Let’s Talk About Race: Civil society and race equality
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Executive Summary

Background and aims

Between 2016-2018, Civil Society Futures, the independent inquiry into the future of civil society, has examined how civil society in England can prepare for a more sustainable future. Racism has been high on the public agenda during the inquiry – from hate crime on our streets, the treatment of the Windrush generation, the experience of the survivors of the Grenfell tower tragedy, to Islamophobia in the media - there are increasing concerns that we are becoming a more racist society. But also the Inquiry heard little about race in the many conversations and workshops across civil society they ran, and so commissioned brap (an equality and human rights charity) to undertake a specific piece of research to surface issues and find solutions.

In particular, Civil Society Futures asked brap to explore three key lines of inquiry that we hope may help us reconsider the relationship between race equality and civil society:

- Is civil society talking about ‘race’ and race inequality? If not, why not?
- How is race equality being championed and progressed within civil society?
- Is there a role that civil society can play in progressing race equality? Where are the barriers and where are the ways forward for the future?

Approach

To explore these three lines of inquiry further brap interviewed a range of people within civil society and ran five discussion events in Birmingham, London and York. brap spoke to black and minority ethnic (BME) voluntary sector organisations, large organisations within civil society such as ACEVO and Big Lottery Fund, as well as those with lived experience of racism and race inequality.

What we found

Is civil society talking about ‘race’ and race equality?

Some parts of civil society are discussing these issues, but it’s too often muted or insufficient. Research participants cited a number of reasons:

- a lack of focus within public policy;
● a perceived decline in political work on race with more focus on service delivery within black and minority ethnic civil society groups;

● a belief that we now live in a post-racial society;

● framing of topics in the media like immigration or Islamophobia as distinct and separate from race equality;

● more comfort discussing workforce diversity, less comfort discussing patterns of discrimination and racism affecting wider society;

● lack of confidence to talk about race if you are from a white British background for fear of getting it wrong.

How is race equality being championed and progressed within civil society?

Through this project, participants described various race equality-focused activities that engage different parts of civil society. There are inherent problems associated with categorizing these activities, but we think it is possible and is important to try to do this if we are to better understand what “progressing race equality” currently looks like across the breadth of civil society in England. We identify five broad areas of activity:

● Politicised race equality voluntary organisations;

● Fundable anti-prejudice/anti-discrimination work;

● Services provided specifically for black and minority ethnic people;

● Equality and diversity work within voluntary sector organisations;

● Broader civil society movements.

There also some important limitations associated with the nature and breadth of activity to progress race equality in England:

● The increasing professionalization of the voluntary sector runs the risk of ‘institutionalising’ those that were once more politically vocal about race equality.

● A heavy focus on funding short term, reactive projects means that less time is spent addressing the causes and long term effects of discrimination and racism in society.

● Civil society has an opportunity to generate an independent, long-term vision for promoting race equality.
What role can civil society play in progressing race equality?

There are opportunities to improve investment in race equality work locally and to change how Government engages with civil society on this agenda. Yet change needs to come from within civil society too. A lot of this comes down to personal skills, taking responsibility, relating and talking to one another differently about this topic. These themes align closely with the overall findings of the Inquiry into the Future of Civil Society which identified opportunities to change how power is distributed within society and how connected we feel within civil society. On the specific topic of race equality, there are opportunities to think more deeply about race and race inequality and about the role that we, personally and organizationally can play in maintaining the status quo or building a more equitable society.

Participants identified opportunities for change in five broad areas:

**Vision and Impact**

To make progress on race equality we need to speak clearly about what we are trying to achieve. There are many important activities within this field in civil society (e.g. services for BME communities). Yet not all activities are explicitly about progressing race equality. Civil society needs more clarity about impact on this agenda. There are opportunities to generate a vision for race equality in civil society that includes, but goes beyond workforce diversity to include concrete outcomes associated with addressing structural causes of inequality. To achieve this, funders, organisations and movements within civil society may benefit from support to think through the impact of their own activities to progress race equality.

**Power and representation**

There are opportunities to improve how civil society judges success in ‘representing’ ethnic minority voices. It is about more than ‘numbers’ and ensuring the profile fits. We also need to measure whether BME people within civil society feel they have power. We need to improve how civil society engages with the lived experience of those who have experienced race inequality. This should include recognizing how some views have less credibility or are not heard within civil society. People should be supported to reflect upon and use their personal power to make a positive impact on race equality, but also enable others to step in and access power and resources too.

**Accountability and Responsibility**

There is a belief that BME organisations are best-placed to serve and work with their communities – and whilst there may be truth in this, this type-casting often keeps them under-valued, it keeps them poorer, it drives them out of business. Uncomfortably, it absolves the larger, richer parts of civil society and funders from any responsibility for this work. More
shared accountability for this work would involve larger charities taking an active role in progressing this agenda. It would also involve funders being clearer and more ambitious about the impact on race equality that they expect (both of themselves and others). An assumption that White British people or mainstream charities can’t ‘do race’ can stem from a lack of personal confidence and ‘fragility’ that needs to be worked upon if accountability is to be shared.

**Connection and 'Identity Politics’**

‘Identity politics’ can be powerful and it is often those in power that seek to de-value it. Yet some described a loss of momentum in collective action on race equality due to divisive funding practices for separate communities and simplistic approaches to representing different ‘identities’ within civil society There are opportunities to deepen collective organizing through greater recognition of diversity within groups and through greater collaboration between race equality and other social justice movements.

**Trust and History**

Finally, we rarely listen to the past, but history affects relationships within civil society. Some described apathy and skepticism amongst those who had tried to progress race equality in the past but have seen little success. Others described how empire, class and colonialism continue to shape civil society’s work in England and internationally. Without discussing history, it becomes hard to expect different outcomes and to build trust and equity between people from different backgrounds within civil society. Building trust across civil society will help progress race equality. It will help to build stronger allies and collaboration across ethnic groups. It will help to improve recognition for the leadership, wisdom and growth potential of marginalized individuals and communities (including young people) that haven’t had access to power and influence. To achieve this, there is a need to engage with some difficult issues and to understand our own role in the maintenance of inequality.
Introduction

Between 2017-2018, Civil Society Futures[i], the independent inquiry into the future of civil society, has examined how civil society in England can prepare for a more sustainable future. Racism has been high on the public agenda during the inquiry – from hate crime on our streets, the treatment of the Windrush generation, the experience of the survivors of the Grenfell tower tragedy, to Islamophobia in the media - there are increasing concerns that we are becoming a more racist society. The research brought to the surface the difficulties much of civil society has in talking about and acting on ‘race’, racism and race inequality.

In response to this, brap (an equality and human rights charity) were asked to undertake a strand of research to learn more. In particular, Civil Society Futures asked brap to explore three key lines of inquiry that we hope may help us reconsider the relationship between race equality and civil society:

Is civil society talking about ‘race’ and race inequality? If not, why not?

● How is race equality being championed and progressed within civil society?

● Is there a role that civil society can play in progressing race equality? Where are the barriers and where are the ways forward for the future?

This paper is written by brap and outlines the findings from that work. But before we do this we want to clarify an important point regarding the term ‘civil society’. Civil Society Futures defines civil society as follows:

‘Civil society’ isn’t a phrase most people use, but it’s all around us, it is all of us — everything we do with each other or for each other that’s not the state and not for profit.

By this definition, it is clear that civil society includes what we used to routinely call the ‘voluntary sector’, but goes significantly beyond this. In this paper, however, at times we deliberately refer to the ‘voluntary sector’ in order to distinguish between wider civil society and voluntary sector organisations.

We also use the term ‘black and minority ethnic’ (BME). This broad term is used to reflect a range of dimensions of identity associated with ‘ethnic minorities’ and ‘migrants’ such as culture, ethnicity, nationality, colour, race, migration status and religion. The term is used recognising that it is imperfect and definitions in this field are often contested (Craig et al., 2012).
**Approach**

To explore our three lines of inquiry further we took the following broad approach between August and October 2018:

- A short desk-based review of existing literature on the topic;
- Interviews with 15 people engaged in work to progress race equality from different parts of civil society in England (race equality or BME-focused organisations or movements as well as other ‘mainstream’ voluntary sector organisations);
- Five discussion events in London, Birmingham and York. Three of these discussions were targeted at race equality or BME-focused organisations, one at mainstream voluntary sector organisations and a final event for both types of organisation.

