



STRUCTURAL RACISM AS UK DRUGS POLICY

An exploration of the views of British
Black youth and communities on UK
Drugs policy 2016

Authors:
Ahmun, Jasper and Dale-Perera

BLAK
SOX



COREPLAN

XBV

Operation Black Vote



Simon Woolley

Director, Operation Black Vote,
Board member of the Open Society
Foundation's Global Drugs Policy Program,
and former Chair with OSF's
At Home in Europe

I have had the privilege of working on two distinct Open Society Foundations (OSF) Advisory Boards: the At Home in Europe Project, now closed, focused on integration of minority and marginalised communities in western Europe; and the Global Drug Policy Program more broadly, on tackling racism.

The two worlds intersect dramatically, and although there was overt work on the issue of police profiling such as the 'Stop and Search' or 'Stop and Frisk' initiatives, the link between negative national drugs policy and institutional race inequality needed greater acknowledgement and a strategy to deal with it effectively. Therefore, we initiated this groundbreaking work with At Home in Europe and the Drugs Policy Program to answer two questions. Firstly, to what extent do institutional racism and current integration policy impact drugs policy throughout England? Secondly, how could we simultaneously facilitate new and authentic voices within the UK drugs policy forum?

This critically important and timely project was conducted by Coreplan, whose members have a wealth of experience in relation to breaking new ground around community engagement and inclusion, and certain key and important features jumped from the pages of their findings:

• In England - and in accordance with my own anecdotal evidence - much of present drug policy is heavily driven through a race paradigm. Certain, Black And Minority Ethnic groups (BAME) are disproportionately

targeted and treated negatively within every aspect of the criminal justice system.

• In the current drugs policy reform debate, apart from 'Stop and Search', BAME voices are barely heard, much less invited to the policy reform table.

• Listening to the new voices in regard to race and progressive drugs policy, the two main entry points - decriminalization, and public health policy – were largely insufficient entry points for many BAME individuals.

Two important areas demand further work. The drugs policy reform debate desperately needs new voices, particularly from the BAME communities, and those at the very sharp end of negative drugs policy. Alongside new voices, we also need a new paradigm or entry point to have a meaningful drugs policy reform discussion, notably one on structural race inequality. This, along with public health policy and decriminalization, would add to the tools we have, in not only taking more people along with us, but critically, to close the inexorable pipeline that leads to violent gangs, terrorised communities, our prisons bursting with young Black and Muslim men, and an ever increasing number of women too.

I strongly believe that this report could play an important role in the Government's own race equality review, chaired by David Lammy, MP, that looks into persistent race inequality within the Criminal Justice system.

We hope that, like us, many will see this as an exciting development that will both tackle persistent race inequality and boost progressive drug reform. I commend Viv Ahmun, Annette Dale-Perera and Lee Jasper for providing us with the opportunity to move this debate forward.

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Forewords | 4 |
| Preface | 8 |
| Acknowledgements | 14 |
| Executive Summary and Key Recommendations | 15 |
| Introduction and Methodology | 21 |
| Findings: Setting the Tone | 25 |
| Youth Consultations | 26 |
| Are You For Or Against: Drugs? The binary debate | 28 |
| Lack of Access To Services & Health Ignorance. | 34 |
| Doing For Self: Blaksox Social Action Movement | 36 |
| Defining Leadership Legacy | 41 |
| Blaxsox: a product of this consultation | 48 |
| Key findings, Conclusions and Recommendations | 47 |
| Key findings | 47 |
| Conclusions | 50 |
| Recommendations | 51 |
| References | 52 |



FOREWORDS

...this report explores the issues around structural racism and its connection around the failure of drugs policy development and prevention for the black community. The desk research and the community dialogue events which provide the evidence base for this report paints a bleak picture of the failure to build on the struggle for social justice and race inequality in post-war modern Britain.



Patrick Vernon OBE

I welcome the launch of this important report by Coreplan, which I hope policy makers, funders and politicians will read and seriously consider the recommendations. The timing of this report is ideal in many ways as it complements the recent UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) which every five years reviews Britain's record on race equality and the major review of race quality by the EHRC. Both reports published in August 2016 highlight the fact that structural racism and social mobility are major issues in Britain which the Coalition and the Conservative government not only failed to address over the last six years, but has in many ways exacerbated with its austerity programme and failing to implement the Equality Act 2010.

However, this report explores the issues around structural racism and its connection around the failure of drugs policy development and prevention for the black community. The desk research and the community dialogue events which provide the evidence base for this report paints a bleak picture of the failure to build on the struggle for social justice and race inequality in post-war modern Britain. The black community is not only vulnerable to the impact of globalisation of the drugs industry (and the merits of decriminalisation) but it also is destroying community resilience in relation to how families and neighbourhoods respond to the intersectionality of drugs, gangs, violence and gender. The report however highlights some examples of best practice and community leaders who are making a difference, particularly women.

Back in the late 1990s when I was Chair of City and Hackney Drugs Action Team a lot of effort, resources and strategic leadership took place in a number of London boroughs and cities in engaging with the black community in an attempt to jointly tackle issues around crack, prostitution, development of new drugs/alcohol service, and health prevention. It clearly feels today there is lack of impetus and desire around strategic engagement and capacity building for the black community to play a key role in developing leadership roles, community based asset approaches in developing and owning solutions in partnership with the public sector.

This report provides a platform for a new dialogue and re-engagement around a whole systems leadership approach in how we can collectively tackle issues around structural racism and thus shape a coherent approach around drugs policy and prevention in meeting the needs of different generations and aspirations of the black community. The report also makes the case for funders and commissioners to support a network of self-sustaining, independent and viable organisations along with investment in leadership skills and capacity building.

Finally, the UN CERD report recommends that the government adopt the UN Decade of African Descent (2015-2024) recognising that structural racism has a specific impact on black communities. The recommendations in this report provide the perfect platform to deliver this agenda.



Gwenton Sloley:
Youth Violence Advisor and
Author

When we speak to any frontline practitioner, young person, parent or elder, they tell us that the illegal drugs industry is driving the violence in their community.

They tell us the drugs exist because of the poverty, and the poverty exists because of discrimination at every level. I am so excited about this fresh take on the prohibition debate because it forces those who have been comfortably discussing it outside of the structural inequality paradigm to take stock of their own position of entitlement in this debate. Coreplan did more than just produce another sanitized report; they ensured that after taking intellectual property from the community, they left Blaksox behind as fair exchange. We know that Asset Based Community Development in poor communities is at least part of the solution, which is why it is so refreshing to see researchers actually leaving more than a few high street vouchers behind in the wake of their research and consultation processes. I am looking forward to seeing what comes next....



Patrica Lamour:
Education Specialist

The views of young people and community members consulted in this report makes very disturbing reading. The disproportional impact of school exclusions has for decades been an angry flashpoint within Black communities, who highlight this as evidence of racism in schools. Excluding any child from school is not a decision that is ever taken lightly by a headteacher – but the figures seem to say that when it comes to young Black people, these decisions have been taken far too easily, far too often and for far too long.

We must also acknowledge the fact, that the experience and understanding of Black and Minority Ethnic head teachers have hardly been brought to bear within the education system, as there are so few of them, as Black and ‘mixed’ male headteachers, number 39 out of over 3000 secondary school leaders. Yet, in the 24,000 plus nursery, primary, secondary and special schools in the country, one in four pupils are from a minority ethnic background. Furthermore, some of the school exclusions are illegal, as the Children’s Commissioner’s Schools Exclusions Inquiry found out. The DfE in their profile of pupil exclusions in England stated that “Black Caribbean pupils are still four times more likely to receive a permanent exclusion than the school population as a whole and were twice as likely to receive a fixed period exclusion”. At the last count there were 331,380 fixed term exclusions of all children from the nation’s schools – thousands of young people being sent out onto the streets every school day – where they are more at risk as victims or perpetrators of youth and violent crime and swelling the ranks of the unemployed and prison population. In post Brexit Britain, if this is not what we as educators want for young people for whom we are ‘in loco parentis’ and have a public duty of care, then schools have to take responsibility for the poor experience and outcomes of the many Black children and young people driving them to be caught up in the “War on Drugs”.



PREFACE

Coreplan's Senior Management Team, along with their partners and associates, have more than 60 years of experience in the drugs and alcohol industry, both running services and developing new approaches to service delivery. The company's founder Viv Ahmun developed the first national young people's drugs service in the UK in 1991 and led on the development of stimulant related provision in Europe: all of the first stimulant specific services in the UK were either directly or indirectly influenced by him.



Coreplan works on issues of social policy with a view to enabling genuine change and ethical leadership. For example, the company recently carried out a study across three cities, in order to support vulnerable communities in managing the cutbacks to local authorities and the resulting need for community members to fill that gap through increased social action, community resilience and joint working approaches. Coreplan uses a combination of personal coaching, advanced group development tools, ethical social research methodology and multi-platform communication and marketing approaches to achieve its goals. Coreplan is the founding member of the Choices Consortium (CC).

The Choices Consortium (CC), is a network of large, medium and smaller companies and projects whose clients often come from under-served communities. Our objective is to facilitate more effective partnership working between large companies and community based services that cannot deliver sufficient volume to win contracts, despite being best placed to do the work. By connecting organisations that have the financial and administrative capacity with those that have the street craft, authenticity and credibility, we offer something that is culturally sensitive, blended and fundamentally more effective.

CC was established in response to the government's programme of opening up public sector services to private, third sector and

small community organisations. The drivers of austerity and localism are leading to widespread recommissioning of criminal justice, health, welfare and social care services. These drivers are complemented by an expectation that local community groups and individuals will need to take more responsibility for themselves and the areas in which they live.

CC was established to enable this process and to specifically help build community assets in local areas experiencing health and social disadvantage, inequality, and higher levels of crime and serious violence. CC has a pioneering new approach to partnership working, where we incubate and build sustainable capacity and resilience in individuals, groups and community networks, so they can contribute positively to local areas and help tackle disadvantage and inequality.

CC will respond to wider strategies including, addressing the causes of serious youth violence, truly transforming rehabilitation and health and social care reform.

This publication is the first of what will be a series of pro-active community owned, multi-platform reports.

