced a number of key challenges in developing and delivering the work funded through FCCBF and CCPlus, including:

- delays in recruiting staff and appointing people of the right calibre
- delayed publicity about the work planned by the projects
- lack of cooperation from partner agencies
- the amount of time and effort involved in making contacts with potential project participants
- the time taken to establish trust and comfort between partner organisations and/or communities, especially where there was a poor history

- widening participation and involving new or different communities and ‘leaders’.

We did not get enough money and so could not employ the right staff immediately. They were employed nearly seven months into the project and we were only able to do so by applying for additional funding.

FCCBF grant recipient

The target groups

The groups, individuals and communities who were the primary beneficiaries of the work carried out by the funded projects fell into three main categories:

1. **Generic**, from all sections of the community.

We did not want to focus on faith even though we have got a large Muslim community in this area.

CCPlus grant recipient

2. **Specific** sections of the community such as young people, women, particular faith communities and/or a combination.

Our project was aimed specifically at the Muslim communities but we did involve other agencies through a steering group.

FCCBF grant recipient

The work with women was driven by a perspective that women are 50% of society and are involved in every aspect of life, especially in relation to children and young people, and the saying that “... if you want to educate a nation you have to educate women”.

FCCBF grant recipient

In terms of community cohesion different young people of different ethnic backgrounds were able to take part – Muslims of Pakistani, Afghani and Somali origin for instance.

FCCBF grant recipient

3. A **combination** of the community as a whole and specific sections within it.

We did not have a specific target group and anyone could join the activities. But by the very nature of the area in which we work, which has a large Bangladeshi community, a lot of the young people we ended up working with were of this background.

CCPlus grant recipient

Most projects were successful in reaching their intended target groups. However, for many there were practical issues about working with a critical mass of people on a longer-term basis because of time and resource constraints. In one instance, the project

found it difficult to get the full commitment of young people during winter periods when it was dark and cold.

Achievements and outcomes

Respecting differences

The FCCBF and CCPlus funding helped projects to strengthen community cohesion locally. The projects acted as magnets for drawing together people of different backgrounds. For many project participants, this was the first time they had talked to or got to know a person of a different background. For many projects this was a key aspect of their overall achievement and they believed they had been successful in creating spaces and opportunities for people of different backgrounds to get to know each other and respect differences.

We found that people were prepared to talk to get their stories across ... we now have improved relationships between communities and they all feel more valued and more friendly and there is more interlink.

CCPlus grant recipient

In one instance, non-Muslim students visited the local mosque to learn about Islam; in another, non-Sikhs were able to visit the local gurudwara (a Sikh place of worship and community activities) as part of a school visit, to explore different faiths and the make-up of local communities. In another example, before the project was initiated, service users of different nationalities used to sit separately in their own clusters when they came to the centre. The project helped to create better communication between these groups and helped individuals to form relationships that were sustained outside the centre.

People of different backgrounds got to know each other and have better respect. Many group members have become friends. As an example to the rest of community we had a party to celebrate the end of the project which included an exhibition.

FCCBF grant recipient

Another project used music and football to draw in African-Caribbean and Asian young men who traditionally had shied away from each other or whose previous interactions were largely confrontational. The project also facilitated workshops to discuss the tensions between the two groups and ways forward.

Projects recognised that effective community cohesion could not be achieved without also striving for justice or at least listening to the injustices faced by different sections of society. End of project events and community celebrations were used to publicise and celebrate the achievements and to 'set an example to the rest of community' that it was possible for people to live side by side.

We have been able to improve people's lives. There is greater harmony and community cohesion, and they perceive and view each other in a more positive way.

FCCBF grant recipient

Talking about violent extremism

One of the points of interest for this study was the degree to which projects were able to discuss the issue of violent extremism with project participants. As stated previously, a criterion for selecting projects was their stated intention to work on the preventing violent extremism agenda. However, just because projects bidding for funds had stated they were planning to tackle this did not mean that it was an easy subject matter to broach.

With the young people it was possible to talk about the PVE agenda as long you are able to build trust and are able to talk confidentially.

FCCBF grant recipient

In most cases, projects were able to talk relatively freely with project beneficiaries about preventing violent extremism.

Young people are familiar with PVE language – they see it in the media. They recognise that extremism is not right and they learnt not to sort out things through violence. Some of our workshops were led by ex-gang members and this had a big effect on some of the young people.

CCPlus grant recipient

We were able to use PVE language but from the standpoint that no one should be labelled. We looked at media stereotyping and what drove the 7/7 bombers and the fact that a number of factors – alienation, religious beliefs, global politics – were all at play.

FCCBF grant recipient

Project participants were able to recognise how different forms of extremist behaviours within all communities could lead to exclusion and poor community relations. In this respect, most projects did not see the use of terminology about preventing violent extremism as being problematic because many (young) people were comfortable with such language, even if the words 'preventing violent extremism' were not always used to describe different forms of 'extremist' values, beliefs and behaviours.

Projects found that there was a need to acknowledge that some form of extremism existed in most communities and it was essential to address all forms of extremism in all communities, not just label certain communities or home in on certain forms of extremism.

... even the language of terrorism was used – people think that all Asian young people are terrorists and we were able to explore the issues around this with young people, many of whom felt that they were being wrongly labelled.

CCPlus grant recipient

Some projects also received funding from other sources, which helped facilitate more open discussions about different forms of extremism.