**About this paper**

This paper outlines what we heard in relation to our three lines of inquiry. It has to be said that this conversation was very welcome and in the eyes of many, long overdue. In the time available to us, there were, of course, many voices we were unable to hear. We have tried our best to reflect the range of views expressed by all of the interviewees and event participants that very kindly contributed their time and expertise to this work. Inevitably, we won’t have captured all of those views in this paper, but we hope the paper will promote further dialogue and action on this important topic.
Is Civil Society Talking About ‘Race’ and Race Equality?

The black and minority ethnic voluntary sector

A good place to start is with the black and minority ethnic (BME) voluntary sector which, in some respects, was developed to ensure that ‘race’ and race equality was talked about in England. We will avoid a lengthy history and description of the BME voluntary sector in England here in this paper (brap and others have done this elsewhere, see Afridi and Warmington 2009; Mayblin and Soteri-Proctor 2011). Suffice it to say that, in the 1960s, 70s and 80s, BME voluntary sector organisations were involved in building up essential community infrastructure so that they could provide the services the local state failed or refused to provide. They were likely to have political objectives too. Many were established explicitly to fight back against racism and discrimination. Often these early organisations offered an alternative community-based political activism, opposing the entrenched racism of the mainstream parties. The 1970s is now recognised as the decade in which anti-racism found its voice, its organising methods and its political agenda[2].

Has this work on anti-racism and race equality continued? The development and creation of new BME voluntary organisations is still evident amongst more recently arrived communities. Yet, to a large degree this continuing development of BME voluntary sector organisations reflects a trajectory that began in the 1980s and 90s with organisations forming to provide culturally appropriate ‘racialised’ services, or refugee and asylum support, or community welfare services. Necessary as such services may be in the current political and policy climate, a number of the people we spoke to felt that these services do not always equate to challenging and addressing race inequality. With some exceptions, it is now relatively unlikely that these more recently established organisations will have an explicit political or equality agenda. They will often be focused - like most voluntary organisations - on delivering the services the community needs and which may ensure the organisation is or eventually becomes fundable from one source or another.

This increasing professionalisation of the voluntary sector, then, has inevitably had an impact on the nature and type of work organisations can ‘afford’ to be engaged in, but it is not the only factor that has contributed to the gradual disappearance of explicit commitments to discussing ‘race’ within civil society. As we explore, in Section 3, there are a range of
important strands of work focused on race equality evident in English civil society. Yet, many of those we spoke to felt that the space to talk about race equality within civil society is diminished and under significant pressure. The following barriers to dialogue about race also emerged as important for the people we spoke to through this inquiry:

**Demise of race equality focus in public policy**

A common thread running through the interviews and events that we ran was what Gary Craig has called, the ‘invisibilisation’ of ‘race’ in public policy (Craig 2013). Participants felt that over the last ten years far less ‘air time’ has been given to issues of race by public policy-makers than before. This concern has been echoed in other parts of civil society too (CORE 2010). Some interviewees put this down to changes in Government. Others to the lack of success/effectiveness of previous race relations policy.

Others pointed to the gradual loss of funding to keep race on the agenda of policy-makers. Take for example, the old network of Race Equality Councils (RECs) established following the 1965 White Paper on immigration from the Commonwealth. Some RECs do still exist but most have either closed or morphed into other types of organisations – usually due to financial necessity. RECs didn’t always function effectively but they did succeed in giving a prominence to race equality that is now lost (Craig 2011). Many felt that funding the BME voluntary sector would help to ensure there is a level of presence and scrutiny on issues of race equality:

> “They need to have hypothecated funding streams for BME groups so they don’t get edged out by bigger more articulate white-led organisations, which is what happens all the time across the voluntary and community sector.”
> (interviewee)

**Framing race in the media and public discussion**

Some interviewees linked the lack of discussion about ‘race’ within civil society to a more widely-held view that following fifty years of equalities legislation we now live in a ‘post-racial’ society in which the most egregious instances of race inequality have already been expunged (Murji and Solomos 2014). Others suggested that positive, progressive views regarding the need to tackle race inequality have been displaced by concerns regarding radicalisation, Islamophobia, immigration and the global uncertainties of the ‘post-9/11’ world. Indeed, it is worth reminding ourselves that it is unlikely that anyone much under 35 currently working in civil society organisations will personally remember a pre-9/11 equalities landscape. As Lentin (2016) suggests, in a post-racial landscape, issues of Islamophobia or problems of immigration are not typically seen as part of a longer history of the racialisation
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of minority groups in the UK – thus they are not framed or discussed in terms of ‘racism’ and discrimination.

**Fear and paralysis in discussing race equality**

Some participants in the inquiry described the fear of ‘getting things wrong’ or being seen as ‘racist’ as preventing people talking openly about race equality within civil society:

“A friend of mine, in Northampton talked about – four no English speaking Polish kids arriving into the year 1 class. Her take was that everything slowed down because the teacher was relying on Google Translate just to get them to the toilet. We need to be able to talk about that. The fact that somebody is a different ethnicity to me and I want to talk about it doesn’t make me racist.”

(interviewee)

In a blog written by Tom Lawson, one of our interviewees, he calls for more ‘dangerous conversations’ between people working in civil society where they can ask clumsy questions and get things wrong in order to learn from each other (Lawson 2018). The nature of these conversations and the ways in which they might be facilitated emerged as an important topic for many participants. In one of the discussion events we ran in London as part of this inquiry, the group chose to discuss ‘whiteness’ and some participants described how this was the first time they had discussed the topic openly in public with others. The group also noticed a tendency for participants to sometimes deflect discussion about who benefits from ‘whiteness’ within the group out of politeness and in order to protect each other’s sensibilities.

Some interviewees also described a dynamic where senior leaders in the charitable sector do talk about race inequality, but frame their inability to engage with it largely in a self-abasing (and sometimes weirdly self-congratulatory) way. One academic has termed this dynamic ‘white fragility’ (Di Angelo, 2011) and suggested it is linked to the inability to tolerate ‘racial stress’ because it contradicts or questions white privilege. This dynamic can restrict open discussion about race equality within civil society.

**Breadth of discussion about race equality**

Finally, many of the participants in this study described a tendency within civil society to focus on ‘comfortable’ topics of discussion. In our journey to address race equality, we have absorbed many of the criticisms about how ‘race’ makes people feel. For example, discussions about ‘diversity’ have become part of the mainstream agenda. Seemingly introduced to be more inclusive of everyone – we have failed to recognise that we are avoiding conversations
about race and the term ‘diversity’ can provide us with the ultimate permission to do so. Indeed a preoccupation in mainstream civil society (and perhaps especially in the larger/national charity sector) with numbers, representation and organisational diversity is, to some degree, understandable. There is a longstanding problem with the lack of workforce and board diversity amongst charities. For example, data from the latest UK Civil Society Almanac (NCVO 2018) shows that only 9% of the charity sector is ‘non-white’, compared to 12% of the private sector and 11% of the public sector.

However, necessary as workforce diversity initiatives may be, managing inequalities in the workplace alone does not dismantle the social structures, systems and attitudes that created and now perpetuate racism. In this sense, the discussion about race equality within civil society needs to be broadened to consider other domains of race equality that should be talked about and valued more in civil society (such as outcomes enjoyed by black and minority ethnic people in fields like mental health, housing and education).

Some of the participants we spoke to felt that the uncomfortable nature of this agenda has even led to the deliberate obscuring of race equality – with much of the what we have learnt lost, and an unwillingness by most to see how ‘race’ has relevance within our society.

