



COMMUNITY ASSETS

The Asian Peoples
Disability Alliance
(APDA)

THE URGENT NEED FOR
COMMUNITY ASSET
OWNERSHIP FOR ETHNIC
MINORITY COMMUNITIES

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Community Assets

Maintaining a safe space for black and Asian minority ethnic groups

What are community assets?

Buildings, community halls, places of worship, town halls, libraries and other amenities in cities, towns and villages are the community assets that enhance people's everyday lives. They are frequently publicly owned premises that are transferred into local organisations' hands for less than the market value so that they can directly benefit the community. The transfer of community assets can lead to a variety of arrangements, such as long-term leasehold contracts, where only a minimal rent is paid, short-term leases, a licence to occupy the property or outright ownership. Local authorities can use the transfer of community assets to local groups as part of their strategy to promote equality and diversity and to support social inclusion.

How do community assets benefit black and Asian minority ethnic communities?

Community assets help create safe spaces for people from black and Asian ethnic minority groups, by offering them a "home from home". They are places where they can feel comfortable among others who share their identity, language, culture or common interests and where social support and community services are readily available. They help people from these groups, particularly those who might otherwise be housebound, feel included in the community.

For example, **Asian People's Disability Alliance (APDA)**, provides Asian disabled people with social support and advocacy, organises day centre activities, religious celebrations, training, work experience and volunteering as well as homecare and befriending. It operates from a shared community centre in a residential area of Harlesden, a hive of activity where Asian disabled people and their carers can meet others, speak in their native language and share common cultural experiences. The centre enables people with a disability and their carers to overcome isolation and to socialise.

Michael Jeewa, APDA chief executive, says: "The Asian community, like other minority groups, needs essential space where those affected by serious disabilities, such as dementia, can receive culturally specialised and sensitised support."

Mamta Karia, whose daughter Anisha has been using APDA for over 10 years, praised the work of the organisation: "The centre gave my daughter a space where she could make friends, see familiar faces and familiar people, which is especially good for those with learning disabilities. She particularly enjoyed the sports activities, which are no longer running. Anisha came home very excited and got the opportunity to do activities that she might not otherwise do with me."

Preeti Kale's son Kush has a rare syndrome and is also an APDA service user. Preeti says: "The centre provides good activities, where he can socialise with other children. It also gives us a break so we can take our other little ones to other activities."

Meanwhile, **Apna Ghar**, a housing association for disabled people, provides affordable, accessible housing for disabled people, mainly those from an Asian background. It manages 300 properties across the boroughs of Brent, Ealing, Harrow, Islington, Haringey, Hackney

and Newham. It has itself recently acquired a new office space in Kingsbury, a potential resource for residents, which it has occupied over the past six months.

Jai Dosanjh, chief executive of the organisation, explains: “Once our tenants get to know where we are they might see the premise as their own resource. Residents can use the computer facilities and use our meeting rooms. Hopefully over the long term, they will feel a sense of belonging.”

Grassroots organisation **Association of Blind Asians** was set up and managed by Asian people with visual impairments. For several years, it provided its large number of members with a talking book service, outings, leisure facilities, regular social gatherings and functions at which prominent Bollywood singers would perform. These specialist services ensured members felt they were part of a community.

Brent Indian Association, based at a community centre in Wembley, has been providing services for Indians in Brent for 35 years. Its remit is very broad, offering everything from advice on immigration and welfare rights and social activities, such as a luncheon club for senior citizens and a bridge club, to a reading room and Gujarati classes. All these activities enhance the quality of life of local Indian residents and help to promote social inclusion.

A charity operating in London, Birmingham and Coventry, **Faith Regen Foundation (FRF)** has since 2001 been organising activities to promote social cohesion, such as education, workplace training and intercultural dialogue. It recently added domestic violence and mental health support services to its list of activities in response to evidence of increasing needs in these areas. Catering for a diverse client group, the organisation’s culturally sensitive provision means the organisation’s work has become indispensable. Since its inception, FR has supported over 27,000 clients and had its interventions recognised through numerous awards.

What’s happening to community assets?

Specialised services catering for marginalised groups are finding it much more difficult to obtain and maintain suitable premises.

Over the past 10 years, community asset ownership has suffered a decline because of cuts in funding for voluntary groups and local initiatives. Even where they have been able to acquire a premises, a lack of funding has sometimes meant they have not had the resources to invest in the property to ensure it is well maintained or to carry out refurbishments, and they often end up falling into disrepair. They might then be forced to give up the property.

On top of this, the move to cater for mainstream organisations in traditionally minority ethnic areas through ‘gentrification’, has contributed to a reduction in community assets and the rising price of property particularly in urban areas, has meant local authorities have been more reluctant to transfer their assets to the local community than they otherwise would have been. They often prefer instead to sell them off to private developers or as part of private finance initiatives, where private capital funds public infrastructure.

Changing council policies and priorities have added to these difficulties and have led to shorter leases on buildings creating insecurity among community groups.

Localism Act 2011

The Localism Act 2011 allows councils to keep a list of assets of community value, which have been nominated by local community groups. Community groups can put in a bid and raise money to buy the asset when it comes on the open market. Also known as the community right to bid, the scheme aims to provide local communities with more control over facilities and assets in their area. While it's a good way of promoting local involvement and community action, the downside is that individual volunteers with the most expertise, relevant skills, appropriate networks and free time are at an advantage over more marginalised groups. The scheme also relies on people being aware that it exists.

The Ubele report (<http://locality.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/A-Place-to-Call-Home-exec-summary.pdf>) has shown that, despite the Localism Act, very few black and Asian minority ethnic communities have benefited from the community right to bid. Interviews with a number of organisations have revealed that applications submitted to local authorities to have their assets designated as those of community value have been ignored or rejected.