We used the PVE funding to recruit a worker to help build up the capacity of the Muslim community so that we can hear also the British Islamic voice not just the more extremist voices.

FCCBF grant recipient

For many projects, the need to foster trust with and amongst project participants was essential. Projects had to ensure they were able to build local confidence in the work and that the outcomes would be beneficial.

Another of our success stories includes two young, disengaged Muslim youths, who were heavily involved with extremist organisations. They were successfully recruited out of these organisations and eventually got involved in the project. They felt that their Islamic perceptions about many misconceived issues were changed and channelled to a better understanding of Islam.

Adapted from a project report

Myth busting

Our project has a huge impact on the asylum seekers as they now encourage each other by word of mouth to get involved, learn English and not live in fear. We also actively challenge myths surrounding asylum seekers and try to change attitudes by creating positive opportunities for people to interact and learn together.

Adapted from a project report

In many communities, people lived their own lives in isolation from each other and other communities. The lack of familiarity with each other as well as exclusion and alienation felt by local communities exacerbated the mutual stereotyping and suspicion. Myth busting, challenging attitudes, tackling racism and confronting the mutual demonisation of communities was seen to be a necessary and important part of the work carried out by some of the projects.

Previously people lived parallel lives and did not use to cross over. Actual facts do not travel well but through the group activities we were able to get people to understand why people had to come to this country.

CCPlus grant recipient

However, some projects found that despite good intentions, for many communities or sections within them the experiences of racism, exclusion and violence made it difficult for them to join hands with their neighbours. For some local communities, their neighbours often represented lifestyles and ways of being that were abhorrent to their own values and beliefs and so projects had to work through such dynamics with participants.

There was a lot of rumbling and bad feeling in the area with stereotypes such as the immigrants will take their jobs and they were all on social security. We had to argue that they had a right to be here, just the same as the Irish who came during the potato famine.

CCPlus grant recipient

The role of faith

Even though project participants might have shared a common faith identity, there were often significant ethnic, cultural, social and political differences between people of the same faith. Projects commented that these needed to be taken into consideration when developing faith-based work.

Many projects were able to use faith positively as a medium for exploring individual and collective identities as well as intra and inter faith relationships. They were able to do so by encouraging greater dialogue between people of different faiths and providing opportunities for people to express the values and beliefs that underpinned their faiths. They were also able to provide opportunities for people to explore the values and beliefs underpinning other faiths. Finally, projects were able to strengthen community cohesion by bringing together people of different ethnic backgrounds or nationalities that share the same faith.

We now have groups of Muslims of different nationalities sitting together. There is greater inter-talking and people are able to value the benefits of relationships with other groups and the efforts made to be with other people.

FCCBF grant recipient

Equality, justice and challenging racism

Many projects stated that the principles of equal rights, justice and challenging racism had to be fundamental to any debate about community cohesion. They felt it was important to recognise that strengthening communities and building community cohesion was not a straightforward process of bringing diverse people together. The communities in question had prior histories with each other, and their relationships were often marked by inequality, discrimination and intolerance. It was therefore necessary to take such factors into account when working with diverse communities and to attempt to talk about and tackle the underlying inequalities and tensions between communities.

We have got to talk about the prejudicial attitudes – racism, sexism and homophobia – the sharing of culture is not enough, all that it does is to create a hierarchy of oppressions and divides communities.

CCPlus grant recipient

Building relationships with other agencies

For many projects, one of the clearest benefits arising out of their work was the opportunity to engage with other agencies and bodies, bringing together the voluntary,

community, public and, occasionally, the private sectors. In some cases, this was planned from the outset; in others it became an offshoot of their work. Many projects were able to cultivate opportunities of working with a range of partners, including statutory bodies such as the police and schools, private sector businesses and voluntary and community organisations, as well as faith-based organisations. In turn, and as a result of the FCCBF and CCPlus funded projects, many key agencies and public bodies had the opportunity to get closer to their constituencies and engage in direct dialogue with local communities.

We were able to change perceptions about the local football club. Previously the dominant perception amongst parts of the local community was that it was not for us. It was also seen as a nuisance value before with white supporters coming in and making a mess in a predominantly Asian area. As a result of this project, we have noticed that we have more different types of supporters in terms of gender and ethnicity and are now seen as a real asset to the local community.

CCPlus grant recipient

The work with other partners, especially public and voluntary sector bodies, had a double edge to it. On the one hand, such work enabled these agencies to understand better the needs of local communities; on the other it enabled local communities to gain better knowledge and more direct access to service providers. Of course, both elements were important in tackling exclusion and alienation arising out of unmet needs. Despite the apparent merits of partnership working, projects were keen to emphasise that the public and private sectors needed to have their own dialogues with local communities as part of their own responsibilities for addressing community cohesion and violent extremism. One project started to get the community involved in the local football club, which resulted in the club featuring more prominently in regeneration plans for the area. Another project helped local authority officers and councillors to become more aware of local community issues and understand how to feed into the work of local agencies such as the local youth and community service.

Through this project we realised that there was a need to train service providers to understand the Muslim community.

FCCBF grant recipient

Overall, many of the activities carried out through the projects resulted in public bodies having a greater collective awareness about local people's issues and concerns. In turn, this resulted in the community having greater confidence in their ability to access services and interact with local public bodies on issues such as reporting racist incidents to the police.

The women feel more confident now and there are likely to be further conferences and meetings with service providers.

