RESEARCH ARTICLE

Community Participation in Housing Market Regeneration: The Reasons for Lack of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Participation and Engagement

Community Participation in Housing Market Regeneration: The Reasons for Lack of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Participation and Engagement

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Abstract

Man is a very social being; hence we all desire to reside in liveable communities where our life aspirations can be met. To achieve this, we often times need to regenerate our communities. The importance of engaging with community members in the process of regeneration has been widely accepted as good practice because of its benefits to both the government agencies as well as to the members of the community. However, there is a seeming lack of active participation on the part of the community members. Many reasons have been specified for this lack, so also has so much funds been expended on getting members of the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities to participate and engage with government agencies. This paper discusses some of the main factors that influence community regeneration and the importance of community engagement. In this paper, the concept of BME participation in regeneration is discussed, the barriers preventing BMEs from participating in community regeneration are reviewed and facilitators of enhanced participation are explored. Results of interviews with stakeholders in community regeneration are presented and the main findings which borders on the reason for lack of participation of BMEs and what can be done to alleviate this situation are summarised.

Keywords: BMEs; community participation; housing market regeneration; participation barriers.

1. Introduction

Community regeneration has been defined by many authors to mean different things. While some say it is the same as urban renewal, some authors see a difference. Put simply, the Scottish Government define community regeneration as 'the lasting transformation of places to benefit those who live and work there' [1]. This implies that the main focus of community regeneration is not just for the physical attributes of the locality, but for the benefit of the people who live in those communities. The idea of what makes a community can be a little evasive and difficult to define [1]. However, using a widely generic scope, a community can be seen from two perspectives i.e. it can be viewed in relation to 'space' e.g. streets, wards, schools etc and in relation to 'people' e.g. relationships like sharing similar ethnicities, cultures or professional affiliations. In UK, communities are very diverse both in terms of places as well as the people. Over 250 languages are spoken on the streets of London alone, making it the most multilingual capital in the world [2] and the people of the UK can be broadly divided into two i.e. 'Whites' (or White British) and 'Non-Whites'. For all that, in all of the UK, the Non-Whites are only ranging between 10-12% according to which source is been followed. These Non-White people referred to here are also called BMEs (Black and Minority Ethnic) groups. Research by the Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research (CCHPR) has shown that in the UK, the proportion of the population ethnically classified as 'White British' has fallen [3]. The report further added that this trend is likely to continue into the future, partly because the part of the population classified as White British is generally older and the natural population growth of this group is slower, and partly because of immigration and emigration.

Although in some areas like Middlesbrough (UK), the BME population is relatively low, in other areas, BMEs have dominance [4]. For example, according to the UK parliament, aside the fact that just 8% of the UK population are 'non-white, BMEs make over half the population of Newham and Brent, 26% of Leicester's population are Indian, the highest share of any local authority in the UK. 33% of the Tower Hamlets population are Bangladeshis while 15% of Bradford's population are Pakistani. 12% of Lewisham's population are Black Caribbean and 16% of Southwark's population are Black African.

Studies by various government bodies shows that the settlement pattern of BMEs is such that they are concentrated in pocket areas of acute deprivation and environmental neglect. BMEs are more represented in social housing than their 'white' counterparts, and as maintained by the CCHRP; there are 18.6% of 'whites'

in social housing, while the figure is 50.8% for Blacks. For these reasons, when the need for community regeneration arises, there is an expectation that BMEs views should be heard since regeneration is geared towards their benefit.

Even though, community representation and engagement as been widely accepted as crucial to successful regeneration partnerships [5] according to Falkirk District Council, the level of community representation is ominously low especially for the BME communities [6]. Lack of participation remains a problem blighting BMEs in the community. There have been many reasons postulated as being responsible for the lack of engagement of BMEs.

Lack of trust in the government agencies, lack of information about government plans and cultural differences among others are some of the challenges faced by BMEs in the process of community engagement [7]. These challenges are reviewed in more depth in this paper.