Imbalances in community funding

The difficulties black and Asian minority ethnic community organisations experience with premises echo wider unequal treatment in what has become an increasingly competitive funding climate. Mainstream organisations are applying for resources designed to address the specific needs of black and Asian people as a way of boosting their own funding, sub-contracting minority groups to carry out the work on their behalf. Funding agencies also appear to prioritise large mainstream charities over black and Asian groups when they allocate financial support, leaving black and Asian groups under-resourced and marginalised.

Why Asian community groups need asset ownership now more than ever

But the need for community services is growing as the Asian ethnic population expands.

According to the London's Poverty Profile,

(<http://www.londonpovertyprofile.org.uk/indicators/topics/londons-geography-population/londons-population-by-country-of-birth/>)

an estimated 290,000 people in London were born in India in 2014, an increase from 190,000 in 2004; people born in Pakistan was the next largest group born outside the UK, having doubled in size – from 57,000 in 2004 to 134,000 in 2014.

Added to the growth in the Asian population, is the rise in the number of older people in the UK as people live longer, which means there are likely to be more black and Asian people who are frail and disabled. According to the Office for National Statistics

(<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/ageing/bulletins/estimatesoftheveryoldincludingcentenarians/2002to2015>), there were an estimated

over half a million people (556,270) aged 90 and over living in the UK in 2015, up from 194,670 people in 1985. Although those aged 90 and over accounted for only 0.9% of the total UK population in 2015, the size of this group relative to the rest of the population has increased over time. In 1985, there were 344 people aged 90 and over per 100,000 population, compared with 854 people aged 90 and over per 100,000 population in 2015.

As a result of these population changes, community organisations serving Asian people will see a rise in demand for their services, which they can only continue to meet if they are able to operate from premises that are large enough to accommodate an increasing client base and secure sustainable accommodation to guarantee their future.

What difficulties are groups facing?

Recognising the importance of offering culturally specific services within a secure community premises, the **APDA** attempted to acquire its own community space. It secured a sizable amount of funding under a central government regeneration programme. However, the local authority directed the organisation to divert its funds towards renovating a dilapidated building set within the grounds of the local hospital. Together with colleagues from the disability movement, it turned the building into a fully accessible day care and independent living training centre.

Michael Jeewa says: “After just 10 years, both local and health authorities compelled the APDA to relinquish adequately spaced premises acquired by our own efforts and providing appropriate services for vulnerable ethnic minority elderly and disabled people and their carers and families. This was so that they could accommodate a private finance initiative scheme that turned a purpose-built fully accessible centre for elderly and disabled people into a building used for administrative purposes. The landlord ignored disabled people’s motto of ‘Nothing about us without us.’”

As a result, the organisation had to move to a less suitable centre, which it currently shares with another organisation. The space is cramped and fails to cater for the rising demand for the charity’s services. As a result, the APDA has been forced to close several projects, including its popular sports activities, and is struggling to meet the needs of a growing client base, particularly those with learning disabilities and dementia. The APDA is now exploring the possibility of setting up a porta cabin on a small plot of land adjacent to the centre to cater specifically for people facing these challenges.

The Association of Blind Asians had to operate under the patronage of a mainstream national organisation and from rented accommodation, which meant it lacked an independent, secure space. The situation was exacerbated by a lack of statutory support and it was forced to reduce its services. A dedicated community premises and secure government funding would have helped maintain and sustain this user-led organisation, which had gained valuable expertise in meeting the needs of Asian people with visual disabilities as well as those of their carers and families.

Brent Indian Association has also had its fair share of difficulties with buildings. In 1976, thanks to funding from the Urban Aid Programme, the organisation acquired a property in north London. However, in the 1980s, Brent council decided to terminate the lease and repossess the building. A court battle took place and the organisation managed to retain the building, overcoming a fire that was later to gut the premises. The organisation eventually bought the freehold of the property, but is finding it hard to survive as a result of dwindling statutory support. The increasing needs of the local community mean that the organisation’s current community hall is no longer big enough to accommodate more than 90 people. The organisation plans to extend the building, but it must raise the money required to build it.

For **FRF**, a dedicated community space is vital to ensure the organisation continues to provide its services. High rent increases have, however, forced it to quit the centre where it was based over the previous 14 years.

A spokesperson for the organisation comments: “As a community organisation we find the rent in London extremely high and mostly offered through long-term leases, which become difficult if all our activities are time-bound and project-based. A community space would

reduce the pressure on our core costs and allow us to continue assisting our community. It would act as a base for many services instead of having them dispersed.”

What’s the solution?

When community groups lose their buildings as has happened to several black and Asian minority ethnic organisations, it can often mean that culturally specific social support and community services can no longer be provided or must be cut back. Local councils and health authorities must consider what happens to community groups when they are unable to maintain a building either because the lease runs out or the local authority decides to sell off the building to a private developer. Carrying out an impact assessment is a vital step towards improving local groups’ access to community assets.

The statutory sector must also recognise the significant and longstanding contribution organisations such as the APDA, Brent Indian Association, Apna Ghar and FRF have made towards meeting its own social objectives. Local councils, health authorities and central government need to harness the expertise they don’t have themselves by supporting and promoting these community groups so that they can continue to provide a holistic range of culturally tailored services. The services complement government provision and could operate from a single hub premises offering a ‘one-stop-shop’ solution. Making affordable, sustainable community assets available to black and Asian minority ethnic groups helps the statutory sector meet its own equality and social inclusion targets, preventing marginalisation and ensuring everyone has a stake in the local community.



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