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The State of Race Equality in London  
– Is the cup half full or half empty?

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## The State of Race Equality in London - Is the cup half full or is it half empty?

By Maxine James and Ade Sawyerr of Equinox Consulting

### Introduction

Eight years after the passing of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and despite several government initiatives at national, regional and local levels, the people of London still have no comprehensive information on how the implementation of the Act has worked to address and reverse the critical state of race equality in the capital city.

There are still glaring inequalities in the private, public, community and voluntary sectors that are out of place in an advanced country such as Britain; especially in London where people of Asian, Caribbean and African descent represent almost a third (29%) of the capital's total population. Persistent inequalities in political representation, health, education, employment, housing, transport and the criminal justice system impact on the lives of these people on a daily basis affecting their basic needs.

The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 placed general and specific duties on public bodies to (a) eliminate unlawful race discrimination, (b) promote equality of opportunity between persons of racial groups and (c) promote good relations between persons of different racial groups. But in reality the years since these ideals were conceived seems to have produced no discernable impact on these inequalities. This suggests that either race equality initiatives are not working as anticipated or the law does not provide strong enough sanctions to discourage individuals and organisations from breaking the law.

In this article we intend to provide a compilation of race inequality data to highlight that despite what may be seen as gains in race relations there is still a need for further action. We believe that the authorities must show leadership and undertake and through concerted action with several organisations signal to the Asian, Caribbean and African communities that their own contributions

are in tune with what the political leaders of London want to achieve.

### Housing

Although we do not often come across Black people sleeping rough, compared to whites, homelessness is high at 22% for people from the old Commonwealth and Pakistan. Much homelessness is hidden in overcrowded households. According to London borough statistics overcrowding is as much as 23% for Pakistani and Bangladeshi people compared to only 2% of white people. The conventional explanation is that these communities have larger families and therefore place undue strain on statutory sector housing allocation. But, such arguments are weak because larger families do not explain the other inequalities.

From an economic viewpoint, persons from African, Caribbean and Asian backgrounds tend to have the lowest house ownership and the lowest equity and are almost three times more likely to live in poor neighbourhoods. Many say that they do not feel safe walking at night, insecurity confirmed by Metropolitan Police data suggesting that one in three racist incidents recorded occurred in or outside the person's home and that 25% cases involved local youths or neighbours.

So not only do black people have an inadequate stake in the properties that they live in, but, because they tend to live in deprived neighbourhoods they also have problems associated with losing out in the postcode lottery in terms of insurance, jobs, good education and health care for their children.

Poor housing is a reflection of household poverty. It is important that decent housing for those who cannot afford to buy, in these times of high interest rates and credit crunch, becomes a priority for whoever gets the mandate to run London.

## Transport

Despite all the advances to improve the transport system, inequalities that need addressing persist. People from black and minority ethnic communities are less likely to own motor cars and tend to rely disproportionately on public transport than the white communities. Often fear of racial attacks force people from ethnic minority communities to undertake longer journeys preferring the buses because of the presence of other people who are able to assist them, rather than by underground which is faster. The numbers of people from African Caribbean and Asian communities using the Underground fell by 28%, and 11% have stopped using it altogether. One in six ethnic minority people feel more excluded from using the Underground system as against 11% from the mainstream community. Similarly, those who do not speak English very well prefer to use the Oyster Card, despite being relatively more expensive because of the set up costs.

Safety remains an issue in the use of transport system because people from ethnic minority communities are more afraid to go on the public transport system especially, waiting at isolated bus and train stations, for fear of racist attacks. In some boroughs, children and young people from BME communities are over represented as pedestrian casualties though they make shorter journeys.

On a positive note, London's transport has been a good source of employment for people from ethnic minority communities. Sadly, while they account for 32% of the overall transport work force, as with other public sector organisations, they are less well represented at senior management levels.

## Health

The names of diseases may change but inequalities in health are stark. Some diseases, especially those associated with poverty, such as tuberculosis, which were supposed to be eradicated decades ago, are now creeping back into wealthy Britain, and mostly affecting BME

communities; the incidence of HIV and AIDS among heterosexuals is far higher within certain African communities as is the incidence of sexually transmitted disease.