They will be crafted to enable people of African and African Caribbean descent and other oppressed communities in the UK, to begin taking responsibility for defining their reality in relation to UK Drugs laws and how they experience those laws in the wider context of socio-economic inequality, state violence, racism and lived oppression.



ASSET BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT:
THE GYM AS A COMMUNITY SUPPORT
AND WELLBEING HUB



Viv Ahmun:
Coreplan Director

Viv Ahmun is the founding partner of Coreplan and has been involved in service development for more than 30 years. Viv sat on the Advisory Council for the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) for 5 years. In 2014, he completed a three City pilot - commissioned by the Home Office - focused on the development of community resilience in order to more effectively combat economic deprivation and the associated violence against young people and women. (The report is currently with the Home Office and a community-centred version is due for publication in early 2017). He applies a whole Systems Thinking approach to his work.



Lee Jasper:
Community Organiser



Lee Jasper is arguably the UK's most prominent Black community activist and social commentator. Lee is the former Director for Policing and Equalities for London and served on the London Criminal Justice Board (2000-2008), and is a former Home Office Advisor on Policing (1998 - 2008). He has played a key role in founding many social action organisations, including Operation Black Vote.



Annette Dale-Perera:
ADP Consultancy UK

Annette Dale-Perera has an independent management consultancy business (ADPConsultancyUK). She has worked in addiction and offender healthcare for over 30 years as a psychologist, a researcher, as head of policy for national voluntary sector and statutory drug treatment umbrella bodies and latterly as the Strategic Director of NHS services. She is a current member of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs and regularly briefs ministers and senior civil servants.



Acknowledgements

With special thanks to the following people and organisations who contributed to making this report possible:

Courtney Brown: Father 2 Father

Delphine Duff: London CRC

Hide Away Youth Club, Manchester

Jane Slater: Transform

Mike Trace: RAPt

Niamh Eastwood: Release

Open Society Foundations

Paul Anderson MBE: Voyage

Peter Herbert OBE: Society of Black Lawyers

Simon Woolley: Operation Black Vote

Temi Mwale: 4Front Project

Yvonne Field: The Ubele Initiative



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

With special thanks to:

Courtney Brown: Father 2 Father

Delphine Duff: London CRC

Hide Away Youth Club, Manchester

Jane Slater: Transform

Mike Trace: RAPt

Niamh Eastwood: Release

Open Society Foundations

Paul Anderson MBE: Voyage

Peter Herbert OBE: Society of Black Lawyers

Simon Woolley: Operation Black Vote

Temi Mwale: 4Front Project

Yvonne Field: The Ubele Initiative

Annette Dale-Perera

Patricia Lamour



INTRODUCTION

This work was funded by the Open Society Foundations, under its Global Drug Policy Program (GDPP), which aims to shift the paradigm of drug policy from a punitive approach, to one that is rooted in public health and human rights. GDPP strives to broaden, diversify and consolidate the network of like-minded organisations that are actively challenging the current state of international drug policy.

The project was a pilot that was focussed on working with Black and Minority Ethnic communities (BAME) to:

- **Increase community awareness of the relationship between drug policy, inequality and violence in BAME communities;**
- **Explore how to build community capacity, leadership and resilience to enable lobbying for change at local, regional and national levels;**
- **Establish a multi-platform presence that will increase knowledge and provide leadership and**
- **Begin to build an asset-based community development and social action approach in relation to policies and practices that damage BAME communities.**

The work was conducted between 2015 and 2016.

Whilst the study was primarily conducted with individuals of African and African Caribbean heritage (referred to as Black), our research indicated that the findings apply to other BAME groups. It is for this reason that the terms 'Black' and 'BAME' are used interchangeably throughout this report.

METHODOLOGY

We used a number of methodologies to undertake this project. We undertook a literature review that evaluated both academic and grey literature on the impact of drug policies and legislation on BAME communities in England and Wales. In addition, we held two youth focus groups with a total of 90 young people and two broader consultation events in London, attended by more than 200 community members. We also took part in a series of community events that were attended by more than 1000 people from BAME communities.



1. Our meta finding was that the differential impact of drug policy on BAME groups in the UK is a consequence of structural state racism.

The impact of drug policy and practice on BAME was described by community members as being part of 'State Racism'. It was experienced as physical and psychological violence by BAME communities within state and structural institutions (education, health criminal justice etc.) and on the streets. Lack of economic opportunity, poor educational attainment, and community violence were constantly referred to as the consequences of state racism and oppression that some also described as being "wrapped up in white skin privilege". The majority of BAME people we consulted thought the "War On Drugs" was actually a deliberate war on BAME people. Those consulted felt that until structural discrimination and violence was addressed, the war on BAME communities would continue even if the "War on Drugs" ended.

2. Decriminalisation or legalisation of illegal drugs did not have traction amongst Black communities consulted, as they thought structural inequality and institutional racism would not change.

Discussions regarding the decriminalisation or legalisation of drugs failed to capture the hearts and minds of BAME community members with whom we spoke. Our findings were not the outcome for which many in the drugs de-regulation and decriminalisation movement may have hoped. Drug policy and prohibition was perceived as merely one in an arsenal of weapons that the state deployed to justify its on-going oppression, mass criminalization and subsequent imprisonment of BAME people – particularly young Black men. The differential impact of 'Stop and Search' and

KEY FINDINGS

A number of recurring themes emerged from our exploration of this issue.

drugs reform was viewed as just another symptom. During our events, despite a focus on drug policy, conversations revolved around a more generalised sense of oppression felt by many within BAME communities. Participants expressed that, to make drugs reform the main focus of the debate made little sense. All participants thought that to deal with the symptoms, a remedy must be found for the main ailment that was universally described as structural state racism manifesting as global white privilege.

3. Lack of community access to quality information about drug policy, drugs and their impact was evident and hampered development of sustainable community responses.

Consultation indicated a lack of access to quality information around drugs in BAME communities. This was thought to be compounded by the lack of leadership at a community level with white professionals in positions of authority, neither, sharing information nor co-producing solutions with Black-led community-based services. Frustration was expressed at "safe and not challenging" BAME representatives being 'co-opted' who lacked the trust of BAME communities.

Despite information about the disproportionate impact of drug policy on BAME communities we consulted, hardly any had actually accessed the data, reports or the recommended solutions. For example, only a few had heard of either the Young Review into disproportionality in the criminal justice system, or the Release work on "Stop and search". Worryingly, very few participants had knowledge on the impact of drugs and where to get help – particularly high potency "Skunk" cannabis which was widely available and used.

4. Black communities were unaware of the impact of racism in policy 'silos' and how they relate to each other without leadership.

Black communities were unaware of the links between the global war on drugs, UK drugs policy and how the two translate into serious youth violence and increased numbers of young Black men in the criminal justice system. There appeared to be no credible organisation that helped BAME communities think across silos which has hampered the community's ability to think about linkages and interactions in the UK. The disproportionately negative impact of drug policy on Black communities requires 'grounding' in the wider context of race-based intersectionality and/or a disjointed government that is unwilling and unable to 'join up the dots'.

5. Black communities expressed an absence of leadership in the home and in the community, as well as within statutory services.

Drug use, drug dealing, 'gang' involvement, school exclusion and involvement in criminal justice systems by young people were discussed as 'common' and a 'source of concern' by all BAME community members consulted. Many parents consulted in the process reported feeling powerless to control their children. Consultees also blamed schools and local authorities for their problems in relation to young people – particularly young Black men. School exclusions and the closure of community facilities were most often cited as key factors that had contributed to a growth in youth street violence. Community members were aware that many 'perpetrators' had been excluded from school with no meaningful alternative provision in place. There was general consensus that Pupil Referral Units of any description were little more than gang recruitment centres or as one parent put it, "slaughter houses for our children". Young people consulted reported that they knew the role of the police: they expected the police to do what police do. However, many young Black people expressed that they felt their "elders" within the Black communities had let them down, by failing to protect them and show consistent, ethical leadership.

6. BAME communities want to help but expertise and leadership was missing to enable development such as Asset Based Community Development.

At every event and focus group, community groups and individuals consulted wanted to do more to help their communities. People spoke passionately about self-determination and not looking to the state for handouts in order to bring the change that was needed. At one meeting, convened as a consequence of two murders, money was raised to help implement a new Black-led social action movement. Community groups and individuals called for Black men in particular, to work together in order to set positive examples for the young, citing a lack of current leadership to achieve genuine and lasting change. A lack of organisational and community collaboration was cited as a major reason for the community's inability to mobilise and establish a sustainable economic base in response to state racism. In-fighting amongst elders, and competitiveness rather than co-operation between Black organisations was repeatedly cited as the main drivers of 'postcode wars', often related to drug dealing across London and other cities.

7. The lack of BAME community-driven leadership and succession planning and legacy was thought to be actively supported by the authorities.

This consultation found that there were examples of good work that had been done in the past to develop community leadership and initiatives. However, participants said there was a lack of continuity and lack of emphasis on capacity building and succession planning. It was thought that too often those in leadership lack the skills and the emotional intelligence needed to establish sustainable institutions. It was felt that members of the community with 'organisational memory' of good initiatives were too often locked out of planning, consultation and commissioning processes by the authorities. Furthermore, it was expressed that those in community leadership roles placed little or no emphasis on bringing young leaders through the ranks. Community participants felt that as a consequence, lessons learned were rarely passed on, resulting in the same mistakes being made over and over again by a succession of different ill-equipped faces and initiatives.

CONCLUSIONS.

We conclude from this work that more needs to be done to work with Black communities to develop a more informed and rounded position in relation to drugs policy reform. Given the extent to which the “War on Drugs” has been a proxy war on Black people and other poor communities, it is inevitable but unacceptable that Black people in the UK have not been more involved in the debate and campaign for change.

In short, we found a real and urgent need for specialised and on-going capacity building, information sharing and genuine empowerment of Black communities around drugs policy.

We need to enable our own distinct voice to be heard and have a much greater awareness and an understanding of the complexity of the impact of drug policy on BAME communities, especially drug enforcement. We need to increase awareness of the adverse impact of illicit drugs markets, deprivation and ill health on BAME communities. Fundamentally, we need to understand the critical role that structural racism plays in maintaining the inequality and poverty that exists in Black communities.