FCCBF grant recipient

One project held a conference in conjunction with the police to look at issues facing local young people. Another project presented Muslim perspectives, including those from the Shia community, to a health authority. In another instance, a project was able to use a DVD it had produced in a conference with the Association of Chief Probation Officers. Such a strategy also helped many public institutions to appreciate more fully the

conditions of the communities they served and gain direct experience of working with the voluntary and community organisations active in the area.

For us we have a greater and better working relationship with service providers – the police, health services and the education department.

FCCBF grant recipient

Building local capacity

Many of the projects were able to use FCCBF and CCPlus funds to carry out informal education work with local communities to raise their awareness about community cohesion, diversity and issues of extremism, rights and responsibilities. Sensitivity, awareness of the issues of concern to local communities and using flexible approaches were crucial in achieving project objectives.

Pakistani kids have the lowest education and highest numbers in prison – they live in the worst areas – there is deprivation and poverty of aspiration – some get into drugs and do not go to college. We have to do diversionary work with them.

CCPlus grant recipient

Projects recognised that raising awareness was not enough; equipping participants to challenge stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination was just as important.

We saw internal and external issues going on with young people – alcohol etc – there was no youth policy from the mosque and we took stick from the elders. In the end we had to set up an independent organisation separate from the different mosques and were able to draw in young people this way.

CCPlus grant recipient

For some projects, it was apparent that social issues such as drugs, crime and community tensions would not just go away. Communities needed to find local solutions and learn how to take greater ownership of the social issues they faced. In this respect, projects were instrumental in helping build local capacity for addressing issues such as substance misuse. Many of the project workers and volunteers were local residents. They learnt the skills and approaches needed to improve community cohesion. As ‘change catalysts’ they improved their understanding and practised their skills including:

- conducting small-scale research and needs analysis
- organising events such as public meetings and exhibitions
- producing flyers, newsletters, DVDs and other products
- writing press releases and working with the media
- influencing politicians and decision-makers
- making contact with hard to reach communities
- establishing new links and contacts
- facilitating workshops and enabling people to have their voices heard.

Many participants were also able to learn key skills.

The pupils got more knowledgeable about social divisions, community cohesion, social diversity and extremism. They learnt also to challenge other people's views and developed skills to do so. This has all helped young people to explain their views and learn how to agree/disagree.

FCCBF grant recipient

Many projects were able to build their leadership capacities within their own organisations as well as within local communities. Building on the work of the peace activist John Paul Lederach, one organisation modelled its work on developing 'anchor points' within the local community. Anchor points refer to people of different backgrounds from the local community who exercise leadership or have the potential to do so and who are brought together to debate and act on issues of common concern to local communities. Individual anchor points are likely to have established prestige and respect within local communities or have the potential of becoming activists, shakers and movers.

Case study 1: Oldham Interfaith Forum

In the north west of England, Oldham Interfaith Forum actively works to bring different groups and communities together.

The Forum draws on Lederach's theory of 'critical yeast' (Lederach, 2005), which involves working with chosen small groups. Lederach calls this the 'critical yeast' approach as only a little yeast is needed to cause dough to rise. Applying this to the Forum's work, it involves building networks of relationships – rather like a spider might build a web. The spider finds anchor points that will enable the web to cover the chosen area and then links those points to each other and to the centre. To build the web the spider has to be completely aware of the area in which it operates.

In Oldham, anchor points were chosen from different sections of the political spectrum, different religious backgrounds and positions of social leadership, and they came together for a series of meetings. As well as discussing agreed issues, the meetings also witnessed the telling of individual stories, which were sometimes painful but always engaging.

In Oldham, the critical yeast theory was used to set up a young people's interfaith forum. Young people from all the secondary schools in the borough were brought together with other young people from colleges and those who had recently started paid work.

Also, in June 2007, the Forum took 20 other young people who could be described as anchor points to Srebrenica and Auschwitz, as well as to the seats of political power in England and Europe. The visits to Westminster and Brussels were to increase the young people's capacity for engagement in the sense of 'participation'.

Since returning to England, the young people have formally constituted themselves and have taken on several pieces of work. They have put together a DVD of their journey and shown this to nearly 1,000 local people. They have spoken at events and have been invited to speak at schools. They are now planning to take other groups of young people from the different communities on activity weekends. They have engaged with the local authority, the media, including the BBC, and the government minister for community cohesion.

(Adapted from a presentation to the World Conference on the Development of Cities (February 2008) by Rev Philip T. Sumner and Fazal Rahim)

Pump priming

For some projects, the grants acted as seed funding to help get the work underway, in many instances for the first time. Previously, projects had been keen to undertake such work but did not always have the dedicated resources to do so.

The CCPlus funding helped to kick-start a key initiative to make football part of the community.

CCPlus grant recipient

For some projects, this was the first time they had secured external funding. Not only did this help boost the confidence of many project workers and volunteers but it also created a belief that the learning and skills gained would be useful for the future.

The young people decided to take control and have set up a sub-group to produce a regular magazine to help voice and present their opinions and views.'

FCCBF grant recipient

Pump priming was also seen to be important in other ways. One project was able to use the funds to involve more young people as volunteers. This was to help the project build its internal capacity, nurture future leadership and improve its chances of longer-term survival.

Funding, resources and timeframe

Money is an issue – especially for us – we are working with young people who are born and bred in this country and yet they have been left out.