“What we’ve tried to do is to deal with people’s lack of knowledge by making dealing with it more comfortable. Developed things like diversity, rather than what it is – we’re challenging racism...One of the things that DV [domestic violence] has taught us – if we don’t use the right words, we can cover up. When we use the term ‘domestics’ it took it out of the criminal sphere – but it is a criminal act. That’s why it’s so important to talk about racism, rather than something else.” (interviewee)

**Summary**

Participants in this inquiry identified a number of restrictions to the level and quality of discussion about ‘race’ and race equality within civil society. There is a perception that fewer BME voluntary sector organisations have an explicit equality or political agenda. The breadth of discussion about ‘race’ is limited in the media and in public policy. There is a sense of paralysis amongst some working within civil society who fear saying ‘the wrong thing’ about ‘race’ or who see the issue of race inequality as too big or scary to tackle. There is a strong preoccupation with addressing issues of workforce diversity, but other aspects of race inequality within civil society are discussed less.
How Is Race Equality Being Championed And Progressed Within Civil Society?

The foregoing section should not be taken to mean that debates about ‘race’ and race equality are absent from civil society – only that what conventional voluntary sector organisations and charities do is increasingly likely to have some kind of practical foundation and constitute a fundable activity. Arguably these changes in the voluntary sector, these pressures driving greater professionalism and business methods, are better understood when one distinguishes between conventional voluntary sector organisations and what might be referred to as civil society movements – citizen-led, largely voluntary, large scale, sometimes not just national but international in scope, and centrally concerned with political and social change. A number of the participants in this inquiry stressed that there are important differences in approach between civil society movements and between different forms of voluntary sector organisation activity. When one makes this distinction we think the spaces in which civil society and voluntary organisations are operating with regard to race equality become clearer and in the next section we consider these under five (very broad) categories of activity:

- Politicised race equality-focused voluntary organisations;
- Those engaged in fundable anti-prejudice/anti-discrimination work;
- Those engaged in service delivery targeted specifically at black and minority ethnic people;
- Those engaged in internal equality and diversity work within their organisation;
- Broader civil society movements.

These are not proposed as hard and fast distinctions, there is naturally a high degree of potential overlap between them. We propose these categories here because we think they help in exploring the relationships that exist between civil society and race equality. It may also help us to understand exactly what we mean when we talk about ‘progressing’ race equality. We consider each broad area of activity in turn:

Categories of activity
**Politcised race equality voluntary organisations**

There are still a range of established voluntary sector organisations whose commitment to political work on anti-racism and anti-discrimination remains unblunted, but this type of organisation seems to be declining, particularly at a local and regional level. Organisations like the Institute of Race Relations, Southall Black Sisters, the Migrant Rights Network, Runnymede Trust, Black Training and Enterprise Group, Race Equality Foundation, Voice for Change England, Race on the Agenda, SARI, the Cambridge Ethnic Community Forum and Cambridge Human Rights and Equality Support Service, Friends Families and Travellers, North East Race Equality Forum, brap and so on to name a few. This is not an exhaustive list, there are many more. One feature that characterises many of them is the provision of activities like welfare services, advice, training and research alongside activities of an overtly political or lobbying dimension.

A number of participants in the inquiry felt many of the migrant and refugee support organisations and modern slavery organisations they had encountered are also likely to see themselves as having an overtly political dimension, even when the bulk of an organisation’s work concerns practical humanitarian support, welfare services or other forms of support. Yet, some participants also noted that this focus on migrant rights was not always explicitly framed as anti-racism or race equality work. Indeed, one participant suggested:

*“There’s traditionally been a whitewashing of migration in that there are few organisations willing to call out the racialised nature of border controls and the border regime.” (interviewee)*

**Fundable anti-prejudice/anti-discrimination work**

Typically, anti-prejudice/anti-discrimination work is funded by charitable trust income, donations or is commissioned by public agencies like schools or NHS trusts. The Equality and Human Rights Commission has taken particular interest in such activities recently, reviewing a number of significant projects as well as publishing guidance regarding what works in initiatives of this kind and suggestions for good practice in their evaluation (EHRC 2017a). The activities mentioned in that report reflect the diversity of activities ranging from apps to help children resist prejudice and stereotyping, through to quite technical workshops on the public sector equality duty and initiatives to raise awareness of online hate speech and racism.

**Services provided specifically for black and minority ethnic people**

From the early 1950s and even before this, new migrant groups have self-organised to build up essential community infrastructure so that they could provide the services the local state failed or refused to provide to BME people. Nationally and locally, these types of services are still provided by a plethora of voluntary organisations and community groups established to
provide ‘culturally competent’ and relevant services for specific BME groups and for newly arrived migrants. Several interviewees noted that the range of activities delivered by these types of groups varies widely. Some are provided by BME-focused organisations. Whereas others are provided by local faith groups or ‘mainstream’ voluntary sector organisations. Whilst some provide specific welfare or advice services, others focus on enabling public agencies to engage with local BME populations, or focus on projects in the field of art, music or preserving and raising awareness about different cultural heritages. For many of these groups, though they may not be directly engaged in conventional campaigning for race equality, their activities and services are designed to address a range of gaps and inequalities associated with marginalisation of minority cultures and discrimination in society.

**Equality and diversity work within mainstream voluntary sector organisations**

In the short time we have been running this project, we have spoken to a range of charities that have told us about their work and desire to improve their organisation’s response to race equality. We also attended an event run by New Philanthropy Capital “Will the Charity Sector ever embrace diversity?” and a meeting convened by ACEVO focused on achieving better racial diversity in civil society leadership. Much of this work has focused on improving workforce representation of BME people. This remains a strong theme and there appears to be increasing interest in the topic. In addition to this, we heard examples of projects / initiatives run by mainstream charities and charitable trusts to respond directly to race equality in society, or to improve the reach and impact of their services and funding to better include BME groups.

**Broader civil society movements**

In the 1970s and 80s the social and political landscape was transformed by huge, popular movements such as the Anti-Nazi League and its sister organisation Rock Against Racism; the Anti-Racist Alliance, which grew out of the Labour Party Black Sections movement; and of course the Anti-Apartheid Movement, which grew from a tiny consumer boycott campaign against South African goods into an era-defining movement. Many influential interventions in the field of anti-racism continue to be civil society movements with an explicit political agenda rather than single, individual civil society organisations. Hope Not Hate, Unite Against Fascism, Operation Black Vote all have their routes in campaigning and social movements. Mass movements demand mass audiences and one area where large-scale civil society movements or campaigns on race equality have gained particular traction is in sport – and especially football, through campaigns such as ‘Kick it Out’ and ‘Show Racism the Red Card’.

A further important characteristic of civil society movements is their increasing internationalisation, even globalisation. A prime example of this is the #BlackLivesMatter (BLM) movement. Founded just five years ago in the US by three women activists[iii], BLM now has chapters across the US and has taken root in the UK too; there has also been some
crossover with refugee and migrant activists in other European countries\[iv\]. There is now increasing momentum for the establishment of a BLM with a specific UK flavour[iv] – a direct anti-racist response to the growing crisis in gang and knife crime that has seen nearly ninety people murdered in the capital alone in the first eight months of 2018, and all predominantly young men and women from minority communities[vii].

**Reflections**

Many participants we spoke to identified limitations associated with the nature and breadth of activity to progress race equality in England as described above. Some felt a focus on service delivery to people from BME backgrounds has led to a form of ‘institutionalism’ and lack of independence within the BME voluntary sector:

> “Government funding often comes with ‘gagging’ orders – i.e. you can’t critique the government or do campaigning/advocacy work. This often means that there’s a watering down of race equality issues in the sector.”
> (interviewee)

Participants described how many civil society organisations are reliant on public funding to survive and thus they follow trends in public policy. This can be problematic in a field like race equality because public policy has been largely reactive to crisis. More focus is placed on responding to acts of racism than addressing the underlying causes and long-term effects of racism. Many new policy initiatives are created in the wake of a riot or death of a BME person and short term funding for civil society to implement those policies sometimes follows. Yet the stop-start nature of short term funding has made it harder to achieve long-term systemic change. As a society, we have lacked sustained momentum and investment on this agenda. After each new crisis, a new policy initiative is created and the ‘reset’ button is pressed.