Information dissemination to Black communities on drug policy on an on-going basis is critically important in order to inform communities and promote action and change. To maximize results, that information must be credible and employ asset-based approaches, in order to sustain itself and remain relevant in relation to its community.

Black communities will increasingly need to be able to provide community-based interventions to educate community members about drugs and co-produce interventions to address problems related to drugs, as part of a wider health and wellbeing approach to developing community resilience, irrespective of any changes in drug legislation.

More collaborative and targeted work needs to take place with organizations like Release, in order to address the on-going disproportionality relating to stop and search and drugs policy reform, particularly as it relates to drug dealing and the violence it causes in communities.

Our work also points to the need for a radical re-evaluation of current research and policy priorities and engagement activity undertaken by research institutions and drug policy groups. The notion that Black youth are politically ambivalent, disengaged and “hard to reach” is largely a consequence of tired yet persistent racial stereotypes and the failure of statutory and non-government organisations to build ethical partnership relationships with local communities.

Ultimately our aim must be to enable oppressed Black communities to develop an owned and informed leadership that is able to identify and challenge social injustices such as the UK Drugs Policy. Black communities must develop their own economic base from which greater independence and community resilience to the racism they suffer can emerge.

Finally, we are heartened by the development of Blaksox, which is an emerging multi-platform presence. It has begun to provide leadership development, increase knowledge, train BAME community members in asset-based community development, raise funds and campaign on issues that disproportionately impact on BAME communities. It is the beginnings of a social action approach that could be harnessed to explore and redress drug policy and practices that damage BAME communities.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.** Address structural state racism and inequality in the UK, or drug policy reform will have little traction or impact amongst Black communities.
- 2.** Increase community access to quality information about drug policy, drugs and their impact to enable the development of sustainable community responses.
- 3.** Increase community access to education, prevention and treatment interventions around drugs including co-production and delivery.
- 4.** Continue the progress made as a result of this consultation process in order to develop strong and dynamic Black community perspectives about drugs policy in the UK
- 5.** A paradigm shift from silo thinking to systems thinking around the impact of all government policies (including drugs) to tackle institutional racism.
- 6.** Support the progress made as a result of this consultation process in relation to the development of Black community leaders and Black led organisations (such as Blaksox) in order to develop strong and dynamic Black community perspectives about drugs policy in the UK
- 7.** Include succession planning and “legacy” initiatives within Community leadership projects, actively supported by the local and central government and charitable trusts.



**INTRODUCTION
AND METHODOLOGY**



Introduction

This work was funded by the Open Society Foundations, under its Global Drug Policy Program (GDPP). This program aims to shift the paradigm of drug policy from a punitive approach, to one which is rooted in public health and human rights. GDPP strives to broaden, diversify and consolidate the network of like-minded organisations that are actively challenging the current state of international drug policy.

The work comprised of a pilot which was focussed on working with Black and Minority Ethnic communities (BAME) to:

- increase community awareness of the relationship between drug policy, inequality and violence in BAME communities;
- explore how to build community capacity, leadership and resilience to be able to lobby for change at local, regional and national levels;
- establish a multi-platform presence that will increase knowledge and provide leadership and
- begin to build an asset-based community development and social action approach in relation to government and local policies and practices that damage BAME communities.

The work was conducted in 2015/2016.



Methodology

We used a number of methodologies to undertake this project. We undertook a literature review⁶ which evaluated both academic and grey literature and looked at available research on the impact of drug policies/legislation on Black communities in England and Wales, including examining Drugs Misuse findings from the 2013-14 Crime Survey. In addition, we held two youth focus groups with a total of 90 young people, and two broader consultation events in London attended by more than 200 community members. We also took part in a series of community events that were attended by more than 1000 people from the Black community, which together gave us a powerful insight into the views and opinions of young Black people, the wider community and local practitioners.

Literature review

The principle objectives of the literature review and final report were to:

- a. consolidate and make accessible existing information on the issue
- b. raise levels of awareness of the actual and potential impact of drugs policies/legislation on Black communities
- c. facilitate the voices of Black youth and Black communities in national and international drug policy reform debates
- d. establish a framework for the development of community leadership and community empowerment.

The analysis presented in this report draws significantly on statistics developed by the Home Office and effectively utilised by Release as part of their ground breaking and under recognised report *The Numbers in Black and White: Ethnic Disparities in the Policing and Prosecution of Drug Offences in England and Wales, 2013*. Under Section 95 of the Criminal Justice Act 1991, the Secretary of State is required to publish statistical monitoring information to enable those involved in the administration of criminal justice to avoid illegal discrimination on grounds of race, sex or any other improper grounds (Home Office, 2000).

Since its introduction, the Home Office and latterly the Ministry of Justice, has regularly published statistics showing the rate at which different ethnic groups come into contact with the criminal justice system, for example the police use of Stop and Search powers.

Community focus group consultations

We conducted focus group consultations with 290 community members of all ages, in London and Manchester. The youth specific element of this was delivered in partnership with Release in both cities. Our presentations to the community focus groups used material drawn from Release's² research and other information relating to the war on drugs, such as the award winning documentary "The House I Live In"³. We utilised that same data that Release had used in similar meetings in the form of powerpoint presentations, role play and guided conversations to make community representatives aware of the deep disparities in the administration of criminal justice; and to contextualise the broader guided discussions regarding the war on drugs and its impact on Black communities.



In relation to stop and search and drug possession, where appropriate, we have drawn on the information produced by Release as a result of their analysis of national policing and Ministry of Justice data for 2009/10 and 2008/09.

Release analysed the data using the 2011 Census data and as such, their estimates were as robust as it was possible to be at the time. As part of their research methodology, Freedom of Information requests were sent to every police force in England and Wales asking for the ethnic breakdown for 2009/10 of those who were subject to stop and search for drugs; those who received cannabis warnings and penalty notices for disorder; those who received cautions; and finally those who were subsequently charged.



The purpose of this information was to determine whether racial disparity existed throughout the police's processing of those caught in possession of drugs and whether those from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds were more likely to receive a harsher response. Of the 42 forces contacted, 28 provided a response to the questions posed.

Those who did not provide data cited financial cost as the reason they could not meet the requirements of the request. However, only a limited number of forces provided sufficient data and from those providing such data, the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) was chosen for more detailed analysis. For not only was the information they provided robust, but also because the MPS undertakes 50% of all stop and searches for drugs in England and Wales. The analysis was undertaken by the London School of Economics.



Community consultation approach

Coreplan adopted a community based, participatory and process driven approach to the consultation process and the scoping and producing of the report. By approaching the report from a genuinely community investment and empowerment oriented perspective, we were able to ensure comments from seldom heard voices would be discernable above that of the academics, policy makers and other professionals. We believe this to be a more ethical and experientially informed approach that helped us to avoid the mistakes around appropriation of ideas and experiences often associated with conventional research and studies, particularly when 'done to' as opposed to 'in partnership with' communities. This in effect meant that:

1. We encouraged community members to define and speak 'their truth', even if what they shared did not marry neatly with conventional wisdom or the theme of our review.
2. We ensured those who shared their intellectual capital also benefited from the process in terms of their increased understanding of the issues and of the critical path to policy reform and legislative change.
3. We intended to leave something tangible behind in the form of a Social Action response based on the Asset Based Community Development model (ABCD), which was achieved through the creation of the Blaksox movement.

This approach also focused on highlighting the collective potential to produce wealth, multiply output of physical assets, gain

competitive advantage, and/or to enhance the value of other types of capital within the community.

For example, as part of the process we helped Shiloh, a 16 year old Community Organiser from the very popular Hide Away Youth Project in Moss Side Manchester, to raise the funds needed to spend time in New York's Harlem Children's Zone and other innovative initiatives to increase his understanding and capability to improve things for his peers back in Moss Side. The Hideaway Youth Project were instrumental in enabling us to engage with 40 young people from the Moss Side area. We will continue to direct resources and information to them and support their work in any way we can and our support for Shiloh is just beginning.

By adopting this community based participatory approach, we planned to ensure the focus of this process remained on achieving increased community understanding and capacity, rather than statutory or professional understanding and direction.

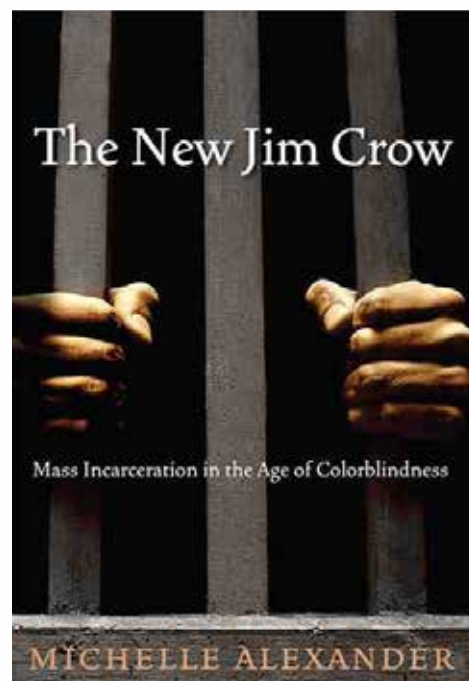
Aside from the obligatory requirement to produce an outcome report for our funders, the bulk of our efforts went into capturing the learning and representing it in formats that made sense to the community. This ethical approach to consultation will further enlighten and provide solutions to the multiple and complex challenges faced on a daily basis by communities living in the midst of open drugs markets.

Michelle Alexander summed up our thinking when she stated the following in the preface to her powerful book, *The New Jim Crow*⁵ *Mass Incarceration in The Age of Colourblindness*.

“This book is not for everyone. I have a specific audience in mind—people who care deeply about racial justice but who, for any number of reasons, do not yet appreciate the magnitude of the crisis faced by communities of colour as a result of mass incarceration. In other words I am writing this book for people like me, the person I was ten years ago. I am also writing it for another audience—those who have been struggling to persuade their friends, neighbours, relations, teachers, co-workers, or political representatives that something is eerily familiar about the way our criminal justice system operates, something that looks and feels a lot like an era we supposedly left behind. It is my hope and prayer that this book empowers you, allows you to speak your truth with greater conviction, credibility and courage. Last but definitely not least, I am writing this book for all those trapped within America’s latest caste system. You may be locked up or locked out of mainstream society but you are not forgotten.”