FCCBF grant recipient

Organisations were pleased to have been awarded FCCBF and CCPlus funding to tackle local issues. However, for some projects the funds were not sufficient for the work they needed to carry out. Some were only able to appoint part-time staff and this was seen to be inadequate, especially for projects starting from scratch. Others struggled to secure commitments from partners and service providers. Some projects had to top up their grants with other funds, their own reserves, office and other resources and/or the efforts of volunteers.

We delivered more than what we were funded for and gave good value for money. The sheer investment of volunteers' own time in doing the paperwork and reports for the CDF show this – but that is the nature of voluntary work.

FCCBF grant recipient

The timeframe of the projects was seen to be too short and there was an overwhelming view that more time was needed to develop the work and consolidate the relationships formed. It was found that funding of less than a year created breaks between projects,

leading to a loss of momentum and a sense of having to start again from scratch. Despite this, there was a great sense of having achieved project objectives within the tight timeframe and with limited resources.

By the time we got the money to deliver the project it was nearly time to stop and we really need funding over a longer period. We had to get the workshops out of the way to meet the funding deadlines and if we did not have to do this, young people could have got more out of it.

CCPlus grant recipient

2

Key lessons for practitioners

Introduction

This chapter highlights some of the key learning points and practice implications for workers and volunteers involved in community cohesion work. It summarises some of the main approaches and strategies deployed by the projects surveyed and will be of interest to community development practitioners and others involved in community cohesion work.

The use of informal education

The use of informal education as a way of working with local communities was an important part of the approach used. Helping individuals to build confidence, challenge views and perspectives and learn and develop different ways of looking at matters, were seen to be important when working with excluded communities. In this way, projects were successful not just in terms of delivery of the formal project outputs but also in working with individuals on their personal and social development. The approaches used were designed to equip local people for life, thus building capacity for the future.

We were able to help young people to explain their views and learn how to agree and disagree. We were also able to challenge them about their ideas and create more positive attitudes and greater respect for others and, in turn, for them to become positive models.

FCCBF grant recipient

Informal education through group work was seen to be an important means by which prejudices, stereotypes and discriminatory behaviours could be addressed. One project organised a range of community activities as a way of building community cohesion and strengthening relationships between people of different backgrounds. Another project used the sharing of cultures and food as uniting points, rather than using the subject of extremism, which was perceived to be more contentious and potentially divisive.

A volunteer from Iran cooked a delicious feast for the launch event, which gave people the opportunity to taste traditional Persian cuisine. There was also a spontaneous display of Kurdish dancing from some young men. Over 70 people attended the event and 24

people signed up to take part in the group's activities ... The project organised seven other community events, two neighbourhood litter picks, painting of the local church, a trip to the local town, a trip to see a premier league football match, a visit to a local museum of photography and a day trip to the seaside.

Adapted from a project report

Learning points

1. Informal education as a developmental and learning process can play a key role in helping individuals and groups reflect critically upon their values, beliefs and attitudes.
2. The informal education process can help tackle prejudice and discrimination in a safe and controlled environment.
3. Community cohesion work and relationships within and between communities can be strengthened through informal education.

Engaging hard to reach communities

So called 'hard to reach' communities sometimes can be reached by using more populist strategies that can help initiate and sustain community engagement. One project used sports and TV personalities to draw in young people who otherwise would have resisted the idea of going to a formal workshop or a seminar about community cohesion or extremism.

We need to build cohesion to tackle radicalism. We could not talk about this and no one wanted to admit to the problem. The trust and faith was just not there.

FCCBF grant recipient

Another project secured expert training to help young people explore and understand what was happening in their community. The use of such external expertise gave higher status and a sense of greater value to the work carried out. In another instance, a mentoring scheme was initiated within a college to help young women get support about the issues that affected them as 14–15 year olds.

We set up seminars for younger and older women to look at issues such as generation gaps. This was done during Ramadan as a way of getting more people in. The seminars enabled different attitudes and ideas to be explored – a lot of the older women did not know about the issues facing the younger women, e.g. bullying in schools, the pressure of exams, relations, religious taboos – and experts such as clergy and psychologists were invited to contribute.

FCCBF grant recipient

Learning points

1. Involve local and/or well-known personalities in community cohesion work to help get a buy-in from local people.
2. Identify what is in it for local people who get involved, what would trigger their involvement and consider using incentives such as food to create warm, sharing and inviting spaces.
3. Build relationships and trust with local communities, key agencies and anchor points (see Case study 1: Oldham Interfaith Forum).

Widening community involvement

Community cohesion initiatives can be successful in drawing in local people who have not previously used local organisations' services. By becoming involved in the FCCBF or CCPlus funded projects, new and different people were able to participate in the wider activities of the organisations hosting the projects. In some areas, the FCCBF and CCPlus funded projects were able to attract local people who, ordinarily, either did not use the organisations hosting the projects or were not familiar with what they had to offer. In this respect, FCCBF and CCPlus funds enabled some organisations to become better known within their local communities and helped them to draw in new users to their other services.

Through this local people were able to develop a greater awareness of key local organisations and services.

One project working with young people was able to encourage parents to participate in sports events. Not only did this help to widen participation, it also created opportunities for inter-generational work. One sports organisation was able to work with young people using non-sports related approaches such as workshops and discussion groups.

Our project was successful in engaging the wider Muslim community ... We also aimed to simultaneously run a similar project to a broader audience, in terms of age and religious background, at a local college. In the college, we aimed to bring a set of four talks that elaborated on some of the topics discussed in our workshops. Topics such as "Jihad: useless or use less?" and "The importance of a harmonised society" were some of the key talks that were given by relatively well-known speakers. These talks were open to all at the college and cleared up many misconceptions and thoughts to both a Muslim and non-Muslim audience.