With a tendency towards professionalisation of the voluntary sector, delivery of services and short-term projects that tend to react to public policy, is it any wonder that we have craved space within civil society to generate discussion and new thinking on topics like this in recent years? Is it any wonder that the campaigning edge of some voluntary organisations working in this field has become more blunted?

Many participants we spoke to felt that civil society requires investment in thinking about what its own long-term vision for race equality should be in a contemporary England. Many felt civil society requires new thinking and practice and increased independence from the State on this agenda too.
The next chapter considers how civil society might go about creating that sort of vision. It describes the barriers that stand in the way of this, as well as the opportunities and promising areas of practice that could be nurtured more in the future.

**Summary**

Through this project, participants described various race equality-focused activities that engage different parts of civil society. There are inherent problems associated with categorising these activities, but we think it is possible and is important to try to do this if we are to better understand what “progressing race equality” currently looks like across the breadth of civil society in England. We identify five broad areas of activity:

- Politicised race equality voluntary organisations
- Fundable anti-prejudice/anti-discrimination work
- Services provided specifically for black and minority ethnic people
- Equality and diversity work within voluntary sector organisations
- Broader civil society movements

There also some important limitations associated with the nature and breadth of activity to progress race equality in England:

- The increasing professionalisation of the voluntary sector runs the risk of ‘institutionalising’ those that were once more politically vocal about race equality.
- A heavy focus on funding short-term, reactive projects means that less time is spent addressing the causes and long-term effects of discrimination and racism in society.
- Civil society has an opportunity to generate an independent, long-term vision for promoting race equality.

**Where Are The Barriers And Where Are The Ways Forward**
For Progressing Race Equality In Civil Society?

Setting the Context

As identified in Section 2, changes in public policy and the funding environment would help to drive progress on race equality within civil society. Greater investment from the State and from charitable trusts on this agenda and a greater willingness for them to engage with race equality issues featured highly on people’s recommendations for what needs to change.

As an example, one interviewee emphasised how, with the decline of local RECs and other race equality-focused civil society organisations, there has been a sharp decrease in the level of scrutiny of public agencies on race equality issues:

“**We need an ecosystem of challenge at a local level…. One of the reasons the Windrush affair and immigration problems have happened is because they stopped listening to black and minority ethnic groups and migrant groups and didn’t really care. It leads to bad policy-making, but it’s also a democratic deficit.”** (interviewee)

Despite the need for greater investment in race equality work locally and nationally, there is a compelling case for change coming from within civil society too. Many of the participants we spoke to stressed that civil society itself has a role to play in creating and acting upon a more compelling vision for this agenda. But where are the opportunities for civil society to create, for itself, a future built on principles of race equality? Where are the barriers? How will civil society need to act? What attitudes and behaviours will civil society need to model? How will it need to organise itself if it is to progress race equality in England in the future? We asked these types of questions through our interviews and group discussions.

For many of the people we spoke to, the answer to these questions comes down to personal skills, taking responsibility, thinking differently and talking to one another differently about this topic. In the remainder of this chapter, we outline some of the barriers that participants identified to working on this agenda within civil society. We also identify opportunities and promising areas for further work and exploration.

**Barriers and ways forward**

We have organised the findings around five broad themes described by participants:
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- Vision and Impact
- Power and Representation
- Accountability and Responsibility
- Connection and Identity Politics
- Trust and History

The latter four of these themes correspond closely to the principles that the overall Civil Society Futures inquiry identified as central to building a sustainable future for civil society in England. Where relevant we have shown how these PACT principles of power, accountability, connection and trust are applicable to progressing race equality.

**Vision and Impact**

**Barriers**

Some of the participants we spoke to as part of this inquiry raised concerns about the lack of impact of activities undertaken in the name of race equality. Some felt that too much focus has been placed upon more comfortable issues of ‘diversity’, ‘representation’ and celebrating ‘culture’ whilst other deeper issues of racism within civil society remain untouched:

“*The Government is funding groups, but if they are too narrowly funded as cultural rights groups / just single issue and they don’t have a wider race equality perspective, then it can be problematic.*” (interviewee)

At the same time, many participants also stressed that projects geared towards supporting particular communities are important too. Many felt that BME organisations have just as much right to be funded for the range of activities that other parts of civil society are funded to do too, be that for young people’s services, daycare, advice services, art projects and so on. Yet whilst these types of activities and services might be racialised, a number of participants stressed that they do not always strictly address the structural causes of race inequality. There is a muddy but important distinction between the two:

“*Talking about why Caribbean men are more likely to end up in secure units, we’ve known that for 30 years. It’s almost impossible unless one of the poor souls has killed somebody. To hear, it’s not just an issue. That’s one of the difficulties we have in civil society. Are there enough BME CEOs? Yes it would be good that we do something about that, but it is a second order issue. Race isn’t ignored – but often we talk about trivial things. But by talking about them too often we allow others to conclude that everything about race inequality is trivial rather than it is real.*” (interviewee)
Some participants suggested that confusion and disagreement around what constitutes progress on race equality and an absence of a clear and ambitious vision for progressing race equality within civil society is a major barrier to progress.

**Ways forward**

Could civil society have more ambition and be clearer about impact? In some respects, civil society is trailing behind the public and private sectors in its interest in workforce diversity. But, following other sectors may not be the best route to achieving change. We need to also ask what hasn’t been done so far in other sectors? There are opportunities to generate a vision for race equality in civil society that includes, but goes beyond, workforce diversity to include concrete outcomes associated with addressing structural causes of inequality.

A number of participants stressed that any new vision would need to be informed by those that experience inequality and discrimination. Yet assumptions about what progress on ‘race equality’ looks like are often informed by those that have the power to set the agenda. There is a risk that we are not measuring the right things as we judge our success on race equality. Progress will need to be measured against the things in life that matter to people who are affected on a daily basis by race inequality. The following quote from a focus group participant in Birmingham sums this up well:

**“Civil society is progressing race equality very well, we are getting exactly what we are asking for, you have equal opportunities to go out but whether you have the economics to be in the spaces is different. It’s like, you can come to the party but not everyone is allowed to dance.” (focus group participant, Birmingham)**

Thus, any new vision for progressing race equality within civil society would benefit from greater engagement with a wider range of people that are affected by race inequality to understand domains of equality that are important to people. But also, any new vision needs to involve honest evaluation of what works. This is because (as many of the participants in this research told us) previous approaches to ‘doing’ race equality have not resulted in the pace of change required. Progress on race equality has remained relatively static for years in a range of fields from mental health to education, from employment to housing (EHRC 2017b).

Finally, a shared vision for race equality within civil also needs to consider the unique equality challenges that contemporary England faces. Increased demographic diversity, changing migration patterns and interconnectivity across the globe are only one part of the story. Challenges associated with segregation, the promotion of ‘British values’, population flux in local areas, the impact of cultural values and practices on gender equality and the long terms effects of discrimination on families and communities are also having a significant impact in
communities across England. Many of the people we spoke to felt civil society has not had the investment, time or space to generate appropriate solutions to these challenges.

So where should this work begin? Clearly, there would be benefits in initiating a wider conversation across civil society and with funders to generate an independent vision for how to progress race equality in the future. Yet a number of participants suggested that a good starting place would be for organisations and movements within civil society to think through, for themselves, the type of impact their own activities are having on progressing race equality. Some participants named activities that are undertaken in the name of race equality that they saw as transactional, ‘ticking the box’ rather than being ‘transformational’. Participants also described activities that focus heavily on helping particular individuals, but aren’t helping to change the system / structural causes of inequality. These were seen as useful questions for organisations to reflect upon. Are the activities I undertake around race equality transactional or transformative? Are they helping individuals or addressing the system?