Michelle Alexander



Finally, our progress in establishing a multi-platform presence to increase knowledge, provide leadership and begin to build an asset-based community development and social action approach has resulted in the Blaksox movement. This is discussed towards the end of this report.

Findings Setting The Tone



The literature review⁶ found that there was very little comprehensive research into this issue here in the UK, in stark contrast to that available in the United States. However, we found a plethora of research evidence spanning many years, demonstrating that Black people are subjected to racial profiling through the use of 'Stop and Search' powers and disproportionate rates of arrest, charging and sentencing⁷. Furthermore, that this criminalisation of Black communities takes place largely through the prism of drugs law enforcement, with cannabis possession being the largest arrest category for Black people in the UK.



The numerous research reports included in the review looking at criminal justice, all concluded that Black people endure on going and acute judicial discrimination by both police and the courts. This is particularly true in the area of law enforcement.

The Release drugs charity published their now seminal and influential report: The numbers in Black and White: Ethnic disparities in the policing and prosecution of drug offences in England and Wales. This report is the only UK research analysis that identifies racism as central to understanding how Black communities are policed and tried before the courts, in relation to drug possession. Importantly, the report cites the extent to which Black people in the UK are now routinely criminalized through drug enforcement policies, which is driving ethnic disparities throughout the criminal justice system in England and Wales.

“Black and Asian people are being stopped and searched for drugs at a much higher rate than white people. Black people are also being subject to harsher sanctions for drug possession offences.”

The report reaches the unequivocal and damning conclusion that:

“Enforcement of drug laws is unfairly focused on Black and Asian communities, rates of drug use being lower than the white majority.”

In addition to racism in policing and the criminal justice system, the literature review also highlighted the serious health implications of smoking cannabis, in particular high potency cannabis such as Skunk.

Professor Wayne Hall, Director of the Centre for Youth Substance Abuse Research at the University of Queensland Australia, compared evidence of the adverse health impacts of cannabis over the period dating from 1993 to 2013. His report⁸ found strong evidence to suggest consistent linkages between heavy cannabis use and poor psychological outcomes and an increased risk of mental ill health in adulthood.

A National Institute of Drug Abuse⁹ report cited in the review found individuals with a genetic predisposition to schizophrenia were more likely to develop acute ill health as a consequence of smoking cannabis.

In the UK, while overall cannabis consumption continues to fall, the number of people trying to access treatment is increasing.

The review also highlighted a report published by the Home Office Local Perspectives In Ending Gang and Youth Violence Areas¹⁰ and provided powerful evidence of the link between drugs, gangs, criminality and violence. The report also highlighted increasing concerns about vulnerable young people being increasingly used to transport and sell drugs, including the sexual exploitation of women and girls.

The Scottish Drugs Forum Report¹¹ published in March 2007 conducted an in depth drugs and poverty literature review and found there to be strong links between poverty, deprivation, widening inequalities and problematic drug use. The Forum made the critical point that these situational factors are often ignored in drug policy debates. They also found that drugs markets weaken the social fabric of deprived communities, damage health and increase crime rates.

Youth Consultations

“Legalising or decriminalising drugs on its own, won’t solve racism. You need to focus on the whole problem, not just the drugs.”



The youth focus group consultations brought additional life and texture to the project activity. They provided further evidence of the profound and acute marginalisation of Black communities. Young people could not talk about these issues in isolation and repeatedly made the point about the multifaceted and interlinking nature of the challenges they faced. They wanted to start the debate where they were and not where they were assumed to be. The outcome was dynamic debate and high-level interaction.

“We want to set up our own businesses on our own high streets and we want to be able to run our own clubs without police closing them down. We will support legalised drugs if we get to run the businesses, but we know they will just cut us out, just like they cutting us out of the entertainment industry. Little white boys with MPs as dads turning rave promoter and grime artist manager come on. It’s a joke ting !!”

Young London Event Owner

Awareness among Black communities about the availability of drug services is very low, with virtually no awareness of the existence of drug policy, advocacy and/or reform organisations. No one knew of any research reports on the issue and there was no meaningful awareness of drug support or advocacy services.

The same was true for formal or informal consultations on drugs policies. For all of those young people involved in our youth focus groups, this process represented their first and only formal consultation on this issue.

Whilst, young people were not aware of the national and international drugs forums and policy debates, rather unsurprisingly, they were very aware of how some of the negative impacts of policing, criminality and poverty, combined with the widespread availability of illicit drugs,

played out in their communities.

All those who attended were unanimous in wanting quality information and genuine opportunities to represent themselves in these important debates.

*“We got lots to say about how the police f**k wid us when no one is looking -in our homes and on road. They got at least four faces and we see the wicked one most of the time. They in dis ting to make money, just like the rest of us”*

Ex Drugs Dealer

What was also abundantly clear, throughout both the review and consultations, was the abject failure of any single organisation, within the field of drugs policy reform to engage with young people in any consistent meaningful, sustained or effective way.

“We don’t see no one except reporters when someone gets shot or stabbed to death. We get some good youth workers on the road but most of them stay in their buildings with the weak youths”

16 year old ex-offender

They believed that their voices are locked out of key policy debates here in the UK, in Europe and internationally. They felt their voices were being marginalised and ignored. Many felt they were being used as ‘consultation fodder’. They felt this amounted to nothing more than token engagement by statutory and non-governmental organisations seeking to demonstrate they were actively consulting Black communities. As one young person put it

“Legalising or decriminalising drugs on its own, won’t solve racism. You need to focus on the whole problem, not just the drugs.”



**ARE YOU FOR OR AGAINST:
DRUGS?** THE BINARY DEBATE

In any attempt to look at specific issues that affect Black communities, the result is a temptation for organisations and institutions simply to assume or indeed impose their own analysis, their own agenda and their own preferential politics on marginalised Black communities.

As a consequence, consultation by mainstream organisations within Black communities is viewed with deep cynicism and sometimes, outright hostility. This speaks to the lived Black experience, which so often sees mainstream white organisations dominate the agenda in discussions about solutions to the problems that they, the Black communities face every day.

Young people felt strongly about the deeply alienating and obsessive nature of statutory led consultation that militated against the extent to which Black communities could see consultation as a real exercise in community partnership and civic engagement. This was cited as the main reason why many statutory consultations fail to attract and meaningfully engage with Black communities, in particular young Black people. Many believe that consultation is seen by institutions and mainstream organisations as nothing more than a PR opportunity and tick box exercise required by number crunchers and bureaucrats who require them to be seen to be consulting with marginalised groups.

Many felt they were being used as 'consultation fodder'. They felt this amounted to nothing more than token engagement by statutory and non-governmental organisations seeking to demonstrate they were actively consulting Black communities.

This attitude toward consultation of any kind made it even harder to engage in conversation on a topic that was felt to have no real bearing on the realities of life for Black people in

...it was not so much that racism was the 'elephant in the room' as is so often stated; it was actually truer to say that racism -systemic, institutionalised or otherwise- was actually the room itself...

Lewisham, Tottenham, Brixton, Moss Side, Hackney or any of the other deprived areas where violence and unemployment is a part of daily life for the Black inhabitants.

Targeted and Excluded

No matter what the specific theme, racism, economic exclusion, housing, jobs, drugs, all those consulted during this process felt Black communities were being actively targeted and excluded, so it made no sense to focus on the question of legalisation or decriminalisation because the process of state racism would continue in some other form.

"They don't want us to be strong - that's why they kick our youths out of school, keep them out of work, only tell them about their slave history like that is all there was and encourage them to deal drugs to rich white people. Then lock them up for meeting a demand so they can't make legitimate money and have some self respect"

Community Worker Birmingham

As a result, it was almost impossible to generate any specific interest in drugs policy alone in isolation of the broader lived experiences that are encountered by Black people in poor communities every day. In terms of these consultations, what became apparent was that, when it came to discussing 'systemic racism' as an issue, it was not so much that racism was the 'elephant in the room' as is so often stated; it was actually truer to say that racism -systemic, institutionalised or otherwise- was actually the room itself, i.e. an all encompassing paradigm.

It is also important to note that this resistance to discussing drugs reform was mainly due to the general lack of awareness about drugs reform and drugs policy, as well as the widely held belief that state sponsored racism within the criminal justice, education, health and housing sectors and the resulting economic deprivation was central to any debate about their current state.



Such concerns are well founded. For example, the Youth Justice Boards¹² publication of their Annual Youth Justice Statistics 2014-15, whilst showing an overall reduction of 9% of young people entering the youth criminal justice system, in stark contrast it showed that the number of children from Black and minority backgrounds remain stubbornly high and increasing at 20%.

Over half that number are serving long term prison sentences. In London, over 78% of those in youth custody were Black and minority children previously excluded from school. Almost a third of these young people were aged 14 and under when last in school, and almost half had the literacy and numeracy levels of children aged three to seven years younger. i.e. between 7-11 years of age.

The disproportionality and illegality of school exclusions has been highlighted by a recent inquiry of the UK Children's Commissioner¹³. In addition, a research briefing to Parliament into the educational attainment of the majority of the young people involved in the last major street disturbances in the UK in 2011, showed 83% were from deprived areas, not gang affiliated and were either failing in school or indeed had been failed by school.¹⁴

This highlights the industrial conveyor belt from school to jail cell, known as the school to prison pipeline in the US¹⁵ that is also becoming routine for young Black people in the UK. As was said by one of the participants at the event,

"They use Black school exclusion rates to assess how many jail cells they will need ."

