

How to increase ethnic participation in National Parks and develop a model to change management structures of countryside authorities and agencies

A. The challenge of fully involving ethnic communities in National Parks

The following challenges to ethnic communities should be tackled to gain confidence and participation of groups.

1. Institutionalisation

- 1.1 The immediate image of Environmental / National Park structures are white and therefore difficult to perceive as relevant or desirable to ethnic communities. The power for change is seen to be held in white, male, middle class hands in all areas of the countryside.

Ways forward

- 1.2 Open up the countryside. Create opportunities to be in touch with different aspects of the countryside, e.g. The use of mentoring schemes to encourage ethnic minority persons, women and youth in particular, to see what's out there. It is not a question of supplanting one group (e.g. white men) with another (e.g. black women and youths), but rather to give everyone a chance to see what kind of things are happening, what choices there are in the work force and what the implications may be in terms of lifestyles.
- 1.3 Work towards the reality of a multi-ethnic work force - An attractive image for all diverse communities.
- 1.4 Provide opportunities for ethnic community groups and individuals to contribute to the development of National Parks, e.g. Consultation and other structures such as membership of an advisory group or the Management Committees of National Parks or other authorities and agencies.

2. Access and belonging

- 2.1 Many ethnic groups feel alienated by lack of access to relevant information.
- 2.2 Ethnic groups are in the main excluded from the official history of Britain - how do they fit into the history of British heritage, including the countryside?
- 2.3 The feeling that they are not welcomed by countryside authorities or agencies who control countryside areas, including National Parks.

Ways forward

- 2.5 Producing relevant information or making arrangements, e.g. using a community interpreter, to communicate in languages of the immigrant generation of ethnic groups in relation to programmes of events would be a very positive step. It is, however, highly recommended that this approach should be backed-up with direct contact with target groups with the aim of building up an ongoing relationship.
- 2.6 Put multi-cultural interpretation into place on heritage sites and National Parks, developed through partnership with ethnic community groups. e.g. highlighting how ethnic cultures and communities have contributed to British heritage.

3. Dissemination of Information

- 3.1 Ethnic groups do not have much information about project examples involving ethnic groups and countryside/environmental organisations (whether the project worked or not). This contributes to the image of National Parks as unknown territory - feeding the fear of the unknown.

Ways forward

- 3.2 Promote project examples will help encourage communities to participate in National Parks and the countryside.
- 3.3 Monitoring and evaluation of a project is essential for future planning and in involving ethnic groups in developments. It should also be made available to ethnic groups involved in projects with National Parks.
- 3.4 Enable ethnic groups to shape the direction of projects through adopting an open and approachable vision to projects.

4. Support for ethnic communities

- 4.1 Ethnic community groups and organisations have been excluded from National Parks and heritage /countryside sites in terms of support, resources and funds for participating in programmes of activities and events at National Parks.

Ways forward

- 4.2 Provide support for ethnic groups to engage with National Parks. Any form of support for ethnic groups and organisations need to be pro-active.
- 4.3 Strategically planning with long term, medium term and short term objectives in relation to ethnic participation in National Parks. Building up projects with groups may take a long time (years?) for particular ethnic groups, whereas others may take up the opportunity of building up the capacity of ethnic groups with some experience in countryside.
- 4.4 Project ownership should be shared with ethnic groups and take into account the needs of the ethnic communities involved.
- 4.5 Plan for sustained funding and resourcing, or develop modes of provision of funding that do not require groups to spend it all immediately.

B. Internal organisational challenges to National Parks and countryside authorities and agencies who wish to make National Parks more accessible to ethnic groups

1. Fear of change

- 1.1 None of us likes change. Many organisations are fearful of change and the consequences of change.

Ways forward

- 1.2 Awareness raising can dissolve fears, and enthuse and stimulate motivation towards change.
- 1.3 Organisational culture change - Personnel at all levels of an organisation must accept the need for change based on clearly defined issues e.g. Legislation, Organisational Policy, Equal opportunities etc. On the grand scale, we need joined up government - civil service, politicians, local authorities must all work together. Having different work cultures within authorities is unhelpful. Accepting need for change within relevant sections of organisations will lead to resource allocation and sustained support.
- 1.4 Benefits of change to the organisation must be highlighted e.g. increase in stakeholders in National Parks, volunteers from a new sector of society etc.

2. Lack of experience in instigating structural / organisational culture change

- 2.1 Organisations which want to change may have difficulty in knowing what is "good practice".
- 2.2 Embarrassment - organisations whose work is of high quality find it difficult to be seen to know little about a particular field of work.

Ways forward

- 2.3 Working with organisations that have experience of changing structures to highlight what is already "good practice" and what projects are already taking place, in order to address issues such as developing staff skills in working with ethnic communities, access to advice regarding organisational change in working with ethnic communities etc.
- 2.4 Accessing existing databases of organisations and community groups that have done environmental/countryside projects or who have demographic data on ethnic communities e.g. Black Environment Network (BEN), Racial Equality Councils, Council for Voluntary Organisations etc.

3. Policy 'labelling'

- 3.1 Organisations have their budgets labelled in a narrow or restrictive way which determines their policies.

Ways forward

- 3.2 There needs to be cross-cutting policies unifying environment and social benefits since these two are intrinsically linked e.g. a project that benefits the "environment" should not be construed to underplay or cut out the focus on doing something for people.

4. Risk involved in change

- 4.1 Organisations see community led projects and community ownership within the context of sustainable development as a risk - "Don't know where that will lead". Hard for authorities to 'let go'.

Ways forward

- 4.2 Strengthen networking to develop knowledge of and confidence in working with client groups.
- 4.3 Liaise with community development workers e.g. staff within local authorities and other voluntary organisations
- 4.4 Agree clearly defined limits of any partnership work.

This report is from a workshop held at the BEN Networking Conference 2000.

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