Apart from aiding the success of regeneration, community engagement has also been identified as one of the key factors that contribute to social inclusion and community cohesion because members of the community are important stakeholders in the process of regeneration. It is to this light that this paper aims to explore the benefits of engaging with Minority Ethnics in the community. This paper also considers the main factors that informs community regeneration and suggests steps which can be taken to achieve better participation and engagement of BMEs in the process of regeneration by critically reviewing relevant literature and also interviewing key stakeholders.

2. Literature Review: Community Regeneration

To define community regeneration, it will important to start by separating the two words and handling them separately. There are a number of competing definitions for the term 'community' [8]. It can be seen as a geographical area, as a group of people living in a particular place or as an area of common life. However the American Heritage Dictionary defines a community as 'a group of people living in the same locality and under the same government or the district or locality in which such a group lives' [9]. A community has many aspect; these aspects include the physical, social (human), environmental (natural), and economic [10]. The Physical aspect of the community involves such factors as the built environments, the houses (brick and mortar) roads and bridges, parks, dams etc and it is measured in terms of land value in the neighbourhood, occupancy/void property ratio, design quality if the houses and the open spaces. The Social or human aspect is involved with the relationships inherent in the community and such factors as cohesion, inclusion, exclusion, culture, capacity building, health and well being, etc.

Regeneration on the other hand is 'a comprehensive and integrated vision and action which leads to the resolution of community problems and which seeks to bring about a lasting improvement in the economic, physical, social and environmental condition of an area that has been subject to change' [11]. This shows that community regeneration affects not just the physical appearance of cities; it also affects the social and cultural lives of the inhabitants. The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) stresses the fact that although funds are required for regeneration, it is however not the only factor that contributes to it [12]. They defined regeneration as 'the process of reversing economic, social and physical decay in our towns and cities where it has reached that stage when market forces alone will not suffice'.

The two definitions above [11, 12] suggest that regeneration is an interventionist activity and that it is a reactive rather than proactive activity. However, the UK's Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) saw regeneration as being more holistic in nature [13]. According to them, regeneration is about jobs: their creation, protection, quality and skills and the accessibility to various groups within society. It is also about investment: in businesses, in the urban infrastructure of roads, railways, airports and in facilities like shops, tourists' attraction, sports and cultural facilities; finally, it is about wealth: the generation of profit, of income, of resources and how these are distributed between rich and poor area, and groups. It is a highly political discipline: it is about people and power. Tallon [14] brought all the aforementioned definitions together and resolved on the fact that regeneration has four approaches as shown in Table 1. The governance approach can be likened to political aspect of regeneration.

Table 1: Approaches to community regeneration.

1	Economic	Job creation, income, employability, skills, employment, development etc.
2	Social/Cultural	Quality of life, health, education, crime, housing, quality of public services etc.
3	Physical/Environmental	Infrastructure, built and natural environment, transport and communication etc.
4	Governance	Nature of decision making, engagement of local groups, involvement of other groups, styles of leadership etc.

Going by the above definitions of both regeneration and community, it is lucid that community regeneration is about people as well as place, infrastructures, vision, culture, profit and groups; it can be seen more as a process rather than a product. In putting the definitions and regeneration together, it can be said that the community regeneration definition which will be adopted by this paper is:

"A comprehensive and integrated vision and action involving a group of people regardless of background who engage and communicate together to seek a lasting solution to an area's economic, physical, social and environmental condition by creating a liveable environment with infrastructures, investments and safety whilst giving the power of decision to the residents".

From this definition, it can be seen that there is a 'people' factor which greatly needs to be engaged. According to Duncan and Thomas [15] these 'people' are also called the stakeholders. These 'actors' or 'stakeholders' form partnerships as needed in order to deliver the regeneration need of the area [16]. Members of the community or service users are important aspects of this partnership. Participation of members of the community is far more than a requirement; it is a condition for success [17]. To this light, the next section explores the importance of the BME community group members in the process of regeneration of their communities.