Most of those in attendance were more aware of the research conducted in the United States that identified private sector profit as the motivating factor behind police enforcement. The idea of the 'prison industrial complex' was something that was well understood by the majority of

young people we spoke to, but less so amongst adults. This concept was first outlined in 1997 by Professor Angela Davis¹⁶ now of UCLA in her article "Masked Racism: Reflections on the Prison Industrial Complex"

Drugs a Symptom, Not a Cause

Despite the drugs specific theme of the community focus group presentations, without fail, the conversation at events quickly shifted to discussion about a more generalised sense of oppression felt by many within the Black community. The differential impact of 'Stop and Search' and drugs reform was viewed as one of many associated issues. Participants expressed that to make drugs reform the main focus of the debate made little sense. It was clear to everyone both young and old, male and female, wealthy and long term unemployed, that to deal with the symptoms, a remedy must be found for the main ailment which was universally described as structural state racism manifesting as global white privilege.

Many cited the crisis of unemployment for Black youth as another issue that affected many younger people's decision to enter into the drug markets as a means of alternative income. In terms of unemployment, the influential Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR) published a report in 2010 that took a forensic look at government unemployment figures. They showed that the government's official figures did not represent the full picture of unemployment. The IPPR report¹⁷ showed that 48% of Black people, 31% of Asians and 20% of whites reported that they were out of work.

This reality is a powerful economic driver that many believe pushes young Black people towards the only visible and therefore, readily available, alternative source of consistent income.



The majority of people we spoke to said that the war on drugs had turned their communities into retail outlets for drug dealers and many of the young people into retail assistants, who peddled violence as a necessary aspect of the drug business.

The knock on effect of violence was said to fuel the sense of fear and anxiety that compelled many young people to carry a knife, even if they are not directly involved in drug dealing. This in turn, provided police with the justification for racialised stop and search practices.

Those in attendance could not see how decriminalisation or drugs reform alone could stop the violence, tackle racism, end the poverty and so on. On this question, the young people were ambivalent, one young man in Manchester stated:

“It has always been this way; it will never change. People say they will help us, but they don’t.”

Gaining access to the information certainly fired up debate, especially the two films that we used, suggested by Release. However what access to this information also showed was that the reality of political marginalisation and exclusion of Black communities from economic opportunity had been going on for centuries and therefore, would continue whether or not drugs were legalised and or decriminalised. Again and again, young people and adults alike stated that drugs were simply a symptom, not a cause of systemic an endemic racism.

“I grew up in Hackney on the Pembury Estate with my younger brother and my mum and dad. The estate was known for shootings, drugs and all things bad, but for me life was normal,

school, football over Hackney Marshes, Karate club. Even though the violence was around me it wasn’t too loud for me to ignore, but when I went to secondary school everything changed, and my mum and dad split up that same year. All of a sudden everything felt unsafe, unfamiliar, the pressure was on me not to be too different, not too good, people talk about gangs but I think if the TV wasn’t always around here paying man for stories then the gang thing wouldn’t be a thing. To me it has always been about staying safe and making money-only the mad ones-fucked up homes, violence and all that shit, was looking for glory. I started moving with a small group of respected man when I was 13; they were linked to my cousin and were already supplying drugs that they got from white guys who never came into Hackney. We always had to meet them out of town on the motorway or something like that.....I have been arrested but never been charged, never got expelled from school and never been directly involved in serious violence like stabbing or shooting, but always around people who have....I’m 25 now and stopped the drugs stuff four years ago. If it was legal, I would get in it again but right now it’s too violent, and the police turning everyone into informers, so no one trusts anyone on the street, it’s twisted. I live out of London for the peace and come back in to link people and see my mum. There are lots of man like me who never went jail but was involved in drugs and violence because it was all around us. If the government wanted to stop it, they would have done it long time.”



Legalisation Of Drugs and Economic Opportunity

...Sex for clothes, money or just not to get hurt is what too many of us have to deal with round here. Before all this drug dealing, it wasn't like this...

It was felt that the wealthy elites would move in, once drugs were legalised; and as a result of the on-going criminalisation of Black communities, those Black people with criminal records for drugs, would be excluded from the gains to be had from a legalised drugs business. Some commented that at least whilst things are the way they are, they had some control in their communities - even if that meant remaining at a retail and illicit street level.

"I was raped by a gang member when I was 14. I never told anyone because I thought no one would believe me and if I talked my younger brother would've been hurt. I'm not the only one, girls getting raped or allowing themselves to be used is normal round here. Girls are just property, and if you do not belong to a known family or man you are there for anyone to just pick up, like picking up money off the street. A lot of girls think they like it, they just ain't well. Even if a guy give you a few pounds for having him and his mates, but that is because they was messed up before by someone else. Sex for clothes, money or just not to get hurt is what too many of us have to deal with round here. Before all this drug dealing, it wasn't like this. Drug dealing has made people evil and wicked, there is nothing people won't do when they get involved in that business. I tell girls to stay out of it because nowadays, they don't care how old you are - twelve, ten, or even if you have family, they will kidnap, threaten to hurt your family and use you."

As one young person put it,

"Legalising or decriminalising drugs on its own, won't solve racism. You need to focus on systemic racism not the drugs."

Another issue that was raised by the young people we consulted, related to their concern about decriminalisation and economic opportunity. It was pointed out that in the United States, Black people with a criminal record had been excluded from working within the emerging marijuana industry in States like Colorado¹⁸.

A participant pointed out,

"Once weed is legalised in the UK, all that will happen is rich white hypsters will come in and take over the whole thing. If you're Black with a criminal record you've got no chance."

Gangapreneurs in America

Also mentioned was the fact that high profile African American celebrities were now becoming 'Gangapreneurs' and opening up a range of marijuana based brand companies.

In America today, 23 states have legalised cannabis in some form or another, plus the District of Columbia, that also now allows recreational use.

In 2015, legal marijuana sales in the US topped \$1.42bn, according to a report from US based company Arcview Market Research.¹⁹ In 2016 they predict that figure will grow by 64% to \$2.34bn.



African American actress Whoopi Goldberg²⁰ is another brand cited by young people. She has opened a new range of medical marijuana infused products, one of which is designed to alleviate chronic menstrual pain for women..

In addition, young people also referred to the 'Marley Naturally'²¹ brand established by the Bob Marley Estate in addition to the 'Snoop Dog' brand, Leaf by Snoop.²²

Young people were also aware and highlighted President Obama's²³ prisoner early release programme in which non violent, drug offending prisoners are being considered for early release. President Obama said of this initiative,

"The power to grant pardons and commutations. . . embodies the basic belief in our democracy that people deserve a second chance after having made a mistake in their lives that led to a conviction under our laws..."

The rationale behind this decision was the conclusion that the 'War on drugs' was racially profiling Black communities and that Black offenders were being given hugely disproportionate sentences.

"I have two children both under 5 years old and I'm 22 years old; their dad is in jail for drugs and possession of a firearm and I live in a housing association flat. I let his guys grow weed in my flat, because he says that is his way of looking after me. I do some community

work and want to do more when things settle down. I want to finish my degree in psychology and work with children who been abused like I was. My friends say I'm a hypocrite but I don't think so; everyone does weed, it ain't like I'm selling crack. They have my man on the "gangs matrix" but that's a joke! He ain't into gangs, he is into making money not running around stabbing or shooting people over stupidity. They are about making money, his idols are people like Napoleon Hill, Ozwald Boateng and those kind of people. He's in jail because the kind of business he's in ain't legal, even though everyone does it. I've tried to get him to think about doing something else but he is too proud to work for someone who he thinks is half the man he is and is going to treat him like some negro. Drugs is bad because it isn't legal, people rip each other off and then comes the violence because there is no legal dealing with disagreements, and because of the law young people get dragged into carrying stuff, I don't think that is good. The young drive the violence because they got no sense. When my man comes out, he will go back to it I know he will, because he thinks there is nothing else he can do and no one is going to give him any other opportunities to run his own thing. Sooner or later, someone will try to kill him again, because they want his business and because he has a reputation for violence. I just want the madness to stop..."

Lack of Access To Services & Health Risks Ignorance



A critical outcome of these discussions was the overwhelming demand for improved quality of services targeting Black communities. Young people condemned the lack of information and services available to them. Examples of early intervention mental health projects, Saturday schools, housing projects, employment and education projects, youth clubs were all cited as critical organisations that had been decimated through local authority and NHS and statutory agencies funding cuts.

Specific and named examples were given of credible, functioning and effective Black community organisations, which had faced cuts and closure, despite delivering pioneering services and enjoying great popularity amongst young people and the wider Black community. They remarked upon the fact that these organisations, when they sought to challenge issues of socio-economic disadvantage linked to the extent of race discrimination, were then defined as “troublemakers” or having a “political agenda”. As a result, funding bodies and local authorities were racially and politically profiling Black voluntary sector organisations for their socially progressive views. De facto, funding was being used as political patronage to support organisation whose views on racism, were in alignment with those of the major funding institutions- i.e race and racism is not on the agenda.

What services were available, were largely white run and white owned charities and business organisations that were least qualified to deliver what was needed in terms of services, because of their lack of a footprint in Black communities and as a consequence no real cultural awareness beyond their paradigm of white privilege and entitlement. Attendees had a clear sense that the state did not want any money going directly into community hands. This further compounded deprivation both in terms of quality of provision and undermined community confidence in its ability to do for self.

Most young people in attendance had no idea that the level of potency in cannabis had increased so much over the last decade.

Whilst they recognise the development of ‘Skunk weed’, they had no real appreciation of the increased health risks associated with long-term consumption. Other than that they were generally aware of media reports which highlighted the increased incidence of associated mental ill-health and schizophrenia, which they had assumed was part of an on-going government scare campaign.

Neither were any of those in attendance aware of the latest research indicating that those with a genetic predisposition to mental ill-health can expect to see these conditions gravely exacerbating through the use of high potency cannabis.

De facto, funding was being used as political patronage to support organisation whose views on racism, were in alignment with those of the major funding institutions- i.e race and racism is not on the agenda.

An evaluative report published by the World Health Organisation²⁴ summarised an experts' medical consultants' meeting held in April 2015 that reviewed all available knowledge on the effects of cannabis on health and psychosocial functioning. The report conclusions were that:

- Both short and long-term cannabis use, negatively affected working memory, planning, decision-making, motor coordination, mood and cognition.
- Regular and heavy cannabis use during teenage years is associated with the increased risk of developing psychosis in later life, including schizophrenia.
- Heavy cannabis use can lead to lowering the age of onset of schizophrenia and other depressive conditions.
- Increased rates of suicide among heavy cannabis users. In addition, long-term usage can potentially trigger myocardial infarction (heart attacks) and strokes in young cannabis users.
- Smoking can also predispose users to a range of other respiratory diseases and points to a suggestion that cannabis smoking could potentially be linked to testicular cancer.