Some other health problems relate to the predisposition of African and Caribbean people to hypertension and strokes and a lower ability to recover from these illnesses. Angina and heart disease are more prevalent amongst Pakistani and Indian people; asthma is highest amongst young Caribbean and African people and sickle cell anaemia is almost exclusive to these communities.

But it is not only at the level of disease that there are inequalities, they are also reflected at the points of referral and treatment. Take mental health: Findings of the First National Census on Mental Health Hospitals revealed that unprecedented levels of racism had adverse effects on African and Caribbean patients in the system with rates of admission for Black Caribbean and Black African men three times higher than average. The referral rate of Caribbean and African patients by their GPs is 60% lower than average. Referrals by the police and the Courts were almost double the average for Blacks. Black patients were likely, by as much as over 40%, to be detained under the Mental Health Act 1983; Black patients are also less likely to be given talking therapies treatment. Data also shows a higher proportion of BME mental health patients dying of unnatural causes.

Life expectancy rates in inner city areas are much lower than in outer London areas and since black people live mostly in inner city areas, it is shocking to discover that people who have left Third World countries with low life expectancy should come to an advanced country and still suffer similar rates of life expectancy.

## Labour market

In the job market the inequalities are dramatically highlighted. The employment rate is 59% for the ethnic minority population though as high as 77% for the main population; ethnic minority people are twice as likely -

6.85% to be unemployed than whites at 3.4%.

Whilst nearly 75% of Bangladeshi women are economically inactive only a quarter of white women are. Ethnic minority people are less likely to be managers in organisations and generally work in industries that pay less than the national average.

African, Caribbean and Asian people have a strong history of employment in the NHS, which is still the largest employer of black staff in England; representing 13% of the staff. But here too, the record of inequalities is as dismal. Black staff are primarily employed at the junior levels within the Service. So, for instance, whilst 10% of nurses are from a BME communities only 4% are nursing directors.

They are also under-represented at executive director level. Women represent 47.94% of Chairs and Non-Executive Directors of NHS organisations in London of all those appointed to Strategic Health Authority (SHA) Hospital Trusts and Primary Care Trusts compared to 26% for BME groups and whilst women were 47.22% of chairs only 18.05% were BME. It is feared that the position might have worsened with the creation of foundation trusts and the new PCT and Health Authority boundaries.

It would seem that there is an ethnic penalty in the wages paid, as the average weekly wage for Bangladeshi workers who are at the bottom of the employment scales is as much as £150 per week less than for white people.

There have been several initiatives to address these inequalities in the labour market but it is felt that these need to be more directed at employers in the public as well as in the private and voluntary sectors.

The Race Relations Amendment Act 2000 calls for organisations in the public sector to develop Race Equality Schemes (RES) that would show the level of inequality and their plans for addressing these issues. Most have developed the Schemes, however many organisations including government agencies and

departments have not been sufficiently concerned to conduct Race Equality Impact Assessments required by the same law to show whether existing or new policies have a differential impact on particular groups of people.

### **The Criminal Justice System**

The score card for black involvement in the criminal justice system is one of over-representation as victims and perpetrators and under-representation in the administration of justice and keeping the system running.

Home Office statistics shows that Caribbean people are 8 times more likely to be stopped by the police than white people and after the incidents of 7/7 the statistics show that Asian people are three times more likely to be stopped. Though reported crime has gone down, the number of racially motivated crime has risen by 10% in London; black people are also disproportionately victims of crime.

The numbers of black people in prison has seen a rapid climb to the extent that since 2000 the population of black people in prison has seen an eightfold increase. What is shocking is that black people are six times more likely to be given a custodial sentence than whites, are more likely to be refused bail and more likely to be tried in Crown Courts. Caribbean people, however, are more likely to have their cases discontinued before trial; because they have been inappropriately charged and more likely to be acquitted because they should not have been charged in the first place.

