

## **PRINCIPLES ON CONSULTATING ETHNIC MINORITY SECTOR**

### **Dissemination of Information**

The classical example of consultation is dissemination of information which requests within certain period of time a response from the groups, otherwise it will consider no problem of the group in the consulted issues. It assumes all groups must respond and have experts to respond.

Good practice in consultation should work towards maximum participation in decision making and in particular take account on the voice of service users. As a result, consultation mechanisms should be developed between ethnic minority communities and public authorities.

In a real world large and small organisations do exist. It is important to make consultation processes more easily accessible for small groups. It should allow smaller organisations to have a say through informal as well as formal meetings.

### **Critical Timing**

It is important to ensure that the consultation process is credible and therefore timing is critical. The process should be structured to allow adequate time to ensure that a community response can be fed into strategic decision-making processes.

### **Clarity of Objectives**

What is the purpose of the exercise? What are the expected outcomes, what will success look like? These are all important questions that will require serious thought. It is important to ensure that objectives and goals are realistic, achievable and sustainable.

### **Capacity Building**

Capacity building communities' knowledge base about the issues under discussion. This constitutes a community development approach to consultation. It is important that no assumptions are made about the level of expertise existent within the community, even in regard to issues that are of huge concern to the communities being consulted.

Some preparatory work around the issues and processes will inevitably result in an informed and qualitative response. Providing an opportunity for communities to ask any questions or seek any clarification about the issues under discussion is of vital importance.

## **Mediation**

Using ethnic minority organisations to initiate consultation in partnership with public authorities can often increase and build credibility within communities. Utilising credible ethnic minority organisations to capacity build community knowledge and develop understanding will result in a qualitative enhancement of the consultative process. This partnership approach has to be properly resourced if it is not to become exploitative.

## **Sustainability**

It is important to demonstrate the sustainability of the issues raised throughout consultation. Ethnic minority communities must be given feedback, and public authorities need to demonstrate how the views of the communities have informed either policy or service delivery. It is equally important to ensure that a commitment to report back, evaluate and assess progress made in the longer term are seen as part of the process. One meeting may not be enough – be prepared to go back.

## **Transparency**

Openness and access to information have to inform the entire process. Through the process of capacity building a community's knowledge base all relevant and strategic information should be provided.

## **Language and cultural barriers**

Arrangements must consider accessibility of the language and format of information. It should consult with the groups whether they need translated versions. We are cautious on the costs and time of translation, as well as the educational background of the consultees. We suggest that any translated material should not be more than two pages A4 size (on both sides). The translated material should be in bullet point and summary format instead of long paragraphs of description.

Translated material will not empower the groups and create communication between ethnic minority groups and public authorities. It is important to use interpreters at consultation meetings with those communities that have language barriers, such as the Chinese and the Pakistani communities.

Attention must be drawn to the cultural aspects of the ethnic minority communities such as basic beliefs, greetings, dress, gender, food and drink, festivals and fasting, venue, etc.

## **Consultative mechanism**

Establish consultation mechanisms and regular meetings with ethnic minority communities to address the following issues:

- Making existing service provision more responsive to the needs of ethnic minority communities;
- Promoting self-help and encouraging the community to develop its own mechanisms to meet its needs;
- Overcoming communication, cultural and religious barriers in service delivery;
- Empowering those who are the users of the service;
- Assisting Action Plans, service development and delivery, policy development and needs assessments;
- Assisting monitoring of Action Plans, service development and delivery, policy development and needs assessments;
- Breaking down barriers between public authorities and the community.

### **Practical Issues**

Do those involved in making contact with ethnic minority communities:

- Know what already exists and who runs it?
- Know who the community leaders or spokespersons are?
- Know how the leaders are viewed and by whom?
- Know where people meet – formally and informally?
- Know what languages are spoken?
- Know what the conflicts in the community are?
- Know what the issues of concern are?
- Know what the strengths and support systems in the community are?
- Recognise the impact of migration, asylum and racism on the community?
- Recognise the diverse nature of ethnic minority communities, and that as with white communities, there may be a need for separate meetings with women, people with disabilities, etc.?

**Prepared by:** Patrick Yu  
Executive Director of NICEM  
December 2000

**Contact Details:** NICEM  
3<sup>rd</sup> Floor Ascot House  
24-31 Shaftesbury Square  
Belfast, BT2 7DB  
Tel: 028 9023 8645  
Fax: 028 9031 9485  
Email: [info@nicem.org.uk](mailto:info@nicem.org.uk)