The short-term health effects of long term cannabis use, such as reducing the mental ability to plan and the cognitive effects on levels of personal motivation, were all unknown to the young people in attendance.

The majority of those in attendance had no experience of receiving quality information on drugs from organisations that allowed them to make informed decisions and health choices around their drug consumption.





BLAK
SOX

Doing For Self : Blaksox Social Action Movement

‘The evidence reviewed clearly demonstrates that despite decades of concern expressed by Black and Muslim communities, researchers and academics, and policy-makers: and despite various official reviews and investigations, the issue of disproportionately negative outcomes for young Black and/or Muslim men in the CJS remain. Although there have been some small improvements, on the whole previous actions to address the situation have been ineffective.’

Baroness Young: Young review 2014

The thing that most excited those who took part in this process, was the possibility of putting words into action, as one participant said, “Done wid the talking,” which was echoed by many who took part in the process. It was repeatedly said that despite numerous research studies, consultation exercises and pilot projects, the majority of which were conducted by strangers—described euphemistically as experts—there had been little or no lasting material change to the lives of the community, in relation to their experience of statutory services and access to the means to generate income.

In those few instances, where initiatives had been shown to have positively impacted communities, funding was still withdrawn without notice and often with no explanation. The culmination of these experiences over many years, have led many to believe that the authorities had no real interest in addressing community concerns and in fact were committed to keeping the community divided, contained and in a state of poverty and deprivation. Recent revelations regarding Nixon and Netflix programmes like *Narco* have served to further inform and deepen such views ²⁵.

The Community event, which was convened on October 1st 2015 in response to the deaths of both 17 year olds Shaquan Fearon and Nassem Galleze, in the London borough of Lewisham, was motivated by all of these elements of community concern and anger. Community organisers called the meeting, because it was felt that the Local Authority and Police were not treating the murders sufficiently seriously and had failed to take into consideration, the fear and confusion. A lack of communication with the local community contributed to a climate of fear, anxiety and concern. People wanted to see more effort from statutory agencies to keep the community informed about what was being done to keep them safe.

Over 450 individuals attended that meeting, which was called with only a week’s notice. Local politicians, local authority officers and representatives from the police were instructed to attend and give account. Due to the credibility of the Coreplan team within the community, we were able to help organise and ultimately facilitate the evening to ensure events did not spill over, into a re-run of the Tottenham riots, which was a real concern for the authorities given the anger and strength of feeling.

The event was not aided by the disclosure at the meeting of Lewisham Council’s decision to close the only youth centre on the estate where the boys had been killed. Despite reassurances that the youth club would be rebuilt, the lack of detail regarding when it would be reopened and the absence of any detail regarding alternative provision for the year whilst the venue was closed, further fuelled the lack of trust that already existed in the community in regards to anything proposed by local politicians.



CALL TO ACTION

Community Meeting

01/10/2015

7 PM SHARP

Honor Oak Community Centre

50 Turnham Road

Brockley

SE4 2DJ

PLEASE SHOW
SUPPORT

Although the Turnham Estate is a relatively small and unknown estate in Lewisham, the deaths of the two young men within two weeks of each other and almost on the same spot had shocked the small community and the rest of London. These two murders were also part of a spate of youth murders that ran at more than one every month during 2015. For this reason, in addition to the 200 local people who attended the meeting, an additional 250 people came from other boroughs, further illustrating the extent to which frustration and the need for action was felt across London and all major UK cities.

The meeting was a highly emotional and some would say chaotic event as a succession of community members, young, old, professional, angry and profoundly sad (as was the case with one mother who had lost her son 11 years before) took their turn to express their anger at what they viewed as yet another example of the lack of value placed on Black communities and Black young people's lives by the authorities.

Midway through the succession of short speeches by the authority figures gathered at

the top table, a young man sprung to his feet and begun speaking to the audience in a highly charged yet succinct and ordered fashion. The following is a summary of what he said:

“They ain’t going to do nothing for us. When we going to learn that they don’t have our interests at heart? ... Look at them! None of them come from round here, none of them got family round here, they’re just paid to keep us from causing any trouble elsewhere. We need to do for ourselves and stop waiting for these people to do for us because it will never happen. How many of our children have to die before we deal with this ting ourselves?”

As a consequence of the repeated calls from community speakers for the community to stop looking for help from “those who did not feel their pain”, Coreplan suggested to the audience at the end of the evening that an ABCD Social action model be adopted to enable communities in places like Turnham to begin empowering themselves. It was on that evening that the Blaksox social action movement was born, and on that same evening the date for the first mobilisation and capacity building day was agreed.



Mobilisation and Capacity Building in ABCD

The community members who spoke at the Turnham Estate event and subsequent focus groups across the country, repeatedly referred, to the need for self-determination, often referencing the Black Panther Movement. They argued, that the only reason those initiatives hadn't been more successful was state intervention designed to cause community disruption. Whenever these points were raised, we presented the Social Action ABCD model as a more contemporary solution likely to secure wider buy-in. The Blaksox adaptation became the accepted version.

We presented the idea of utilizing existing resources within the community by adopting an Asset Based Community Development approach. We talked about the benefits of such an approach being wide reaching, whilst making strategic sense because of the ability to start where the need is greatest, ie with the most deprived communities. To begin by focusing on the issues that concern them most; which the majority of respondents sighted as violence, drugs and anti-social behavior that is associated with the sale and use of drugs and ultimately fueled by the lack of opportunity for young Black people.

The following summarizes the ABCD approach and its benefits as we presented them to community members:

- **Asset based approaches recognize and build on a combination of the human, social and physical capital that exists with local communities. They acknowledge and build on what people value most and can help ensure that public services are provided where and how they are needed.**
- **Asset based approaches are underpinned by attitudes and values related to personal and collective empowerment and undertaken within the context of positive change for health and economic improvement.**
- **A number of techniques and methodologies are available for supporting the identification and mobilization of assets amongst the most oppressed individuals and marginalized communities. They can be matched with examples with which the Black community can identify.**



...empowering in practical and innovative ways which impact on the positive factors that increase health and wellbeing within the community...

We made it clear, that this way of working does not have to be described using 'asset' related terms, provided the key elements are present; namely focusing on valuing the positive capacity, skills, knowledge and connections in a community. The 'assets' perspective contrasts starkly with the normally accepted deficit and dysfunctional model/labeling of individuals and communities and therefore is empowering in practical and innovative ways, which impact on the positive factors that increase health and wellbeing within the community.

The actual work involves:

- **making individual issues community ones, identifying and defining needs and aspirations, building supportive groups and networks, developing opportunities for meaningful engagement;**
- **identifying, building on and mobilizing personal, local assets and resources –people, time, skills, experience – mapping the capacities and assets of individuals, associations and local institutions;**
- **building and using local knowledge and experience to influence change, engaging people in decision making and local governance, building a community vision and plan, and defining local priorities;**

- **empowering the workforce, changing the relationships between users and providers and across providers to share and liberate resources, which is often a major block to asset building and genuine community development;**
- **focusing on facilitating, enabling and empowering rather than delivering and controlling the agenda;**
- **leveraging activities, investments and resources from outside the community, mobilizing and linking assets for local economic development.**

For those who engage, the potential benefits include: more control over their lives and where they live; the ability to influence decisions which affect them and their communities; the opportunity to be engaged as they want to be, and to be seen as part of the solution, not the problem. This process may then lead to increased wellbeing through strengthening control, knowledge, self-esteem and social contacts, giving skills for life and work. Asset based activities ensure that engagement with individuals is meaningful and empowering rather than tokenistic and consultative. Asset based working also strives to engage with individuals who would not usually get involved. The benefits to statutory services are huge, but rarely acknowledged.

We presented the ABCD model at all subsequent events and without fail it was warmly received. What people wanted was the information and the means to translate that information into action. This was exactly what people believed was needed. The Blaksox Social Action movement began to develop very quickly after the first event in October 2015.



Defining Leadership Legacy

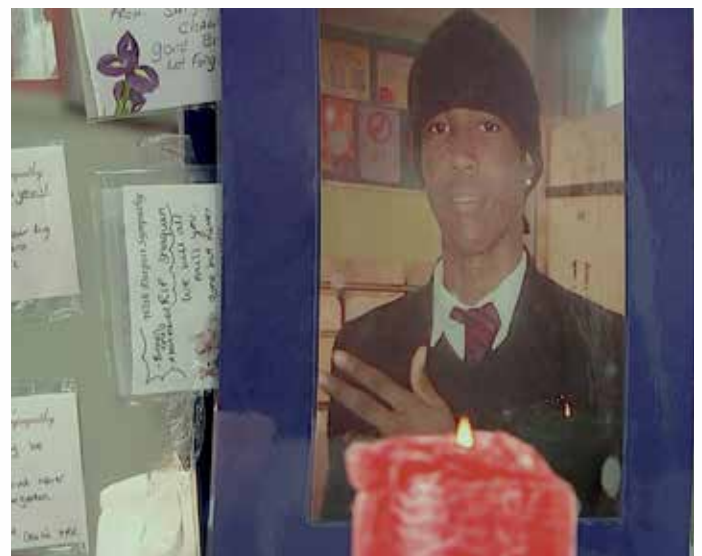
Discussions regarding leadership or the absence of it evoked the most anger and frustration amongst the young male participants, and that emotion was almost exclusively aimed at Black men. A failure to provide a financial legacy was the charge most frequently levelled, with the lack of a presence on the high street often sighted as an example of the failure to develop an economic base upon which the next generation could build. What followed in the wake of Shaquan Mario Fearon's death in 2015, perfectly illustrates what continues to fuel this intergenerational resentment. The following is a Viv Ahmun- centric view of the event:

In the afternoon of September 3rd 2015, Shaquan Fearon was fatally stabbed in the leg. He was just 17 years old and his death came as a shock to the tight knit Brockley community in Lewisham. Shaquan was an extremely popular young man amongst his peers and well known for his prowess as a footballer. As is customary in the African Caribbean community, a Nine Night event was organised to honour this young man's life. Nine-Night, is a funerary tradition practiced in the Caribbean (primarily Grenada, Dominica, Jamaica, Guyana, Trinidad, Haiti and the Dominican Republic). It is an extended wake that lasts for several days, with roots in African tradition.