There are more black young people going to prison by at least one third than those going to university!!! The figures show that in 2002 whilst around 8,000 young African and Caribbean people were finding their way around their university campuses and unions to join their African Caribbean associations, 11,500 of their brothers and sisters were being detained at her Majesty's pleasure. And when in custody black people are more likely to die; of the 23 deaths in custody 16 were from ethnic communities.

These figures are perhaps less surprising if you consider that African and Caribbean people are grossly under-represented in the area of maintaining the peace and deciding who should go to prison.

There have been improvements in increasing the number of ethnic minority officers in the Met. It is now 13.1% of the total workforce, which is still below the percentage of BAME people in the London population (29%) and they tend to be in the lower echelons of the service. A quarter of the new recruits were graduates. This is revealing especially in the face of statements made by previous heads of the police that in order for them to employ more BME officers they would have to lower their standards.

Again though there have been improvements in completion of training, a gap still remains. In 2006, 11.9% of ethnic minority recruits did not complete initial training compared to 4.8% of white officers. However black people in the police service are more likely to face disciplinary action, more likely to be subjected to formal procedures rather than informal speedier approaches used for white members of staff and more likely to have to use Employment Tribunals for redress. Though black people are not being accepted into the police force as fast as they should be, their numbers are increasing as traffic wardens.

African Caribbean and Asian people are greatly under-represented in the administration of justice— only 6% are magistrates and 5% are district judges and there were none in positions above high court judge.

These inequalities endure despite a lot of race equality impact assessments that have been carried out within the criminal justice system.

For those young people who are not locked up and are free to go to school there are inequalities in the education system that is just as unfair and unjust to people from African Caribbean and African communities.

## Education

When experts discuss underachievement in education, they often talk about it in relation to the Asian, Caribbean and African young people, as if it is an inherent characteristic of these groups. The educational system that is considered to be a process for overcoming disadvantage seems rather to have become the gateway into it.

In the 1970s Bernard Coard lifted the lid on the scandal of black underachievement in his book **'How the West Indian child is made educationally subnormal in the British school system'**. Coard revealed that more often than not, a potent combination of poverty and racism led to the Black child being labelled 'educationally subnormal', rather than any actual deficiency of their intellect. Recent studies such as **'Tell it like it is'**, remind us that poverty and racism are still at the heart of why African Caribbean and some Asian children, lag behind in the education system and are not making the type of progress in the school system that we expect. They are more likely to attend schools in the Inner London areas where the school system despite a lot of improvement is still not as good as in outer London

The facts suggest that over two thirds of children from African Caribbean and Asian backgrounds attend school in London, where they make up 20% of pupils in the maintained school system in Outer London and 31% in Inner London schools.

In the secondary school system they are disproportionately more likely to end up in local authority schools instead of the higher achieving and better managed religious schools. A large number, 40%, attend academies that are yet to show improvements on the schools they replaced and that tend to have the worst results countrywide. It is interesting to note that in the latest GCSE league tables 9 out of 11 academies were in the bottom 200 schools in England. African Caribbean children are three times more likely to be permanently excluded from school which results in a disruption on their lives. Some progress has been

made by secondary school students. The number achieving A\* - C grades is now 45% compared to the national average of 59.6%.

Young people can expect little understanding from their teachers as there is as much discrimination in the employment of teaching staff as there is in teaching pupils. Black teachers, though better qualified, (55% of them have degrees as against 49% for the mainstream population), account for less than 7.4% of the teaching staff and for 4.9% of managerial staff and 1% of principals.

Their experience in higher education is not much different. There is a tendency for them to study in universities in London because they find it harder to gain access to the top universities outside the capital. In 11 universities where Blacks are in the majority, all are in London and seven are former polytechnics. They are more likely to enter universities with less conventional qualifications and are more likely to be accepted for vocational and professional courses than for academic ones. This does not necessarily enhance their chances of employment despite the fact that they go into the labour market more academically qualified for their jobs.

### **Political representation**

Do people of African, Caribbean and Asian descent have political clout in London? Are their numbers a fair representation of the proportion of their people across the communities? And if not what can be done to redress the position for them? Anecdotal evidence suggests that voting amongst members of the Asian, Caribbean and African populations is falling and despite all the plethora of initiatives directed at encouraging them to vote they are now starting to question whether voting changes anything for them in the face of static representation from their communities in our political institutions.