2.1 BMEs as important stakeholders in regeneration

According to the Welsh Assembly Government [18], many organisations had not even defined what the term BME means or who a BME is. Gill [19] used the term to refer to people of colour, while the Home Office Statistical Bulletin [20] used broad categorization of BMEs to mean White, Mixed, Asian or Asian British, Black or Black British and Chinese or other ethnic groups. However, this research takes cue from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's [21] classification which describes a BME to be a person who is visibly non White. This section reviews the importance of such people in regeneration.

Regeneration is usually delivered to communities through the various partnerships existing in the community [22]. Partnerships are organisations involved in the delivery of regeneration to an area [23]. They are usually formed to act both as ways of ensuring the effective management of services within the community and as potential 'change agents' in the way they bring together different (and sometimes competing) interest groups [24]. They are the 'actors or stakeholders' in the process of the regeneration. These 'actors' or 'stakeholders' form partnerships as needed in order to deliver the regeneration need of the area [16]. Partnerships or Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) as they are often referred to, include representatives from the community, and private and public agencies [23, 25]. The problem with BMEs as noted by Phillips is that even in BME dominated communities, the level at which they participate is very low and unrepresentative of their dominance [26]. The partners usually involved in LSPs are many and varied. Partners in regeneration usually include:

- community groups
- local authorities
- property consultants, private developers
- urban regeneration companies
- registered social landlords
- faith groups
- individuals/local residents
- voluntary organisations
- health sector workers
- police force, community wardens
- suppliers and other contractors, etc.

It is worth noting that members of the community, faith groups, community groups and other voluntary associations are mentioned as being part of the partnership. This shows the importance attributed by the LSPs to participation/partnering with community groups and BMEs in order to achieve community regeneration.

Strategically reviewing the list of stakeholders, it can be seen that they can be broadly categorised into two i.e. 'regeneration providers' and 'regeneration enablers'. The regeneration providers according to this paper are the government agencies who are burdened with the task of carrying out the regeneration plans in real terms. They are usually the local councils, contractors or urban regeneration companies, who bid for government funds to regenerate a community. In the light of this, it can hence be said that according to the list above, the following are regeneration providers: local authorities, property consultants, private developers,

urban regeneration companies, registered social landlords, police force, community wardens, suppliers and other contractors, etc. On the other hand, the regeneration enablers are the stakeholders who are based in the community and are geared towards facilitating the regeneration initiatives by making inputs that makes the regeneration plan sustainable. HM Government referred to this group (enablers) as *representatives of local persons* [27]. By this it is meant that they include a mix of 'local persons' i.e. a balanced selection of the individuals, groups or organisations the authority considers likely to be affected by, or have an interest in, a particular authority function and who the authority is under a duty to involve where they think it appropriate to do so. Also, scrutinising the stakeholders list above, regeneration enablers include such stakeholders as: community groups, faith groups, voluntary organisations, individuals etc. The barriers preventing this group of people from participating effectively are discussed in the section that follows.

2.2 Barriers to BME community participation
Community participation can be loosely defined as the involvement of people in a community in projects to solve their own problems. It is 'a process whereby community members take part in the identification of their needs, setting priorities, identifying and obtaining means to meet those priorities, including the development, implementation, and evaluation of those means in terms of their outcomes' [28].

Community members can participate in many ways. Dekker proposed that there are many levels of participation i.e. information, consultation, joint decision, joint action and topmost is the level where government agencies supports the community's independent initiative, although the WHO Regional Office for Europe [30] identified a level below the 'information' level which is a situation whereby the people are told nothing. The word 'participation' has even been described as a buzzword which can sometimes mean different thing to different agencies and according to the JRF [31] many attempts at community participation fail because organisations promoting involvement are unclear about the level of participation to offer.

Past government initiatives in the UK have substantially identified the need for community participation in regeneration especially for minority ethnic groups and emphasis have been placed on incentives to engage with this group. The New Deal for Communities (NDC) established in 1998 and the Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder (HMRP) in 2002 are examples of plans which focus on community participation. However, in spite of all the funding and attention given to community participation, Pierson and Worley [32] opine that there is very little evidence to show that participation especially for BMEs has improved. So why has participation for BMEs been low and what are the barriers preventing BMEs from participating?

