

REFUGEE COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS: FROM HERE TO 2012 AND BEYOND

Refugee Action/Refugee Council
Basis Review Session
Muath Trust
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Angus McCabe: TSRC

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INTRODUCTION



- About the Third Sector Research Centre
- ‘Below the radar’ groups
- Issues in researching ‘below the radar’
- Research findings: refugee community organisations – issues and challenges
- RCOs in policy context
- And towards 2012 and beyond.....

ABOUT TSRC



- Third Sector Research Centre
- 5 year research initiative (OTS/ESRC/Barrow Cadbury funded)
- Measuring the sector and its impact
- Long term studies of different aspects of the sector.
- Various work streams: social enterprise, service delivery, commissioning '*below the radar*'

ACTIVITIES

- Literature review
- Definitions and discussion papers
- Reference Group
- Micro-mapping of below the radar activity in 2 areas
- Key informant interviews (29)
- Seminars (refugee and migrant community organisations)
- Reports and ‘think pieces’ in preparation
- Longitudinal case studies commencing

WHAT IS BELOW THE RADAR?

Two definitions:

- Financial: groups with incomes of less than £25k, £30k, £250k
- Legal: unregistered with Charity Commission, Companies House, Community Interest Company Regulator

BTR: A USEFUL TERM?

- Definition would apply to most RCOs
- But even small RCOs are registered
- RCO's help us think of 'other radars'
- Policy, influence, 'visibility beyond the community', 'virtual visibility'
- RCOs moving off and on the radar (Tamil community)

RESEARCH DIFFICULTIES

Focus in Third Sector research is on:

- formal voluntary sector rather than ‘community’
- formal volunteering and organisation rather than activity
- limited framework for reflecting on ‘below the radar’ activity in the sector (which and whose ‘radars’?)
- ‘sub-sector’ research – eg faith groups, housing etc’
- Limited RCO research (though stronger than ‘community’ research generally)

RCOs IN THE LITERATURE

Primary issues regarding RCO's:

- funding
- governance
- skills/skills 'shortages'
- relationship with government
- service delivery agendas
- 'mapping' the RCO sector
- Key gaps in exploring parts of the sector – culture/arts – cultural identity

RCO FUNCTIONS

From the research literature:

- Crisis intervention
- Integration
- Advocacy
- Gate-keeping and brokerage
- Cultural identity (limited research)

OTHER RESEARCH THEMES



Below the radar' – a deficit model?

- Activity 'beyond government'
 - Focus 1; social, cultural (identity) health, care and wellbeing
 - Focus 2: campaigning, social justice and change
 - Inclusive or exclusive?
 - The impact of legislation/regulation?
 - Funding/policy 'bending community agendas'
 - Power relationships – with the statutory sector *and* formal voluntary organisation
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RCOs CONTROVERIES AND GAPS

- Size and scope of RCOs
- Is there a distinct 'RCO' sector? Issues of language, understandings, dispersal? Are RCO's 'different' from other small community groups/activities
- RCOs and faith based organisation?
- Integration or separations? Cultural identity – social/bridging capital?
- Motivations and life-cycles – the sustainability agenda
- Capacity building – to what end?

RCOs IN POLICY CONTEXT 1

Official policy

- From Full and Equal Citizens (2000) through to Integration Matters (2005)
 - Specific policies re employment – Working to Rebuild Lives (2005)
 - Shared themes of ‘border control’, integration, cohesion and access to employments
 - Refugee focused without wider reference points
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RCOs IN POLICY CONTEXT 2

“A healthy community sector is critical for the sustainability of local communities. It is not an end in itself. It helps deliver social capital, social cohesion and democratic participation” p1

“The sector reaches groups that government, central and local cannot. It helps Government, central and local provide solutions and answers to difficult questions that affect disadvantaged communities and groups. It has a tradition of being able to spot emerging needs within communities that larger institutions find it hard to do.” p7

CLG 2007 Local Community Sector Task Force

RCO POLICY CONTEXT 3

Other policy drivers may be:

- The politics of fear: *“How do we change what we don’t understand?”*
- The management of diversity: service planning agendas.

RCOs IN THE FUTURE

Some challenges:

- Recession and cuts: vulnerability – need to demonstrate impact
- The ‘push’ from advocacy to service delivery: incorporation?
- From asylum and refugee to migration
- ‘Sinn fein’, alliances or partnerships
- Islamaphobia
- The rise of the ‘organised right’ *in community politics*

RCOs IN FUTURE

Some opportunities:

- Duty to involve
- Personalisation agenda in health and social care
- Responsive/modernised services accountable to communities
- Social enterprise or communities as markets
- Working with rhetorics and confusions
- Opportunities but also threats?

FINAL THOUGHTS AND A PLEA

- *“Thank goodness for MRCOs. They are the lively part of an increasingly dull and moribund voluntary sector.”* (Community Activist, London)
- RCOs – don’t just do it, don’t just talk it –
WRITE IT!

LEAVING THOUGHTS:

“Never confuse the level of formality, structure and organisation with activity and impact.”

“For every statement about community groups and activity that has an evident truth, there is an equal and opposite truth.”

“Community activity....social return without investment?”