In the pages below, we have tried to map some of the practices, behaviours and attitudes described to us by participants in relation to those two broad questions. Clearly, the examples of practice we have come up with only represent a fraction of the wide range of activities to progress race equality within civil society. You may disagree about where we have put them on the diagram. Disagreement and debate about this is good. There is space for a diversity of approaches across civil society, but being clearer about impact could help in determining where efforts should be placed in the future. Our hope is that the simple framework could be used by groups in civil society to start a conversation about what they are doing to progress race equality and the impact they think it is having.
Summary

- Civil society should invest more time in reviewing the short and long-term impact of activities to progress race equality.
- Civil society should make space to review assumptions about how ‘progress’ on race equality should be measured. Often those with power set the agenda. Greater engagement with a range of stakeholders will help to generate more ambitious and meaningful targets that matter to those affected by race inequality.
- Civil society (including funders) need to engage with each other to share views about what a long-term vision for race equality would look like (a vision that acknowledges, but is also independent from government priorities). This should include plans for generating measures of progress and longitudinal evaluation of impact.

Power and Representation

Barriers

Data from the Inclusive Boards review team shows that amongst the UK’s top 500 charities only 6.3% of board members are from an ethnic minority background, which is lower than the BME representation on FTSE100 Boards (8.2%). In fact, the number of charities whose senior leadership is ‘all white’ is increasing and 80% of charities reviewed had no BME representation at all in senior leadership roles (NCVO 2018; Inclusive Boards 2018). This has led to increasing calls for the charity sector to address its ‘white middle classness’ (Ainsworth, 2018) and various initiatives to this end have been established[vii].

A number of participants described the poor representation of BME people within civil society as a reflection of race inequality. This lack of diversity was also described by many as a barrier to further progress on race equality because civil society is not engaging sufficiently with people who have lived experience of racism or discrimination. Indeed, even when BME people are recruited to senior roles, some identified continued barriers in access to power and influence. Just because a civil society becomes more ethnically diverse, it doesn’t make it a nicer, fairer or more authentic place to work. Participants described efforts to engage with people from BME backgrounds as ‘tokenistic’ when they don’t have power or people don’t listen to what they really think or feel.

“When you look at some of the statistics around leadership and governance around race, there is clearly a disconnect between those that are trying to deal with the issues within our various communities and the leadership.” (interviewee)
Ways forward

The thorny issue of ‘representation’ within civil society emerged as a common area that participants felt needs to be improved. Some described a potential role for funders or the Charity Commission in challenging when the diversity of charities’ senior leadership teams and boards is not reflective of the population it serves. This type of scrutiny could be helpful. But more than this, a number of participants stressed that thinking of ‘representation’ only in terms of the number of BME people on a board is not enough. Whilst the diversification of organisations/boards is a helpful ambition, it can obscure structural racism and make the job of fixing racism that of the BME person. Greater focus should be placed upon examining the level of power and influence that BME people and those speaking out about racism or inequality have within different spaces and structures within civil society.

Civil society organisations could examine how power is distributed within their own organisations more effectively by using feedback surveys for staff and people that they work with in communities. This would help organisations to better understand how fair and equitable they are perceived to be. Do people from BME backgrounds feel heard? Can people raise concerns about race inequality? How are these concerns acted upon? What role is assigned to people from BME backgrounds within organisations and broader civil society? Do these people feel they can act and progress in ways that they choose and that are important to them?

To achieve this type of progress, those operating within civil society will need to find new ways to engage with people who share their (sometimes uncomfortable) views about race inequality and discrimination too. How do we hear things that are uncomfortable to us and how do we act upon them? Some of the people we spoke to as part of this inquiry felt that new approaches to engagement have to start with work to understand personal power and privilege that people have. If people aren’t aware of their own power and privilege, then they are unlikely to understand how this affects their relationships with others (both negatively and positively). For example, one of our interviewees said the following:

“As a white ally, I need to verbalise and become conscious of my racist thoughts and feelings. I need to use my power and find ways to challenge white people that is productive and constructive for them.” (interviewee)

Understanding power and privilege and how power can be used negatively and positively in the service of race equality is important. People should be supported to reflect upon and use their personal power to make a positive impact on race equality, but also enable others to step in and access power and resources too. As one interviewee put it: ’I have always asked if there are other BME people on the panel. Make space for others’ (interviewee). The agenda for the
future of race equality in civil society will need to be informed directly by those that have lived experience of race inequality. For this to happen, those in power will need to acknowledge that they have been able to shape and direct the narrative on what 'success' looks like in progressing race equality and to shut down alternative visions of success. Those in power may need to acknowledge that their past efforts and the awards and kudos they may have gained for race equality initiatives, may not have resulted in the type or level of progress that those who are marginalised were hoping for.

Related to this is the need to build awareness of biases and the impact these have on who or what is listened to and valued. This is important when engaging with people who have lived experience of inequality or discrimination because often less credibility is assigned to people who share these types of views. Similarly, sometimes a group or an organisation can lack the interpretative frameworks to understand or engage effectively with the lived experiences of discrimination and racism. Better community engagement will require a recognition that engaging with people’s lived experience of discrimination can be perceived as exploitative when those views are not heard or engaged with:

“I'm bored going to conferences, being asked to share my ‘lived experience’. White people want their PhD.” (focus group participant, London)

Summary

- Alongside efforts to improve ethnic diversity of the workforce within civil society, more attention should be placed on gaining feedback from staff and people who civil society works with. Surveys should focus on whether people from different ethnic backgrounds feel listened to, whether they have power, whether they have the choice to act and progress in a way that they value.
- Individual work and group work to explore power, privilege and bias needs to accompany any work to improve the representation of BME people within civil society. This will help to improve the quality of engagement and the sharing of experiences across civil society.
- New approaches to community engagement are required that help to improve engagement with emotive, challenging issues of racism and discrimination. These approaches will need to protect and listen to the voices of those with lived experience of racism.

Accountability and Responsibility

Barriers
There is a belief that BME organisations are best-placed to serve and work with their communities – and whilst there may be truth in this, this type-casting often keeps them under-valued, it keeps them poorer, it drives them out of business. Uncomfortably, it absolves the larger, richer parts of civil society from any responsibility for this work. Funders and other parts of civil society have been able to support these important areas of work which are seen as ‘niche’. Yet this also means they can distance themselves from being accountable for the impact of the work. Sometimes the work that is funded in the name of race equality is not as impactful as it could be, but when it is delivered by a BME organisation it is seen as sufficient because they are seen as unofficial custodians of the race equality problem. Indeed some participants described a pattern of displacing responsibility for race equality onto ethnic minority people and a tendency to avoid engagement with race equality issues if their local area is not ethnically diverse.

“People expect our organisation to say some of these things... People assume I have an axe to grind. We need trusted people in civil society... the big charities need to step up and be advocates for it.” (interviewee)

Participants did describe some promising areas of work within ‘mainstream’ civil society organisations to drive progress on race equality. However, overall, many participants felt that responsibility (and ultimately accountability) tends to lie with those working within the race equality or black and minority ethnic sector (whatever the nature or quality of that work might be).

**Ways forward**

More shared accountability for this work would involve larger charities taking an active role in progressing this agenda. There are already a few good examples of this. For example, ACEVO and the Institute of Fundraising (2018) recently published a commitment to race diversity in the charity sector that a wide range of charities have signed up to. The Charity Commission recently revealed that a group of charity leaders had asked the Charity Commission to introduce mandatory requirements for diversity on boards and senior leadership teams[viii]. Liberty (a human rights campaigning organisation) has been working to raise awareness about inequality experienced by BME people through the criminal justice system and surveillance techniques.