'BMEs are ready to participate; the biggest disincentive to this is the attitude and action of the agency concerned' [28]. Friel concluded that the summary of the problem is 'lack of opportunity on the part of the BME to do so' [33]. However, Fashade and Spence stated that lack of trust, communication and language issues and, lack of influence at the decision making process, as the main reasons why BMEs don't participate [34]. Housing Corporation [35] identified the following as the main impediment with BMEs regarding accessing community services or engagement:

- lack of information or knowledge of the 'system'
- fear that services may not be sensitive to their specific cultural needs
- fear of discrimination and racism
- religious or cultural differences
- fear or inability to communicate/ language
- preference for voluntary, community or other informal support networks
- institutional difficulties such as immigration status
- lack of trust in the system.

According to West Midland Improvement and Efficiency Partnership (IEP) 'relevance' and 'lack of confidence' also mitigates against BMEs because if the ongoing regeneration activity does not relate to the them directly, there will be a risk of disengagement and also BMEs often do not have the confidence to speak up [36]. This may be because of their past experience where their voices have not been heard.

As depicted in The Asian Health Agency's (TAHA) annual report of 2009, the above problem's insensitivity to BMEs point of view by the government 'white-led' agencies is the core of the problem of BME non-participation. Council bureaucracies and too many formality and jargons in forms repel BMEs. They (BMEs) want culturally relevant discussions and real life issues as part of the agenda. On the part of the regeneration providers, lack of resources and contradictory policies are the main reasons for lack of

participation [38]. This paper explored these reasons in more depth through interviews with regeneration officers across England. This is discussed more in sections 3 (Methods) and 4 (Research Findings).

3. Methods

Methodology has been defined by many authors to mean a combination of the different methods used by a researcher to resolve a research problem [39-42]. Travers, however, added that the methodology of a research should include the researcher's theoretical position and how employed methods have resolved the research question [43]. According to Crotty, there are many methodologies that can be employed by a researcher depending on the kind of research; they include: survey research, ethnography, experimental research, grounded theory, action research etc [44]. Sarantakos was of a different opinion stating that the nature of methodology relates to theoretical principles which can be narrowed down to just qualitative and quantitative methodologies [45].

The mixed method of data collection i.e. qualitative and quantitative methodologies is used in the course of this research. Just like the triangulation method of research analysis, mixed methods provides rigour and validity for the results. Literature is extensively reviewed over a period of 2 years and the underlying research problems are identified in its true context and nature.

Stakeholders in community regeneration were also interviewed. It will be recalled from literature that the stakeholders in regeneration can be categorised into the 'provider' and 'enabler' categories. These categories were adequately represented in the number of interviewees. 15 semi structured interviews are conducted (4 pilot, 11 main). Seven of the eleven interviews conducted were with regeneration providers while the remaining four was with regeneration enablers. The reason for this was mainly to extract some underlying themes whilst providing professional answers to the questions at hand and also ensuring that a good cross section of stakeholders are represented. Semi structured interviews are used because of its relaxed nature and as Hockney *et al.* assert, this method allows for the exploration of emergent themes and ideas rather than relying only on concepts and questions defined in advance of the interview [46].

Although there were 250 questionnaires sent out in the course of this research in order to get the input of BME themselves, this paper presents only the qualitative data collection findings of the research. It presents the results of the 11 main interviews. The sample of the interviewees is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: List of interviewees.

No. of Interviews	Management Level within Organisation	Organisation	Type of Organisation	Category
2	Strategic Level Staffs	East Central Rochdale Regeneration Office	UDP	Regeneration Provider
3	1 Strategic Level 2 Middle Mgt Level	Northwards Housing Association	ALMO	
2	2 Middle Mgt Level	Urban Living Partnership	HMRP	Regeneration Enabler
2	2 Top Mgt Level	BME group leaders	Community Group Leader	
2	2 Top Mgt Level	BME voluntary group leaders	Voluntary Group Leaders	

The research chose to interview 11 main people because of the exploratory nature of the enquiries and as Onwuegbuzie and Leech posits, for a phenomenological study as this, 6-10 interviews is adequate as it can easily achieve data saturation if properly managed [47]. The respondents were interviewed in their offices between August and November 2009. Five main themes were covered in the interview process. The themes are as follows:

- Stakeholders in regeneration
- Community cohesion/Sense of belonging
- Levels of BME participation in regeneration
- BME housing needs
- Empowering BMEs in community participation.