True to its name, the process of coming to the home with food and drinks to keep the bereaved family company traditionally lasts nine nights and days with the ninth and final night being the night before the church service and the main night of celebration.

Though a sad occasion, it is also a time for

people to catch up with each other, for old feuds to be laid to rest and an opportunity to reaffirm family and friendship ties. This all takes place against a backdrop of food, drinks and music depending on the degree to which the family is religious.





In the old days, Nine Nights were calm and reserved for the most part - but that tradition has changed with the times. Today, these gatherings often resemble parties much more than they resemble wakes, though this is not true for all Nine-nights. It was not true in Shaquan's case whose Nine Night was a cross between a wake, church service and leadership talk for those traumatised young men in attendance.

On September 5th, I was contacted by Sharon Hunter-Cobbina, a community leader of the calibre as described by Saul Alinsky²⁶. She and I had supported the Deslandes family a few years before, so she knew that we have the resources and credibility needed to support a family at their time of loss and where necessary, run a fully fledged campaign with media and political dimensions plugged in. She asked me to attend the Nine Night that was being held for Shaquan within the London borough of Lewisham. I was confused by the request and responded by saying

“Sis, I don't understand why you want me to come to Lewisham. There are a number of known man in that borough who could speak to the youths, and you know that the minute I put my foot on the ground, it will set hares running in the local authority and amongst those locals who think Lewisham belongs to them.”

Sharon responded by saying

“Viv, I have already called everyone. They are either not available on that day; don't think they are appropriate, or I just can't get through to them. A couple of key men said “yes”, then changed their minds. They don't want to jeopardise their government crumbs or they're too frightened of the youths. Whatever the reason the elders in the area are nowhere to be seen.”

She also said

“these young men are shocked and confused; they will all be at this event pretending to be alright, but they won't be. You and I know they are traumatised by Shaquan's death and all the other drug related violence and home stresses they're exposed to every day. They need a real elder to come speak to them whilst their heads are open to listening; there will be loads of them there because Shaquan was well liked. If these other man are not willing to come speak to their youths, we can't beg them and we ain't got time to wait.”

I agreed to attend and decided to take Gwenton Sloley along with me for several reasons

1. At 35 years old, he represented more of a father figure to these young men-the majority of them would be under 21 years' old
2. He was like a young version of me in many respects, a hybrid, not field, not house but flitting between the two, respected by both but not fully belonging to, or understood by either
3. He was not a media whore like so many of the guys supposedly representing our community. Even though he suffered from hubris, what ambitious young Black man who has had to raise himself up from the bowels of hell would not think he was somehow blessed above all other men?
4. He had been under contract to provide critical and timely support to those young men caught up in drug fuelled serious youth violence when they most needed it. He was the one who would be there to reassure them when they had been stabbed, shot, kidnapped or violently beaten to within a hair's breadth of death. He was the one who would console the often isolated mother, biological or otherwise, when she was beside herself with a combination of anger, fear and exhaustion. He was the one who would ensure that any other siblings received whatever support they needed, including organising safe accommodation for the whole family if required. He was the one who would arrange mediation and work for a resolution with the perpetrators where possible. We had carried out an evaluation of Gwenton's services a couple a years ago and worked out that he had saved the authorities at least 34 million pounds over the 10 years he'd been doing his invaluable work. This was based on the unit cost of investigating a murder, which was about 1.7 million pounds at the time, and by Gwenton saving just two lives a year, which was a gross under estimation. For all these reasons and more, it made sense to bring Gwenton along to the Nine Night to speak to these young men.

The event took place on September 12th at about 5.30 pm. Gwenton picked me up from the local station and we went through our pre-brief; he brought me up to speed with developments on the ground and we agreed to take the 'soft and hard' approach, with me being soft and him being hard. We agreed that we would not stay for longer than 30 minutes once we were done and that we would debrief with Sharon on the following day.

When we arrived at the venue, a number of things took me by surprise. Firstly, the researcher in me counted all 350 people in the community hall; of that number, 36 were mothers; a further 19 were young women under 21; 9 were men over the age of 35, leaving 286 young men. Secondly, the 9 elder males lacked presence in the room, as if the life force had been sucked out of them by a debilitating illness and/or a life time of back breaking work. The women were running around organising and facilitating matters as is usually the case, because women are the back bone of the community and the home. Thirdly, there were no statutory services in attendance, nor any of the many organisations who are contracted to support these young men and the community. In short, at that critical time of need, the leadership from men in the local community was non-existent.





I spoke first, and opened by telling the young people that contrary to the media narrative and that of other elders in the community and elsewhere, they were not responsible for the violence. What the youths were doing was no more than a consequence of our failure as elders to represent them and keep them safe. It was at this point they started listening and filming me as I spoke. I concluded by telling them how trauma works and how it was important for them to tell someone close to them if they feared violence from others, and how exposure to violence both physical and psychological can breed violence and that it was important for them to speak to someone if they felt the anger rising up in them. Lastly, I told them that I would do my bit to ensure something came in to existence that would do a better job of mobilising their parents and other adults to more effectively represent them.

Gwenton spoke next, coming in on them low and hard. He said,

“Don’t sit there like you are innocent. Remember it’s me who came and got you out of jail when you were in there all crying and scared. It’s me coming round your yard late at night after all dem other professionals long gone to their house, to make sure your mother and little sister are safe. So I know you ain’t

no gangsta. I know it ain’t easy for you to keep out of tings, but you know if you don’t, it is madness for you and madness for your mum and youngers too. We are here if you want to talk, or if people are forcing you to do things that you don’t want to do, you know I am serious because I am the one pulling you out of pushes at night, when you’re hiding from man who’s looking to stab you up.”

We left shortly thereafter; the young people filmed what we had said to them and posted it on Youtube, and shortly afterwards, one of the young boys, a 13 year old-broke down and told his mother that he was being forced to deal weed in school. As a consequence, Gwenton and his people were able to get that young boy the support he needed. If he had not disclosed as a result of hearing us speak at Shaquan’s Nine Night, he would have been caught and expelled or become a part of the violence either as perpetrator, victim or both. What I remembered about that night was the heart breaking fact that there are Nine Nights taking place all over the country. Yet, the opportunity to talk to those angry and frightened young people is not being taken up by community elders/leaders or professionals and so the cycle of violence mostly driven by drug dealing and stark inequality goes on.



If it were not for Sharon Hunter-Cobbina's determination and understated selfless qualities to be the change that she wants to see, I would not have agreed to attend that event and I would not have contacted Gwenton to be there as well. That is why community leadership is key to resolving the community's issues, the most visible aspect of which is youth violence and over representation in the criminal justice system. When we left the building, there were 5 young men standing outside who were in their mid to late twenties. Gwenton informed me that they were the elders in the borough as far as the young people were concerned. Some of them were not actually located in the borough, although their associates still operated there, unlike the real elders from the area who were, for the most part, nowhere to be seen that night.

The anger and disappointment was not solely directed at local authority representatives and others during this transformational meeting with these youths, primarily because there was not an expectation that they would or could, provide leadership. It was the Black man who was cited as being primarily responsible for the problems and as such it was the Black man who was being charged with the responsibility for putting things right.

Elders were not engaging young men. The "lost ones", a term used in relation to those Black men in jail, either through the revolving

door justice system or on long-term sentences, were cited as absentees whose loss further contributed to challenges in the home; and as a consequence, challenges in the community. Those few men who are willing to stand up, too often lack the competence and emotional intelligence needed for leadership. Too often well-meaning initiatives descend into feuds with other so called leaders, rather than focusing on community need. Too often failing to take wise counsel and failing to share information that would contribute significantly to the community's development and progression.

“All we want is for you adults to work together so we have someone to look up to. Right now we just feel shame.”

Young man from London Focus group



Blaksox: A Product of This Consultation

Our information dissemination and joint working activities resulted in 38 organizations coming together to consolidate the Blaksox movement in just 26 weeks. We believe that with increased support, this social action movement and others like it, will begin to run community empowerment and leadership programmes in Black communities across the country. Recent work by Citizens UK and Locality, further highlight the need for Black-led social action initiatives from which Black communities can directly benefit.

Blaksox is a Social Action Hub (SAH): a specific point of community contact that hard pressed statutory services and major service providers-both public and private sector-can meaningfully partner with, and through which communities can gain access to critical information that at present rarely finds its way to them.

Blaksox and its member organisations have an important part to play in continuing the process of awareness raising within the Black community around the drug reform debate. For example, we know that mainstream providers do not take cannabis use seriously, as something that requires drugs treatment. However, it is increasingly cited as a factor in mental health admissions and as a reason for young men being excluded from sectors in the jobs market that will routinely test their prospective employees for drug use. Blaksox is already developing partnership opportunities with mainstream organizations. Blaksox and similar movements need to be further encouraged and supported in their development of partnership and more defused community leadership approaches.

BLAK SOX

**One person cannot
do everything but
everyone can do
something.**



Key findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

Key findings

A number of recurring themes emerged from our exploration of this issue, which were shared by young people, women, men, and professionals alike.

1. Our meta finding was that the differential impact of drug policy on Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups in the UK is a consequence of structural state racism.

The impact of drug policy and practice on BAME groups was described by community members as being part of 'State Racism'. It was experienced as physical and psychological violence by BAME communities within state and structural institutions (education, health criminal justice etc.) and on the streets. Lack of economic opportunity, poor educational attainment, and community violence were constantly referred to as the consequences of state racism and oppression that some also described as being "wrapped up in white skin privilege". The majority of BAME people we consulted thought the "War On Drugs" was actually a deliberate war on BAME people. Those consulted felt that until structural discrimination and violence was addressed, the war on BAME communities would continue even if the "War on Drugs" ended.





“They are hypocrites! They want us to stop fighting when they been fighting from time”

Young drug dealer In London

2. Decriminalisation or legalisation of illegal drugs did not have traction amongst Black communities consulted, as they thought structural inequality and institutional racism would not change.