Adapted from a project report

One project used the funding to recruit volunteers from diverse backgrounds with the intention of increasing capacity to deliver future work.

We were able to develop a mentoring programme, with young people being mentored by older members to enable them to make good life choices about jobs, careers, family life and so on.

CCPlus grant recipient

Learning points

1. 'Experimental' projects such as those funded through FCCBF and CCPlus can help local communities gain greater insight into local services and the work of key organisations.
2. Developmental work on issues such as community cohesion and preventing violent extremism can help widen participation and engagement with a much broader cross-section of local communities.
3. Widening participation strategies and working on 'real' issues as they affect local communities can help increase the impact of a local project.

Getting the right workers

Recruiting workers at the beginning of a project when the grant has come through can be challenging. It is not always possible to find the staff or volunteers with the required skills, aptitudes and knowledge, and so projects can get delayed. On the other hand, a project might make the decision to go ahead even if the right staff/volunteers cannot be found for fear that the money may be withdrawn or there may be other consequences.

We were not prepared to get the project underway without the right workers.

FCCBF grant recipient

We need paid workers of quality – 12 month projects are limited and it is not always possible to get the best person for the job or someone who is prepared to stay for the full term.

FCCBF grant recipient

Community cohesion work can be extremely challenging and demanding and so committed and experienced staff and volunteers are essential. As well as youth and community work experience, workers and volunteers also need to have a deep understanding of local communities, including the values and beliefs of different faiths. Where it is not possible to find the right staff or volunteers, on the job training, mentoring and support are essential.

Learning points

1. Community cohesion work requires highly skilled staff and volunteers who are experienced in working with diverse communities with all their intricacies.
2. Recruiting qualified and experienced staff and volunteers who are politically aware and knowledgeable about faith and community work is important; it is not enough just to have the technical skills.
3. Gaining the trust and support of local people, including influential youth and community workers and other leaders, is critical for effective community cohesion work.

Measuring the impact

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the projects had an impact on individuals and communities at local levels. They were convinced that the FCCBF and CCPlus funding provided an opportunity to lay the foundation for future work, even though guarantees could not be given about the longer-term impact of the work. Of course, it is not always easy or possible to assess the immediate impact of short-scale projects on complex issues such as community cohesion, preventing violent extremism and active citizenship.

It is difficult to assess whether tensions have gone down in such a short space of time. The local authority does tension monitoring but we have not been able to get any feedback so far.

CCPlus grant recipient

Workers and volunteers were convinced that the projects had had a strong and positive impact, on the basis of indicators such as:

- positive feedback and requests for further copies of materials produced such as DVDs
- increased demand from other bodies for project reports and other resources and being invited to take part in external events
- increased membership of organisations
- more people getting involved in their communities in other ways, for example young people serving on area-based community councils and group activities being continued by members rather than paid workers
- a decline in local support for the British National Party, verified through local authority attitudinal surveys
- a noticeable increase in confidence, trust and ability of organisations to resolve inter-community conflict.

Learning points

1. Community development approaches require practitioners to keep track of both the tangible, statistical outputs as well as 'softer' outcomes such as the confidence of local people to work with people of different backgrounds.
2. Any measurable impact has to include an assessment of how many more local people are prepared to exercise leadership and get involved in their communities, and the quality and depth of such engagement.
3. Practitioners need to consider how community cohesion initiatives started on the basis of short-term project funding can be better integrated into their core work and continue to have a positive impact on community cohesion.

Key lessons for policymakers

Introduction

This chapter highlights some of the key learning points to have emerged from this survey and their implications for policymakers. Policymakers might wish to consider these when planning social policy and/or funding programmes around community cohesion.

Political sensitivity

Working with local, often diverse, communities that have their own internal dynamics is not easy. This is especially so when working on sensitive issues such as community cohesion and preventing violent extremism and when the Government has a declared interest in this area. Many local activists, workers and community leaders stand accused by sections of their community of colluding with the Government. There is a continuous need to emphasise the importance of communities engaging with one another and people talking to each other. One project took the approach of being explicit about the rationale behind working on preventing violent extremism, making it clear to participants the benefits of positive relationships between people of different backgrounds and faiths.

Even if local activists, workers and community leaders are convinced about the need to work on strengthening communities, tensions can exist, especially when working with sections of the community who believe that projects are merely there to 'police' and manage communities. Consequently, projects carrying out community cohesion work have to exercise sensitivity and sound judgement in whom they involve in their work and how.

Partner agencies, especially public bodies, might need assurances that the work to be carried out will indeed help strengthen communities rather than create further divisions and that any investment made will benefit all sections of the community.

For some groups, such as recent arrivals or refugees and asylum seekers, the issue of extremism can be alive in other ways. They might have arrived here from countries where they faced repression, and so be wary about opening out to strangers, especially concerning extremism or other sensitive political issues.

We had secret police from a Middle East country coming over and the communities we were working with were in fear for their lives here and for their families back home. We found that we did not need to talk about the harrowing experiences all the time and also not just criticise bad things here – we got to talk about good things also.

CCPlus grant recipient

Learning points

1. Recognise that community cohesion and preventing violent extremism are politically sensitive issues and there are different perspectives about how and why such work is encouraged within local communities.
2. Demonstrate a project's track record within the local community and how it is committed to working in the community's interests, not just that of the Government.
3. Motivate partner agencies to become involved by demonstrating how they can meet their organisational objectives through a joint project.