However, for the purpose of this paper, only two themes will be discussed - 'Levels of BME participation in regeneration' and 'Empowering BMEs in community participation'.

3.1 Main research questions
The two themes described in this paper were explored with the aid of semi structure questions. The questions were asked from all the respondents as deemed appropriate and a quick overview of the questions is as follows:

- What does participation mean for BMEs?
- What level are BMEs participating currently in community?
- What are the benefits of empowering BMEs in participation?
- How can BMEs be encouraged to participate more in regeneration?
- What level are BMEs expected to participate in regeneration?

3.1.1 What does participation mean for BMEs?
In exploring the level of BME participation in regeneration, it was deemed extremely important to know what participation means for the BME. From the regeneration enablers, it emerged that the word 'participation' for BMEs is not necessarily the same as what is usually defined by government agencies. For the BMEs, participation is about showcasing their culture and being given a sense of belonging in the community. It was propounded by two of the regeneration enablers that perhaps BMEs do not necessarily want to be gauged by the participation ladder; rather they want to be able to make choices on when and how they want to participate. Another perspective to what participation means to BMEs was that BMEs are participating, but not with government agencies. A whole lot of reasons were put forward for this; however, lack of trust on the part of the government agencies was most consistent.

3.1.2 Current level of BME participation in regeneration
From literature, it was seen that BMEs are on the low level of participation as pointed out by Phillips [26]. From the interviews, using the Dekker [29] 'participation ladder' as a guide, it was realised that the BMEs are on the 'information' level of participation. The respondents were unanimous in agreeing that there is a need for better BME engagement in regeneration especially in terms of participation with government agencies. A respondent from Birmingham pointed out that although BMEs regeneration pattern does not necessarily fit into the conventional style, it can still be seen that in terms of responses from BME communities, the level of participation, feedback and comments are still very low. The reason for this according to the respondents was due to the fact that BMEs operate like a community within a community, they prefer to participate mostly with themselves and other community groups and not usually with government agencies. This is in turn due to lack of trust and not having a good sense of belonging in their communities. Regeneration Enablers were disposed to the fact that

- The public at large (the lay public perhaps) provide a contrasting perspective to the views of the professional or political elite; which can serve as a mean of generating more creative proposals and solutions – for thinking outside the box, in the parlance of 'modern' policy making.
- Lay (i.e. inexperienced) people can provide the application of both important knowledge and common sense to policy proposals which can serve as an important form of reality check.
- Community involvement helps to deliver programmes which more accurately target local needs which make the resulting projects more acceptable and longer lasting because communities feel ownership of them.
- The constructive involvement of communities in urban regeneration helps to build local organizational skills, making it easier to develop strong successor organisations.
- Successful community involvement helps to revitalize democracy.

However, the respondents added to the literature findings by adding three new perspectives to the benefits of BME participation. Firstly, the respondents acknowledged that community participation helps in combating social exclusion. It was revealed that it is very important to engage with people of minority in particular because as this will reduce the feeling of lack of sense of belonging. Nevertheless, political and cultural challenges were also identified as one of the challenges of achieving this. Secondly, involving BMEs especially in places where there are a sizeable number of them helps in developing skills, competencies and capacity within the community. This was revealed to be a viable way of ensuring that the BME groups in the community have the skills set to initiate ideas which they can put forward to the government agencies for funding. Thirdly, engaging with BMEs helps the regeneration providers by assisting in efficient resource targeting.