The proportion of people from Asian, Caribbean and African communities in Parliament is 2.3%, 15 out of 659 seats, the proportion of Members of the European Parliament is 1%. If

representation in these institutions reflected the 9% of BME people nationally this would translate into 60 Members of Parliament from Asian, Caribbean and African backgrounds..

At local government level Tower Hamlets leads the way with 57%, Newham with 40% and Brent with 21% of councillors coming from these communities. But in other areas in London the representation rate is much lower than the proportion in the population:

And at the regional level, in the Greater London Assembly, where it matters that all the London communities' expectations would be fairly and proportionally represented, the rate of a dismal 8% still falls far short of the 29% proportion in the population.

The question that one needs to ask is what the established political parties are doing to provide a level playing field and redress the inequalities so that there is an increase in the participation of more people from the Asian, Caribbean and African communities in lawmaking and setting of policy.

### **Conclusion**

The general state of race equality in London is that the law is failing to make a real impact in all areas, there is no sense of urgency because there are those who believe that integration will take place anyway and that with mainstreaming of issues that affect the BAME communities, organisations will willingly adopt and improve race relations. There is no evidence to support this view and it is crucial that with the growth of the ethnic minority population in London, the inequalities that plague the system in political representation, housing, health, education, employment, transport and the criminal justice system should not be allowed to widen.

Despite 27 years of race relations legislation and eight years of the RRAA 2000 progress has been slow and sporadic as many agencies find it difficult to identify race equality outcomes so tend to focus much of their activities on policy and process without a clear vision of the end result. This is a

sad state of affairs, if race equality is to be achieved in this country as a whole then it is vital that we get things right in London.

The Trade Union Congress recommends the extension of the general duties of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 to the private and voluntary sectors. However with the poor record, so far, within the public sector it is feared that without robust means of enforcing the current Act there is even less chance that an extension would have any impact.

More work on race equality in London needs to be undertaken as a driver to achieving actual race equality in the capital city. This work should continue throughout the year collating the patchy information now available at the regional level and consolidating it into a coherent body of information for the region. More information is needed on organisations that seek to implement and comply with the RRAA 2000 and how they are going about it, what targets they are setting and to what extent the targets are being met.

Those organisations that have problems in complying will be assisted with best practice case studies and toolkits that will be compiled and documents that will be disseminated during the year.

With almost one third of the population of London from minority ethnic communities, the State of Race Equality in London conference should be an annual event to enable organisations to take more seriously issues around compliance with the Act and how they implement their race equality schemes. The prospect of yearly reporting and yearly assessment will be a spur to improvement and they may come to welcome this annual event as they seek to make progress on the implementation of their schemes.

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*Why Race Equality is Poor in Rich London*

A report card on race equality will be a useful addition to assessing performance of public sector organisations and how they value their employees and their communities. This work would assist in the development of a league table of public sector organisations and how they are fulfilling their duties under the Act.

Although a majority of public sector organisations are struggling to fulfil their duties and obligations under the Act, the government should consider extending the Act to all organisations including the private and the voluntary sector as well as political parties and independent schools. Focus on the public sector alone sends the wrong message - that this is a problem for this sector alone, while the commercial and voluntary sectors are can continue with the with business as usual. The fact of the matter is that it is essential to achieve race equality in all sectors.

London is now under new management and it more reason why the Mayor of London should lead with an increased sense of urgency to ensure that race equality in London is achieved. The Mayor must find a mechanism for policing the state of organisations it does business with and encourage and strengthen efforts of organisations that are not covered by the Act devising a range of mechanisms that include contract compliance and procurement solutions to the issue.

It must be emphasised that who runs London runs that heart of the nation and must recognise that there is a lot more work to be done on race equality; they must be prepared to champion race equality and ensure that all in the community are able to benefit equally in the gains of London as one of the richest cities in the world. Yes a lot of work has been done over the past eight years, but in the eyes of a large number of African Caribbean and Asian people, the glass is not half full, it is still half empty.