Tackling different forms of extremism

Preventing violent extremism comes across as effectively being about managing and curtailing radicalisation and extremist behaviours within the Muslim community. The policy stance and the ensuing funding programmes appear to be based on the premise that such behaviour and actions are primarily a phenomenon peculiar to the Muslim community. However, this is not always so, and a variety of initiatives are needed to counter different forms of extremism within and between communities. Examples include inter-ethnic relations between Asian and African-Caribbean communities, Islamophobia, racism, xenophobia, caste prejudice, the marginalisation of women, the incidences of domestic violence and the treatment of refugees and asylum seekers.

We were able to explore different aspects of terrorism – some young people saw the Americans as terrorists through their occupation of the Middle East – another form of terrorism, they argued.

CCPlus grant recipient

There is a need to consider how to tackle extremism in all its forms. Any meaningful approach has to be based on the premise that political violence is undesirable and that solutions through peaceful and democratic means are key to effective community cohesion.

We were able to neutralise some of the extreme behaviour. They changed in terms of attitudes in relation to colour and race – some previously had radical views of an aggressive nature such as “I do not like white people” or that “all white people are racist” but now they have a calmer attitude. They have more respect. They learnt that they do not have to like the person but just need to get on with them.

CCPlus grant recipient

Learning points

1. An understanding of different forms of extremism, their manifestations and effects on different sections of society is critical to building community cohesion and preventing violent extremism.
2. Policy initiatives and funding programmes on community cohesion and preventing violent extremism should target, but not be seen to be stigmatising, specific communities or groups.
3. An examination of and working on differences between communities is as important as emphasising the commonalities, as this will help build greater mutual respect.

The language of community cohesion

Terms such as ‘community cohesion’ and ‘preventing violent extremism’ can be jargonistic and create distance between social policy intentions and local communities’ actual experiences. Projects had to learn to adapt the language of community cohesion and preventing violent extremism. The use of alternative phrases such as ‘appreciating differences’, ‘sharing cultures’, ‘having mutual respect’ and ‘understanding your neighbours’ helped to demystify and interpret social policy in laypeople’s terms without undermining policy objectives.

The debate about community cohesion also raises the question of how realistic it is to expect different communities to come together and join hands without tackling racism and other forms of discrimination. Also, the challenge for policymakers is about how communities who are hostile to one another can work together.

Recruiting young people can be difficult on a project because of the nature of extremism. Talking about extremism through organised workshops is not exciting to many young people – they do not talk about these things or were reluctant to talk openly using these words.

CCPlus grant recipient

For some projects it is not always possible to talk explicitly about preventing violent extremism in publicity materials for fear of deterring the very people who need to be involved. However, once participants become interested and involved it should be possible to raise such issues and still achieve the desired end result of getting people together, exchanging experiences, sharing perspectives and forming more trustworthy relationships.

We used music and football as a medium to build bridges and used these as a carrot to get them all involved. We advertised them as open sessions and did not tell the African-Caribbean young people that Asians would be coming and the other way round. Once we got them all there we set up a football team and after this they were able to spend time talking to each other.

CCPlus grant recipient

Learning points

1. Recognise the gap between social policy language and the language of the street that projects need to use to secure community buy-in and engagement.
2. Sensationalist social policy language can serve to alienate communities, making it harder for local projects to engage local people, especially those who are alienated and disenfranchised.
3. Using 'street' language instead of the language of social policy is an important means of engaging local people and connecting them to each others' lived experiences.

Creating safety

Many projects are established to promote the 'integration' of local people into British mainstream society and increase their participation in civic life. There is a need to understand why some individuals and groups continue to remain sceptical about integrating which, for many, means forgoing their religious, cultural and linguistic forms of expression as a trade-off for getting accepted by mainstream society.

It is important to understand the coping strategies used by these communities in response to what is often a hostile and alien environment, and not always interpret this as a conscious rejection of dominant norms. In this sense integration is as a dynamic process whereby individuals and groups zigzag between mainstream society and their own communities rather than as a process of total assimilation and absorption.

Well facilitated, safe and often exclusive spaces are needed for, say, people of similar faiths or backgrounds to help build their confidence before they are able to engage with other communities on an equal footing. Creating separate spaces, for example for young Bangladeshi Muslim men, white working class women or Sikh older people is often seen to be divisive. However, such spaces provide a critical avenue for self expression, common identity, building confidence and enabling genuine talking and listening to take place.

Having realised that arranging events around significant Islamic dates ensures maximum participation, we took the opportunity of religious events to set up a number of programmes dealing with issues that affect the youth of today. We also organised fun events such as Eid parties, an ice skating event and a trip to Paris. These events allowed time for the girls to socialise, interact and network with girls from different backgrounds, cultures and communities, in a safe environment. Through these activities we have been able to benefit over 150 girls ... We also found that because of the negative portrayal of Muslims in the media the young women were very apprehensive to have any dealings with the media and so in order to capacity and confidence build them, a five-day intensive media training course was set up.

Adapted from a project report

Learning points

1. Striving for integration without building the confidence of individuals and groups may not always produce the best outcomes.
2. The provision of secure and safe places where individuals and groups can express themselves and share values and beliefs is crucial to building individual and collective confidence to interact with wider society.
3. Striving for integration requires an appreciation of the social, economic and political inequalities between communities and how these can undermine relationships between and within communities.