Discussions regarding the decriminalisation or legalisation of drugs failed to capture the hearts and minds of BAME community members with whom we spoke. Our findings were not the outcome for which many in the drugs de-regulation and decriminalisation movement may have hoped. Drug policy and prohibition was perceived as merely one in an arsenal of weapons that the state deployed to justify its on-going oppression, mass criminalization and subsequent imprisonment of BAME people – particularly young Black men. The differential impact of ‘Stop and Search’ and drugs reform was viewed as just another symptom. During our events – despite a focus on drug policy, conversations revolved around a more generalised sense of oppression felt by many within BAME communities. Participants expressed that, to make drugs reform the main focus of the debate made little sense. All participants thought that to deal with the symptoms, a remedy must be found for the main ailment that was universally described as structural state racism manifesting as global white privilege.

3. Lack of community access to quality information about drug policy, drugs and their impact was evident and hampered development of sustainable community responses.

Consultation indicated a lack of access to quality information around drugs in BAME communities. This was thought to be compounded by the lack of leadership at a community level with white professionals in positions of authority, neither, sharing information nor co-producing solutions with Black-led community-based services. Frustration was expressed at “safe and not challenging” BAME representatives being ‘co-opted’ who lacked the trust of BAME communities.

Despite information about the disproportionate impact of drug policy on BAME communities we consulted, hardly any had actually accessed the data, reports or the recommended solutions. For example, only a few had heard of either the Young Review into disproportionality in the criminal justice system, or the Release work on “Stop and search”. Worryingly, very few participants had knowledge on the impact of drugs and where to get help – particularly high potency “Skunk” cannabis which was widely available and used.

4. Black communities were unaware of the impact of racism in policy 'silos' and how they relate to each other without leadership .

Black communities were unaware of the links between the global war on drugs, UK drugs policy and how the two translate into serious youth violence and increased numbers of young Black men in the criminal justice system. There appeared to be a lack of systems thinking and no credible organisation that helped BAME communities think across silos which has hampered the community's ability to think about linkages and interactions in the UK. The disproportionately negative impact of drug policy on Black communities requires 'grounding' in the wider context of race-based intersectionality and/or a disjoined government that is unwilling and unable to 'join up the dots'.

5. Black communities expressed an absence of leadership in the home and in the community as well as within statutory services

Drug use, drug dealing, 'gang' involvement, school exclusion and involvement in criminal justice systems by young people were discussed as 'common' and a 'source of concern' by all BAME community members consulted. Many parents consulted in the process reported feeling powerless to control their children. Consultees also blamed schools and local authorities for their problems in relation to young people – particularly young Black men. School exclusions and the closure of community facilities were most often cited as key factors that had contributed to a growth in youth street violence. Community members were aware that many 'perpetrators' had been excluded from school with no meaningful alternative provision in place. There was general consensus that Pupil Referral Units of any description were little more than gang recruitment centres or as one parent put it, "slaughter houses for our children". Young people consulted reported that they knew the role of the police: they expected the police to do what police do. However, many young Black people expressed that they felt their "elders" within the Black communities had let them down, by failing to protect them and show consistent, ethical leadership.

"They took money that was meant for us and kept it for themselves. I'll name and shame them right now"

Young man In London

6. BAME communities want to help but expertise and leadership was missing to enable development such as Asset Based Community Development.

At every event and focus group, community groups and individuals consulted wanted to do more to help their communities. People spoke passionately about self-determination and not looking to the state for handouts in order to bring the change that was needed. At one meeting, convened as a consequence of two murders, money was raised to help implement a new Black-led social action movement. Community groups and individuals called for Black men in particular, to work together in order to set positive examples for the young, citing a lack of current leadership to achieve genuine and lasting change. A lack of organisational and community collaboration was cited as a major reason for the community's inability to mobilise and establish a sustainable economic base in response to state racism. In-fighting amongst elders, and competitiveness rather than co-operation between Black organisations was repeatedly cited as the main drivers of 'postcode wars', often related to drug dealing across London and other cities.





7. The lack of BAME community-driven leadership and succession planning and legacy was thought to be actively supported by the authorities.

This consultation found that there were examples of good work that had been done in the past to develop community leadership and initiatives. However, participants said there was a lack of continuity and lack of emphasis on capacity building and succession planning. It was thought that too often those in leadership lack the skills and the emotional literacy needed to establish sustainable institutions. It was felt that members of the community with ‘organisational memory’ of good initiatives were too often locked out of planning, consultation and commissioning processes by the authorities. Furthermore, it was expressed that those in leadership roles placed little or no emphasis on bringing young leaders through the ranks. Community participants felt that as a consequence, lessons learned were rarely passed on, resulting in the same mistakes being made over and over again by a succession of different ill-equipped faces and initiatives.

“We have been here before, and it did not work then”

Local practitioner in Manchester





Conclusions

More needs to be done to help Black communities develop a more informed and rounded position in relation to drugs policy reform. Given the extent to which the war on drugs has clearly been a proxy war on Black people and other poor communities, it is inevitable though unacceptable that Black people in the UK have not been more involved in the debate and campaign for change.

In short, there is a real and urgent need for specialised and on-going capacity building, information sharing and genuine empowerment of Black communities. The aim being to enable our own distinct voice to be heard and the delivery of much greater awareness and understanding of the complexity of drug enforcement, the adverse impact resulting from illicit drugs markets, deprivation, ill health and at its root, the critical role that structural racism plays in maintaining the inequality and poverty that exists in Black communities.

Information dissemination to Black communities on drug policy on an ongoing basis is critically important in order to inform communities and promote action and change. To maximize results, that information must be credible and employ asset-based approaches in order to sustain itself and remain relevant in relation to its community.

Black communities will increasingly need to be able to provide community based interventions to educate community members about drugs and co-produce interventions to address problems related to drugs, as part of a wider health and wellbeing approach to developing community resilience, irrespective of any changes in drug legislation.

More collaborative and targeted work needs to take place with organizations like Release, in order to address the ongoing disproportionality relating to Stop and Search and drugs policy reform, particularly as it relates to drug dealing and the violence it causes in communities.

Finally, our work points to the need for a radical re-evaluation of current research and policy priorities and engagement activity by research institutions and drugs policy groups. The notion that Black youth are politically ambivalent, disengaged and “hard to reach” is largely a consequence of tired yet persistent racial stereotypes and the failure of statutory and non-government organisations to build ethical partnerships/relations with local communities.

Ultimately our aim must be to enable oppressed Black communities to develop an owned and informed leadership that is able to identify and challenge social injustices such as the UK Drugs Policy. Ultimately, Black communities must develop their own economic base from which greater independence and community resilience to the racism they suffer can emerge.

“We will either find a way or make one.”

Hannibal



Recommendations

1. Address structural state racism and inequality in the UK, or drug policy reform will have little traction or impact amongst Black communities.
2. Increase community access to quality information about drug policy, drugs and their impact to enable the development of sustainable community responses.
3. Increase community access to education, prevention and treatment interventions around drugs including co-production and delivery.
4. Continue the progress made as a result of this consultation process in order to develop strong and dynamic Black community perspectives about drugs policy in the UK
5. A paradigm shift from silo thinking to systems thinking around the impact of all government policies (including drugs) to tackle institutional racism.
6. Support the progress made as a result of this consultation process in relation to the development of Black community leaders and Black led organisations (such as Blaksox) in order to develop strong and dynamic Black community perspectives about drugs policy in the UK
7. Include succession planning and “legacy” initiatives within Community leadership projects, actively supported by the local and central government and charitable trusts.

References

- 0 <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/feb/17/sarah-reeds-mother-deaths-in-custody-holloway-prison-mental-health>
- 1 <http://edition.cnn.com/2016/03/23/politics/john-ehrllichman-richard-nixon-drug-war-Blacks-hippie/>
- 2 <http://www.release.org.uk/publications/numbers-Black-and-white-ethnic-disparities-policing-and-prosecution-drug-offences>
- 3 The House I Live in: <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/films/house-i-live-in/>
- 4 <http://www.youngreview.org.uk/>
- 5 Michelle Alexander: (2013) *The New Jim Crow Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colourblindness* (2012)
- 6 Literature Review
- 7 <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/black-people-still-far-more-likely-to-be-stopped-and-searched-by-police-than-other-ethnic-groups-10444436.html>
- 8 Society Study of Addiction. Volume 110, issue one, pages 19 – 35, January 2015
- 9 The National Institute of Drug Abuse
- 10 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-perspectives-in-ending-gang-and-youth-violence-areas-perceptions-of-the-nature-of-urban-street-gangs>
- 11 Scottish Drug Forum Report March (2007)
- 12 Proven offences by young people for London YOTs, by offence type, age, gender, and ethnicity, year ending March 2015
- 13 <http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/school-exclusions-inquiry>
- 14 <http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN06099>
- 15 Race and the criminal justice system: Ministry of Justice published November 2015
- 16 <http://www.colorlines.com/articles/masked-racism-reflections-prison-industrial-complex>
- 17 <http://www.ippr.org/news-and-media/press-releases/recession-leaves-almost-half-young-Black-people-unemployed-finds-ippr>
- 18 How people are being shut out of America's weed boom. White washing the green rush. Amanda Lewis Buzzfeed 2016.
- 19 <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2014/nov/18/bob-marley-marijuana-herb>
- 20 <http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2016/mar/30/whoopi-goldberg-pot-marijuana-cannabis-products-women>
- 21 <https://www.marleynatural.com>
- 22 <http://www.leafsbysnoop.com/#home-1>
- 23 https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/president-obama-grants-early-release-to-61-more-federal-drug-offenders/2016/03/30/7256bb60-f683-11e5-8b23-538270a1ca31_story.html
- 24 The health and social effects of nonmedical cannabis use, WHO http://www.who.int/substance_abuse/publications/msbcannabis.pdf
- 25 <http://edition.cnn.com/2016/03/23/politics/john-ehrllichman-richard-nixon-drug-war-Blacks-hippie/>
- 26 Saul D Alinsky (1971) *Rules for Radicals*, Vintage Books