3.1.5 BME participation facilitators

As a way of further exploring the theme of BME community participation empowerment, the research asks the question of 'how can BMEs be encouraged to participate more'? Having already identified some of the main barrier facing BMEs in the process of community participation, this research realised that the issues of lack of trust between BMEs and government agencies and the fact that BMEs prefer to participate with voluntary/ community groups are the main challenges to community participation for BMEs. The result from the interviews showed that the facilitators for BME participation can be grouped into four. Firstly, results from the interviewees show that 'timely consultation' with BMEs will help in alleviating the challenge of trust. It was revealed that usually, when the government agencies consult with the BMEs, the decisions on what to do are already made; this leads to disengagement because the BMEs will know that it is already too late for their voices to be heard. The second facilitator was the need to use 'local champions'. Local champions are people or groups who can make significant improvement to the community because of their understanding of the community.

This was said to assist in ensuring that the staff sent to consult with BMEs are aware of the cultural situations of the people. These also assist in overcoming the barriers of language and religion in some instances.

Thirdly, 'training and capacity building' opportunities for BME emerged also as way of encouraging BMEs to participate in community activities. It was seen from literature that in order to make the local residents take ownership of the regeneration plan; it is a good idea to use local skills in the delivery of the plan. However due to shortage of local skill, this is often a difficult challenge. In this light the respondents proposed that government agencies needs to have regular training and education for the local BMEs in order for them to be able to engage more professionally in regeneration activities.

Lastly, collaboration with BME community/voluntary groups emerged as one of the ways through which BME participation can be facilitated. It was seen that by collaborating with the established BME groups in the community, the problems of communication and information, trust and confidence, visas and right of stay as well as time constraint will be alleviated. The regeneration enablers asked concluded that since BMEs do not like to be hassled into incessant consultation meetings, it will be good if government officials come to the established community groups in order to get information about what BMEs want. It will also help the people whose major problem is language as the community centres will serve as a form of information hob for the residents. It was also noted that the reason why some people don't participate is as a result of their right of stay, maybe failed asylum seekers or people with expired leave to remain, this type of people can only e reached by people they can trust and often time, the only people they trust are the people from similar ethnicities as s theirs.

4. Summary of Findings

This paper describes the concept of community regeneration, how BMEs are a very important stakeholder in the process of regeneration and the challenges preventing BMEs from participating. Interviews conducted among stakeholders was in tandem with literature findings on the current state of BMEs in participation, however, some recommendations were propounded as possible solution to the dilemma of lack of BME participation. Some of the key findings in the course of this research are presented below.

- Although BMEs are currently on the low level of participation, this is only so in terms of BME participation with government agencies. Findings show that BMEs might be participating well with their community groups.
- The reason for lack of participation is a twofold challenge. On the part of BMEs, lack of trust and regeneration initiatives not been sensitive to their needs are some of the reason why they don't participate, on the government agencies part, the main reasons why the BMEs don't come to them is due to their contradictory policies and lack of resources.
- Even though BMEs are often expected to participate at very high levels, both literature and interviews show that participation can occur at any level and people should be allowed to choose what level they want to participate without any hindrance.
- Community participation has among its attributes, the tendency to help fight social exclusion by giving BMEs sense of belonging.

It was also noted that although the interviewees spoke explicitly about good practices, it emerged that due to the fact that communities are different and BMEs are very diverse, what works in one community might not necessarily be implementable in another.

5. Conclusion

This research has highlighted some of the benefits of engaging members of the BME groups in the process of community regeneration. Upon the successful completion of qualitative data collection and analysis through interviews with professional stakeholders in community regeneration, this research concludes by agreeing with literature that although BME participation with government agencies especially in community regeneration is low, the contrary might be the case in terms of participation of BMEs with community groups. BMEs are more comfortable engaging with people of their ethnic classes because they see these people as those who can be culturally and socially sensitive to their needs. BMEs are also seen to be aware of the goings on in their community but they want to retain the freedom to decide what 'level of participation' they engage in.

To this light this paper strongly recommends that government agencies should exploit the avenue of the use of community groups as a potential way of overcoming the challenge of BME non-participation because by joint working with BME community groups, the barriers of lack of communication, lack of trust and sense of neglect usually felt by BMEs will be alleviated. Besides joint working, optimum participation can also be achieved by the use of local champions or 'people's people'.

Competing Interests

None declared.

Authors' Contributions

All authors contributed equally to this work.

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