The role of faith

Faith-based organisations and inter faith bodies have an important role to play in nurturing good community relations and facilitating opportunities for dialogue between communities. They also have an important role in advocating for disadvantaged people and helping develop a rights-based agenda to ensure full and equal participation by all sections of society. Inevitably, for faith-based organisations and inter faith bodies, this means looking at how greater equality and participation can be engendered within individual faith communities as well as across and between different faith communities.

Migration into the UK of people of different religious beliefs and the filtration of religion into global politics are important factors in shaping local work on community cohesion and preventing violent extremism. Notions of faith and religion are gaining greater currency as expressions of individual and collective identities and in everyday social interactions and boundary negotiations between individuals and communities.

We need to be able to talk openly about this using this language of community cohesion and preventing violent extremism – need to state this from the beginning. We had an open agenda on inter faith relations and discussed the benefits of such relations and the efforts required of group members to form and keep relationships going.

FCCBF grant recipient

Of course, there are different ways of working with faith communities and on inter faith issues. Some organisations are able to be upfront and work explicitly as faith-based and/or inter faith projects. Others may be reluctant to over-emphasise the faith elements of their work for fear of alienating the people they wish to draw in. Some may steer a middle course and be more or less explicit about the faith element of their work, depending on circumstances. Non-faith-based organisations may find they have little choice but to address faith, religion and beliefs because of the make-up of their communities and the strength of feeling about the role of faith within these communities.

We found that it was important to empower young people in youth work terms. They needed support and to be able to discover and learn for themselves, for example they chose the prayers for the launch event. With faith we never preached to them – we discussed

different points of view about faith. But you have got to have knowledge about their faiths and other faiths and there has to be sensitiveness so that you are not insulting them.

FCCBF grant recipient

Case study 2: Redbridge Forum against Extremism and Islamophobia, London

The Forum was set up with the help of the Home Office in 2006 following the terrorist event on the London Underground. The Forum was one of the first forums on extremism and Islamophobia to be set up in the UK. It has since become a member of the network 'Forums Tackling Extremism and Islamophobia', funded through Communities and Local Government.

Using funding from the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund (FCCBF), the Forum delivered three seminars on topics such as citizenship, tackling extremism and challenging the media on its portrayal of Muslims. Speakers included Sadiq Khan MP (Tooting), Sir Iqbal Saqranie (former head of the Muslim Council of Britain) and Mohammed Ali (chief executive officer of the Islam channel). The seminars attracted an average of 160 guests, including members of other faiths.

Other activities have included:

- newsletters examining a variety of issues relating to the Muslim community in Redbridge, distributed at the community centre and mosque
- police surgeries which have enabled the local police to increase their understanding of issues facing the community
- a madrasa (after school Arabic classes) attended by approximately 300 pupils and parents. Pupils received prizes for achievement
- a one-day Muslim women's empowerment event (with approximately 40 participants).

The Forum's seminars helped build confidence in relations between people of the Muslim faith and statutory bodies in the borough and enabled the Forum to make contact with some of the borough's voluntary organisations. The Forum's work has received press coverage in the local and Urdu media, thus amplifying its key messages.

The Redbridge Forum against Extremism and Islamophobia has acted as a bridge between the local Muslim community and the voluntary sector, working to find solutions that meet the needs of the Muslim community and face some of the current challenges. It has a good understanding of the issues, including local knowledge, and is hence able to act as a trusted bridge between policymakers and local communities.

Learning points

1. Faith is an important constituent and source of identity, inspiration and allegiance for many individuals and groups within contemporary multi-racial, multi-lingual, multi-cultural and multi faith Britain.
2. When working with communities on community cohesion and preventing violent extremism, if using the medium of faith, do not proselytise.
3. There are different ways of using faith as a medium for inter and intra faith work with local communities, sometimes explicitly and sometimes not, depending on the context and the environment.

Resourcing and sustaining the work

Because we are all dependent on funding, projects always come to an end. We need to keep going, innovating and doing things within the community.

FCCBF grant recipient

As is usual with time and funding limited projects, there were issues about sustainability and continuity of the work. Even though most voluntary and community sector organisations are used to the idea of short-term funding, having to bid for yet another round of short-term funding through, say, FCCBF and CCPlus does not make things any easier.

For us it was important to have FCCBF as it helped our organisation but it was sad that we had to apply a second time when we needed to keep the wagon going.

FCCBF grant recipient

Projects welcomed the opportunity to work on community cohesion and preventing violent extremism but were insistent that the principle of addressing critical community issues through short-term initiatives ought to be resisted. Instead longer-term, sustained investment should be the norm. Projects also experienced obstacles in tapping into other pots of money, either due to demand outstripping supply, their own lack of ability and capacity and/or lack of political will by funders and decision-makers to regard community cohesion and preventing violent extremism as a priority.

We have local support for our work but money is an issue.

CCPlus grant recipient

Projects planned a number of ways of sustaining their work, including:

- charging for services as a way of generating some or all of their income
- delivering the work in other neighbourhoods and areas
- continuing the volunteer development and mentoring programme to enable volunteers to become an integral part of the delivery team
- providing mentoring support to newer members
- providing training for management committee members
- establishing offshoot projects: in one instance, a social enterprise film production company.