More shared accountability would also involve funders being clearer and more ambitious about the impact on race equality that they expect. This would involve co-producing ambitious targets with those affected by race inequality and being clear about impact on race equality through funded projects. Just funding something, anything on race equality and placing responsibility for success on BME voluntary sector organisations is not sufficient. It
would also involve being clear about the impact on race equality that they, themselves, want to make in terms of access to funding:

“Everyone I deal with is white apart from one person. Not only white, they are posher than me. The trust and foundation world is the least diverse. Immediately makes it easier for me to fundraise from them – as long as the trusts and foundations remain un-diverse, they are less likely to fund diverse groups.” (interviewee)

Shared accountability would also involve civil society organisations and movements being more open to feedback on their work and understanding whether people from different ethnic backgrounds experience their services in different ways:

“Legitimacy: where do we get this from? Is anyone legitimate and how can they be legitimate unless they are accountable? Given the range of differing options on the issues of race equality, accountability is critical. Does that come from the bottom up? We need to have a better understanding of democratic accountability.” (focus group participant, York)

The need for democratic accountability relates to BME voluntary sector organisations as much as it does to ‘mainstream’ voluntary sector organisations. If organisations or individuals put themselves forward as representing the interests of those affected by race inequality, then there should be routes for those that are represented to say whether their interests are being championed effectively. These types of changes will require personal reflective work within civil society too. For example, one interviewee talked about how ‘community leaders’ from BME backgrounds and those running charities in the sector are often older and male. These leaders may need to ask themselves if they are representing and are accountable to diverse groups within their community (do they listen to and respond to the views of young people, women and LGBT people).

Another interviewee identified the need for personal developmental work to help people engage with ‘white fragility’ (Di Angelo 2011). They noted a prevailing assumption amongst some mainstream charities and White British people that they can’t ‘do race’, it is too big or challenging an issue and should be left to the experts. This type of ‘fragility’ needs to be recognised and worked with if accountability for progress on race equality is to be shared. Similarly, he also identified an unwillingness for people to recognise that they may be displacing responsibility for work on race to others.

“We work in the social sector, our purpose is to get rid of social injustice – how could I be racist?” (interviewee)

Personal and group work to recognise these ‘edges’ and areas of discomfort in practice are important if we are to generate more collective forms of accountability. There is a lot of fear
associated with this agenda and risk of being called ‘racist’, or being blamed for not getting it right if people are open about their lack of progress or understanding. This needs to be recognised and worked with through personal and professional development activities within civil society. As one interviewee put it:

“There is emotional labour in this. It’s exhausting being scrutinised for being racist. But so what—my fatigue can’t compare to that of people experiencing racism day in day out.” (interviewee)

Summary

- Mainstream civil society organisations could take a more active role in progressing race equality through their own work and in their own organisations. This should include being open to feedback on their own work and services they may provide.
- Funders could share accountability by revisiting and co-producing the types of impact and outcomes they expect from grantees that are funded to work on race equality.
- Building collective accountability for work on race equality across civil society will require personal, reflective work that acknowledges how responsibility for race equality work has been displaced to people from BME backgrounds in the past.

Connection and ‘Identity Politics’

Barriers

Many participants stressed the importance of self-determination and self-organisation amongst people from BME backgrounds. ‘Identity politics’ can be powerful and it is often those in power that seek to de-value it[ix]. As one participant in a discussion we held in London said, ’criticisms of identity politics can be used to silence work on race’.

Yet some research participants did feel that collective action on race equality has diminished since the 1970s and 80s when people from different ethnic backgrounds mobilised under a common political banner of ‘black’ to address issues of racism and class oppression.

Some of the perceived barriers to connection and collective action across communities relate to how BME groups are encouraged to apply for funding and to lobby for their interests within civil society. Three particular barriers associated with funding and lobbying were noted.

Firstly, participants identified the problems of divisive funding practices for separate communities:
“There isn’t that feeling of solidarity that we know what the problem is or what we are fighting for when we talk about racism. Again, the money coming into the third sector splits and divides us because we have to be worse than you to win that pot. It’s almost like we are continuing our own isms, we are buying into the argument.” (focus group participant, Birmingham)

Secondly, others talked about overly simplistic approaches to representing different identity-based groups in civil society that can restrict opportunities for solidarity:

“I think it’s got too fragmented, there was once a conversation between black and white. Now there’s colourism going on, you don’t understand what I’m talking about because my type of brown is different to yours. Which means we are all weaker. It’s all fragmented now.” (focus group participant, Birmingham)

Participants described how BME people have little choice about how their interests are described within civil society. Often BME people are forced to ‘claim’ their rights or interests in a society that privileges (and normalises) the rights and interests of White British people. Not all BME people want to talk about race equality, they may want to talk about different social issues within civil society that are important to them, but they may not have that option. Often it is expected that they will be interested in or work on issues of race.

Thirdly, some suggested that ‘racism’ is narrowly defined and does not always include other forms of discrimination that may intersect with ‘race’. For example, a focus group participant described how his experience of Islamophobia is often not viewed in the same way as racism, despite the negative impact it has upon him:

“Widen it to include islamophobia is the way I’ve experienced discrimination particularly from white people and it’s the feeling of not belonging or having an identity in this country... When you see EDL or other far right they may focus on the Muslims first but it doesn’t take much to spread out to something different.” (focus group participant, Birmingham)

Ways forward

Many of the participants that we spoke to felt that civil society could take a stronger stance in recognising ‘intersectionality’ as part of efforts to promote race equality. For many, this meant recognising how other aspects of identity (such as gender, disability or sexual orientation) may ‘intersect’ with race to shape people’s unique experiences in society. Participants felt that civil society needs to develop a better awareness and respect for a diversity of identities and interests within groups. This will open up opportunities for people
to speak more freely about the issues they are facing and to find areas of common cause for social action. As one interviewee put it:

“The binaries are breaking down and we need to reflect that complexity in our response to that.” (interviewee)

Understanding and listening to different forms of diversity can be challenging. Yet transformational movements also recognise that most things get done through relationships and very little gets done without them. Those operating within civil society may need to treat their colleagues and fellow activists differently to achieve this. Participants in a London focus group described how more spaces are needed within the race equality movement to help people care for each other and that this would help to build solidarity. Some interviewees also mentioned the success of ‘Black Lives Matter’ in creating connections across civil society and encouraging a wide range of people (from different backgrounds) with an interest in race equality to step forward. This movement has its roots in forms of contemplative practice. The founders were interested in manifesting the change they were seeking through the process and movement – not waiting until the end. The real-time practices of the movement, the way those within the movement treated each other: nurturing curiosity, working on ally-ship, group therapy, meditation, connection, solidarity and care for each other has been central to its success in the US and beyond.

Some of the focus groups participants in London also described how more could be done to position work on race equality at the intersections of other different social justice sectors that are active in England and are popular in the national psyche such as community ownership of land, environmental justice and food poverty. For example, one person we spoke to talked about how work to reclaim green space by environmental activists directly intersects with race inequality issues because people from BME backgrounds are less likely to live near parks in those parts of London. Relationship-building, trust and collective action are important outcomes that help to describe the impact of intersectional movement building like this. Funders could play a role in supporting the development of these types of relationship.
Summary

- Greater recognition of diversity within race equality movements (based on age, gender, sexual orientation and so on) will help people to speak more freely about the issues they are facing. It will help those working in civil society to understand a range of experiences, how inequality operates in practice for different groups and areas where there may (or may not) be common cause for social action.
- Building connections to do collective work on race equality will require people within civil society to work on their relationships with others (e.g. being curious about what others are doing in this space, working on becoming better allies).
- Funders could support civil society movements to help people explore their shared interests and better understand the challenges and benefits of partnership on linked issues touching their communities. For instance, a number of funders have begun to recognise the need to join up efforts by race equality and migrant rights groups in the UK. Yet, our ambition needs to be bigger. Race equality activism needs to be playing at the intersections of other social justice movements too.

Trust, History and the Present

Barriers

Finally, through the group discussions we had as part of this inquiry, a common and recurring theme was the lack of trust between people within civil society. This lack of trust can get in the way of work to promote race equality. Underlying much of the discussion was the topic of history. How do we learn from the past in order to help rebuild trust between people?

Some participants described a lack of understanding between different generations of people working to promote race equality in England. How do we acknowledge and learn from work that has been undertaken to promote race equality in the past? How do senior leaders working in the field of race equality learn from young people and create space to listen to their views?

The following quote captures this dynamic well (from the perspective of a more experienced activist):

“there’s a lot of problem in that there is a generational gap here. As the young generation, they don’t know what you’re talking about. Most of the people you are looking to continue the fight they don’t understand the history, I mentioned Facebook, this is because my kids don’t know what I’m talking about. The stop and search is the same now than back in the day but they don’t understand it. We have to inform the younger generation about the causes. We don’t have that common understanding of our history.” (focus group participant, Birmingham)
Some described the apathy and skepticism they have built up over time after working in the field of race equality for decades and seeing a lack of sustained engagement from the establishment. This shapes their willingness to engage with others in civil society and share their experience of racism. When presenting the initial findings from this research at our final event in London a number of participants questioned the value of the research and raised doubts about the impact it would have. Towards the end of the session one of those participants openly admitted that at the start of the event, she was skeptical about the research because she had seen so many reports done before and seen no change.

Others described how class, empire and colonialism continue to shape civil society’s work in England and internationally and that progress on race equality will be restricted if we cannot engage with and discuss this. These issues cycle and return into conversations about race equality because we have not engaged with them as a society:

“Civil society doesn’t recognise it has gained from and exploited black communities...If you can’t understand the past, you can’t understand the present.” (focus group participant, London)

Participants also pointed to a lack of understanding between White British and BME people working on this agenda in England. As an example, in the York focus group, some participants described how a coalition that includes White British and BME individuals and groups is needed to progress race equality.

“Sometimes we pigeon hole people and assume they won’t be able to do race equality.” (focus group participant, York)

Another focus group participant put forward an alternative view:

“An alternative view is ‘what right have white people to speak on behalf of the BME community?’ Larger organisations often speak on behalf of smaller groups, academics speak on behalf of BME groups.” (focus group participant, York)

In other discussions, the issue of what it means to be ‘authentic’ and to speak with legitimacy on this agenda came up. Some BME people may not trust white people to work with them as allies to progress race equality. Similarly, white people may not trust in the leadership potential of marginalized individuals and communities. Tensions and mistrust between and within communities can stem from previous experience of exploitation and lack of progress. Tensions can also arise from competition and unfair deployment of resources between community groups.

**Ways forward**
Without discussing history and past-experience, it becomes hard to build trust and equity between people within civil society. Building trust across civil society will help progress race equality. It will help to build stronger allies and collaboration across social groups. It will help to improve recognition for the leadership, wisdom and growth potential of marginalised individuals and communities (including young people) that haven’t had access to power and influence. To achieve this, there is a need to engage with some difficult issues and to understand our own role in the maintenance of inequality and in the progress of equality.

To achieve this, participants suggested spaces for intergenerational learning, political education and discussion on the topic of race equality: These spaces needs to be based on a recognition that older people have something to learn from younger people too:

“I've always had a thing about politics not being taught in school and we know why – because we are not a homogenous group, but if we pool together in our groupings we will see commonalities because we are watching our children suffer. So we must recognise our differences and recognise what comes out of those groups. Deal with the things that are coming out of the groups. Elders have different opinions to the younger ones. Invest more in education for young people in politics, create solidarity while recognising the differences between different people.” (focus group participant, Birmingham)

Others described the need for spaces where those working in the field of race equality, or whom have experienced racism or discrimination can come together to learn from and support each other:

“Given the amount of burnout and trauma, we need to give people the opportunity to build strength back up again. Why do BME people burn out?” (interviewee)

In addition, a number of participants called for more open discussions about the impact of class, colonialism and empire on the current operations of civil society in England. We rarely learn from the past, but history is impacting upon relationships within civil society. For example, some described how colonialism continues to shape civil society (from the sources of income for charitable donations and grants through to how ethnic minority communities are engaged and researched).

Yes, this is difficult work. Civil society leaders will need to build their ability to hear and respond to feedback that they might find uncomfortable. Often those in power can choose what they listen to and can dismiss voices that are uncomfortable, or even seek alternative feedback from people from BME backgrounds that they find more comfortable. But, without discussing history, it becomes hard to expect different outcomes. These discussions need to be facilitated well. They need to be open and need to enable a range of views (including
emotional and hot, conflictual topics) to be aired. But our wounds will only heal if we tend them. As one participant put it:

“The pain associated with the oppressed or living in that oppressed state. I see a lot of pain in the system and when someone is in pain I can’t ask them to be pragmatic.” (focus group participant, London)

**Summary**

- Spaces and opportunities should be created to help established and new activists, organisations and movements interested in progressing race equality to come together to engage in intergenerational learning, political education, mutual support and discussion on the topic of race equality.
- Civil society should be having more, well-facilitated open discussions about the impact of class, colonialism and empire on the current operations of civil society in England.
- Civil society leaders need to build their constitution and ability to hear and respond to feedback that they might find uncomfortable on topics of race inequality and histories of racism and discrimination.
Putting this into practice

Before concluding the report, we offer some practical steps for taking the opportunities described in this section forward either individually or within your community or organisation.

**Power**

**Practical actions**

- Recognise how some views are currently seen to have less; credibility or are not heard within civil society - think about the role you personally could play in changing that;
- Review and improve the ethnic diversity of your workforce;
- Gain feedback from staff and people you work with - do people from ethnic minority backgrounds feel listened to, do they have power, do they feel they have the choice to act and progress in a way they value?
- Find support to reflect upon and use your personal power to make a positive impact on race equality;
- Listen to people’s lived experiences of race inequality and act on what you hear.
### Accountability

All of us taking responsibility

**Race equality work is too hard for me**
I can’t do work on ‘race equality’ because it is too big or challenging an issue. I might get it wrong and I might be called ‘racist’.

**Displacing responsibility**
People from ethnic minority backgrounds and organisations that work with and are led by them are the experts – it is their responsibility to progress race equality, not mine.

**Closed to feedback**
I work to progress social justice – I don’t need to gain feedback about whether I am representing or meeting the needs and interests of people from ethnic minority backgrounds.

**I recognise and work with personal discomfort**
Despite personal discomfort and fear, I take active steps to learn about race equality and the role I can personally play in progressing it.

**Taking responsibility**
I take an active role in progressing race equality, and I use my power, profile and resources within civil to raise awareness about this agenda.

**Open to feedback**
I gather and listen to feedback about what I do. I understand whether people from different ethnic backgrounds experience the support I provide differently, or whether I am representing their interests effectively.

### Practical actions

- Personal reflective work to increase confidence in talking about race, starting with this article;
- Organisations: identify how race equality impacts their work, where it is missing at present, how it could be better included and take steps to receive feedback on their work and services they may provide;
- Funders: revisit and co-produce ideas of impact and outcomes they expect from grantees that are funded to work on race equality - be clear and ambitious about the impact on race equality they expect of themselves and others.
## Connection

**Coming together to address race equality**

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| Division  
I don’t feel solidarity with others working on race equality within civil society, and don’t feel able to learn about their work or engage with them. | Building relationships  
I actively think about my relationships with others within civil society, and work to be more curious about what others are doing on race equality and to become a better ally. |
| Diversity within ethnic groups not recognised  
I am doing work on race equality. I don’t need to recognise the other aspects of diversity that intersect with 'race', like gender, disability, sexual orientation and so on. | Diversity within ethnic groups recognised  
I actively seek to understand a diversity of views and experiences within ethnic groups based on gender, disability, age, sexual orientation and so on. I create spaces where a diversity of views on race equality can be heard. |
| Race equality is a stand-alone challenge  
I work on race equality alone. Other social justice movements don’t understand what I do and I have little to gain by connecting with them. | Race equality is linked to other challenges in society  
I work to explore shared interests with others working on social justice issues in my community (such as food poverty or environmental justice). I aim to understand what they are doing and seek opportunities to work with them to progress race equality too. |

## Practical actions

- Build connections with other groups -- those you already collaborate with and those you don’t -- to act on race equality;
- Funders: fund groups who work across different communities/identities
- Learn more about intersectionality.
Trust

>> Trust and history

From

Not recognising distrust
I am doing or funding work on race equality, I don’t understand why people aren’t engaging with me.