We have developed a youth committee to link into other youth groups in the city and they are currently prioritising what they would like to do. We have mentored this group which has enabled them to write bids for activities they see as important to them. It has had an impact on community cohesion as this project has now brought two rival Asian gangs together under one roof who are now working collectively on a regular basis. There have been 11

volunteers involved in the planning of this whole project and we believe it has been a tremendous success.

Adapted from a project report

Learning points

1. The funding available for work on community cohesion and preventing violent extremism should be built on full-cost recovery principles so that projects are not forced to subsidise the work from their reserves or other funding they receive.
2. Longer-term funding and investment is needed for community cohesion and preventing violent extremism.
3. Building internal capacity and developing staff and volunteers is important in sustaining the work.

Conclusions

This report has looked at the role played by a small sample of the projects funded by the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund (FCCBF) and Connecting Communities Plus, Community Grants (CCPlus) in building community cohesion and preventing violent extremism. It has concentrated on examining the community-based, informal approaches used by projects to initiate or build on existing work with local communities around these issues.

The findings suggest that community cohesion and preventing violent extremism were of concern to local projects long before the FCCBF and CCPlus funds became available. The funding provided the opportunity to carry out work in these areas in a more coherent way with dedicated staff and volunteers and planned budgets.

The findings suggest that surveyed projects were able to engage different communities in their work. For some local people, this was the first time they had been able to discuss and act on issues of common concern with people of different backgrounds. In doing so, an understanding of local communities, their concerns and dynamics were important to help deliver effective projects.

Different communities continue to have different understandings and interpretations of key policy concepts such as community cohesion and preventing violent extremism. Projects had to couch social policy language in a way that would encourage local people to participate. Once participants were engaged, projects found it much easier to raise, discuss and agree what to do about such issues. This process of informal education was found to be effective in raising difficult issues without individuals feeling threatened or thinking they could not work through them without proper facilitation.

The surveyed projects presented examples of credible and positive work carried out using the FCCBF and CCPlus grants. Innovation took place, excluded young people felt a part of something, public institutions were reminded of their duties and responsibilities, cross-community relations were forged, often for the first time. But, most important, there was a sense of creating links, empathy and mutual understanding between people.

As is the nature of such development work, it was difficult to assess fully the longer-term impact of the work carried out by the surveyed projects. Nonetheless, there was a belief that significant steps had been taken to forge better relations within and between local communities and that this would be a good base for future work.

Surveyed projects raised the issue of sustainability. Longer-term funding was seen to be essential if fundamental issues such as community cohesion were to be tackled.

Finally, without the proactive creation of spaces where mutual dialogue and collective action could take place, relations between and within communities might be characterised more by differences and conflict than by solidarity, mutual respect and equality. The creation of such spaces was seen to be crucial in strengthening and sustaining community cohesion and in helping bring about a significant transformation in the beliefs and values that underpin existing relationships between different groups and communities.

Appendix I: CDF letter of introduction



28 March 2008

Community Cohesion and Building Bridges

The Community Development Foundation, responsible for administering the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund (FCCBF) and Connecting Communities Plus, Community Grants, is producing an independent report on the role of faith-based organisations in building community cohesion and building bridges across communities. This short-scale study will look into the 'softer' community development approaches and methods used by community and faith-based organisations to find local solutions to community cohesion, tackling exclusion and improving understanding between different groups.

The work will involve interviewing workers and volunteers from projects that received these funds and will be carried out by independent consultants, Lotus Management Consultancy. Your responses and participation in this research would be most appreciated and all replies will be treated confidentially.

You will be contacted by Vipin Chauhan, Lotus Management Consultancy Ltd, in the next few days and we hope you will be able to contribute to this important area of community cohesion and community development work.

*Sue Armstrong
Grants Administrator
Community Development Foundation*

Appendix 2: Interview guide

The CDF, responsible for administering the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund and Connecting Communities Plus, Community Grants, is producing an independent report on the role of faith-based organisations in building community cohesion and building bridges across communities. The work will involve interviewing workers and volunteers from projects that received grants from these funds and will be carried out by independent consultants, Lotus Management Consultancy. Your responses and participation in this research would be most appreciated and all replies will be treated confidentially.

| DETAILS | |
|----------------|--|
| Contact | |
| Organisation | |
| Location | |
| Telephone | |
| Email | |

A BACKGROUND

- A1 Explain your role.
- A2 Describe the work of your organisation (what it does, which communities, key activities).

B THE FCCBF AND CCPLUS FUNDED PROJECT

- B1 Describe the work carried out under the FCCBF or CCPlus funding.
- B2 Why did you carry out the work? What was the history of community relations before? What were inter faith relations like?
- B3 Who started the initiative? (people, stakeholders, partner agencies/others).
- B4 Which sections of the community did you target? (age/faith/gender/others).
- B5 What were the key issues involved in getting the project started?

C IMPACT AND OUTCOMES

- C1 What were the key achievements of your project?
- C2 What difference did the project make to local communities/community relations?
- C3 What impact did the project have on promoting community cohesion and building bridges? Any noticeable changes in attitudes and behaviours?
- C4 How were you able to measure the impact of the project? How do you know the project was successful/worked/made a difference?
- C5 How do you plan to carry on/sustain the activities started?

D LESSONS AND LEARNING

- D1 What were the key lessons you have learnt from this project?
- D2 What hasn't quite worked and why? What hindered your progress?
- D3 If you were to advise other groups about doing such work, what three things would you say to them?

E ANY OTHER COMMENTS OR OBSERVATIONS

References

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