Recognising distrust
I recognise that past history and bias can affect how much I trust others and how much they trust me.

Not engaging with the past
The past is behind us and I don’t want to talk about it. Talking about the continued effects of colonialism, empire and class is painful, or I’m not aware of it.

Engaging with the past
I am open to discussing and learning about uncomfortable topics of race inequality and histories of racism and discrimination.

Practical actions

- Listen and understand the perspectives and experiences of others - engage with historical issues and events (e.g. empire and colonialism);
- Understand your own role in continuing inequality.

Summary

There are opportunities to improve investment in race equality work locally and to change how Government engages with civil society on this agenda. Yet change needs to come from within civil society too. Participants identified opportunities for change in five broad areas:

1. Vision and Impact:

To make progress on race equality we need to speak clearly about what we are trying to achieve. There are many important activities within this field in civil society (e.g. services for BME communities). Yet not all activities are explicitly about progressing race equality. Civil society needs more clarity about impact on this agenda. There are opportunities to generate a vision for race equality in civil society that includes, but goes beyond workforce diversity to include concrete outcomes associated with addressing structural causes of inequality. To achieve this, funders, organisations and movements within civil society may benefit from support to think through the impact of their own activities to progress race equality.
2. Power and representation

There are opportunities to improve how civil society judges success in ‘representing’ ethnic minority voices. It is about more than ‘numbers’ and ensuring the profile fits. We also need to measure whether BME people within civil society feel they have power. We need to improve how civil society engages with the lived experience of those who have experienced race inequality. This should include recognising how some views have less credibility or are not heard within civil society. People should be supported to reflect upon and use their personal power to make a positive impact on race equality, but also enable others to step in and access power and resources too.

3. Accountability and Responsibility

There is a belief that BME organisations are best-placed to serve and work with their communities – and whilst there may be truth in this, this type-casting often keeps them under-valued, it keeps them poorer, it drives them out of business. Uncomfortably, it absolves the larger, richer parts of civil society and funders from any responsibility for this work. More shared accountability for this work would involve larger charities taking an active role in progressing this agenda. It would also involve funders being clearer and more ambitious about the impact on race equality that they expect (both of themselves and others). An assumption that White British people or mainstream charities can’t ‘do race’ can stem from a lack of personal confidence and ‘fragility’ that needs to be worked upon if accountability is to be shared.

4. Connection and ‘Identity Politics’

‘Identity politics’ can be powerful and it is often those in power that seek to de-value it. Yet some described a loss of momentum in collective action on race equality due to divisive funding practices for separate communities and simplistic approaches to representing different ‘identities’ within civil society. There are opportunities to deepen collective organising through greater recognition of diversity within groups and through greater collaboration between race equality and other social justice movements.

5. Trust and History

Finally, we rarely listen to the past, but history affects relationships within civil society. Some described apathy and skepticism amongst those who had tried to progress race equality in the past but have seen little success. Others described how empire and colonialism continue to shape civil society’s work in England and internationally. Without discussing history, it becomes hard to expect different outcomes and to build trust and equity between people from different backgrounds within civil society. Building trust across civil society will help progress race equality. It will help to build stronger allies and collaboration across ethnic groups. It will help to improve recognition for the leadership, wisdom and growth potential of marginalized individuals and communities (including young people) that haven’t had access to power and influence. To achieve this, there is a need to engage with some difficult issues and to understand our own role in the maintenance of inequality.
Conclusions

Whilst there has been progress on race equality in England, the pace of change has been slow. In recent years the role of civil society in contributing to progress on race equality has also changed as the public policy and funding environment has become increasingly hostile. There are clearly opportunities to improve investment in race equality work nationally and locally and to change how Government engages with civil society on this agenda. Yet change needs to come from within civil society too if it is to have a lasting impact on race inequality in England. In the spirit of the broader inquiry into the future of civil society, this paper has explored how civil society can create a more sustainable vision and future for itself on this agenda.

The previous chapter identifies a number of ways in which civil society can work on the themes of vision, power, accountability, connection and trust in order to make a greater impact on race equality in England in the future. A lot of this comes down to personal skills, taking responsibility, relating and talking to one another differently about this topic. There are opportunities to think more deeply about race and race inequality and about the role that we, personally and organisationally can play in maintaining the status quo or building a more equitable society.

We realise that some of what is being proposed in this paper may seem unusual. How will practices like personal reflection and better conversations between people lead to better outcomes when racism and race inequality are so ingrained in the structures of our society? Yet, many of the participants we spoke to as part of this inquiry emphasised that attempts to address these issues through public policy, short-term investments and legal change, though important, have not been enough. We were asked to examine why civil society has difficulties in talking about and acting upon ‘race’ and racism. From what we have learnt, the opportunities lie in adopting different ways of thinking, talking and acting.

We could have recommended the creation of new organisations, more research, new structures, new networks that will have responsibility to progress race equality in this paper. Indeed these have been recommended in the past. We have a tendency to set new structures up as though the ‘newness’ of the structure will automatically lead to new thinking. As we speak, important plans are afoot to set up a new organisation that will learn from research and deploy £90 million of funding from dormant accounts to address long-standing employment inequalities faced by young BME people[x].
Without also engaging more deeply with how we think about race and race equality within civil society. Without reflecting on how we treat people who are different to us. Without recognising our own power and the effect this has on our relationships, then procedural fixes, new policies or new initiatives will fall short.

Lots of the things we are doing that we believe will make a difference in this field in civil society are very valuable, but at times the focus on race equality and anti-racism is obscured. The idea that a focus on improving diversity in leadership equates to more equitable, anti-racist organisations requires further scrutiny. Many participants in this inquiry felt that we’ve obscured what we’re trying to achieve in the field of race equality to the point that it is unrecognisable both to civil society organisations and to those who are affected by racism.

Important as much of the work is in this field, it can be easy for those us working in civil society to applaud our own efforts. And it is important to recognise and applaud progress. Yet this can also disempower those who don’t feel progress is being made. Those with power, those who hold the purse strings hold the narrative on what ‘progress’ looks like.

Many of the people we spoke to during this inquiry felt that the narrative needs to be dismantled. In order to dismantle the narrative, there needs to be more honesty and truth. We need to be willing to hear difficult things about what it is like to experience racism and what role civil society can play in sustaining race inequality. We need to be open to criticism. A truthful narrative on race equality speaks to lived experience of inequality and oppression. When people’s experience is not heard or is discounted, this can be the most crushing thing of all. Many people operating with civil society share their experiences of racism and inequality willingly in the hope that they will be acted upon, but when their experiences of racism are not heard and even denied, this can be brutal. To work in a civil society that can normalise degradation and alienation of this type, whilst at the same time congratulating itself for progress on race equality, speaks to a kind of cognitive dissonance that we will need to become more aware of and address.
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[i]https://civilsocietyfutures.org


[v] See http://theconversation.com/why-the-uk-needs-its-own-black-lives-matter-moment-to-wake-up-to-police-racism-100998. There is a BLMUK Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/BLMUK/. BLM activists and a loose coalition of anti-racist campaigners were also involved in #ShutDown interventions during 2016 to close UK roads – a campaign that coincided with the fifth anniversary of the death of Mark Duggan, shot dead by police during a 'hard stop' and whose death and the subsequent police response were seen as largely responsible for sparking the 2011 riots.

[vi] News has a very useful daily breakdown of London murder victims from 31st December 2017 to 26th August 2018 at https://inews.co.uk/news/uk/london-murders-a-list-of-the-victims-killed-in-the-capital-so-far-this-year/.

[vii] See http://www.inclusiveboards.co.uk and https://green-park.co.uk/bame100 as examples.

[viii] https://www.civilsociety.co.uk/news/charity-leaders-are-telling-the-commission-to-force-them-to-improve-diversity.html


[x] https://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/about-big/dormant-account-statement-of-intent