

# VOICE OF BANGLADESHI WOMEN

2005

Report researched by: Shamima Chowdhury

*“Having this discussion has brought out a lot of stuff that I personally wouldn’t have talked about. Discussing it, there are things in your head that come out that you yourself don’t realise. How you feel about your community, your own culture. I think discussions like this will help the community more”*

(Anonymous)

Kindly funded by:



**COMMUNITY FUNDING UNIT  
INNOVATION GRANT**

Report  
commissioned by:



**“Creating opportunity, releasing  
potential, achieving excellence”**

## Table of Contents

Forward.....	4
Introduction.....	5
Background.....	6
Brief history of Bangladeshi settlement in Britain .....	6
Methodology.....	7
Research Consultant.....	7
Method.....	7
Research Findings.....	8
Manningham: Women aged 25 years and over.....	8
Topic: Bradford.....	8
Topic: Education.....	8
Topic: Environment .....	8
Topic: Health .....	8
Topic: Employment .....	8
Topic: Leisure .....	9
Manningham: Women aged 24 years and under.....	9
Topic: Bradford.....	9
Topic: Education.....	9
Topic: Environment .....	9
Topic: Health .....	9
Topic: Employment .....	9
Topic: Leisure .....	10
Barkerend: Women aged 25 years and over .....	10
Topic: Bradford.....	10
Topic: Education.....	10
Topic: Environment .....	10
Topic: Health .....	10
Topic: Employment .....	10
Topic: Leisure .....	11
Barkerend: Women aged 24 years and under .....	11
Topic: Bradford.....	11
Topic: Education.....	11
Topic: Environment .....	11
Topic: Health .....	11
Topic: Employment .....	11
Topic: Leisure .....	12
Little Horton: Women aged 25 years and over.....	12
Topic: Bradford.....	12
Topic: Education.....	12
Topic: Environment .....	12
Topic: Health .....	13
Topic: Employment .....	13
Topic: Leisure .....	13
Little Horton: Women aged 24 years and under.....	13
Topic: Bradford.....	13
Topic: Education.....	13
Topic: Environment .....	13
Topic: Health .....	14
Topic: Employment .....	14
Topic: Leisure .....	14
Analysis of Findings .....	15

Common themes of concern .....	15
Education .....	15
Environment.....	15
Health.....	15
Employment.....	15
Leisure .....	15
Recommendations.....	15
Education .....	15
Environment.....	16
Health.....	16
Employment.....	17
Leisure .....	17
General.....	18
Conclusion .....	19
Bibliography .....	22
Useful Websites .....	22

## **Forward**

BEAP Community Partnership originally arose from the Bangladeshi community, in Manningham, Bradford. They now stand to serve the most needy in the community, regardless of cultural background; and serve districts across Bradford. However, true to their origins, BEAP still retains a special interest in the Bangladeshi community.

BEAP commissioned this report because they recognised that there was an urgent need to consult with Bangladeshi women, who had for some time been missing out on service provision. This project was established to ascertain the levels of current (un-met) need, and perceptions of service provision in Bradford to these women, very much in a minority, and perceived as excluded from mainstream provision.

BEAP applied, successfully, to Bradford Council Community Funding Unit for a grant to undertake a pilot research project and publish the findings. This is the result of that work – but far from the end of the story!

## Introduction

The national census in 1991 was the first time in Britain that ethnic groups were categorised under new headings, other than the previous simple categories of the colours Black and White. Along with eight other groups, the existence of the Bangladeshi minority group came into being.

This survey also gave an insight into the way in which groups were leading their lives. It paved the way for other research that covered important areas of people's lives, highlighting inequalities and barriers. A number of these reports made recommendations whereby policy makers and service providers could improve upon their support mechanisms in order to achieve the wider social covenant of equality, in exchange for people's identification with British society.<sup>1</sup>

There have since been numerous amendments and improvements to social policy and service provisions. However, Bangladeshi women in Bradford have changed, and continue to change as they progress through life, and are consequently moving beyond their earlier identified needs.<sup>2</sup> There is little evidence of research having been undertaken to update these needs, specific to women of this ethnic origin.

The movement of the various stages in life are underpinned by many changes that require support, by individuals and organisations. Therefore, the rationale for this research, commissioned by BEAP Community Partnership, was to explore the current needs and gaps in statutory and voluntary service provisions for Bangladeshi women in Bradford; by utilising primary data of contact and conversations with the women. The topics which the research covers are wide-ranging; from women's perception of Bradford, health, employment, education, leisure and the environment. However, this was only ever anticipated to be a small sample survey, paving the way for more **in depth** research and other work with this group & others. The project only took place over approximately six months and consulted thirty women in total.

The findings are in many ways bold and simple, but bely the **complexity** of underpinning issues (barriers, culture & traditions, etc). It outlines what Bangladeshi women of Bradford consider to be their current needs and gaps in service provision, in Bradford. It is also insightful of issues within the Bangladeshi community and culture itself.

One must not forget, that Bangladeshi women are ethnically and crucially culturally distinct. They have need of recognition and respect of their cultural identity, by the statutory and voluntary services provided for them. In addition to services being culturally sensitive, they need to respond to the **varying levels** of needs of the community, which have an inherent degree of transient change as these women evolve as Bradfordian's. Gaps in services can be alleviated by simultaneously addressing the needs of younger and older Bangladeshi women. These women are here and settled, but like everyone else they will continue to evolve as Bradfordian's!

---

<sup>1</sup> Modood et al, 1997, Parekh, 1997

<sup>2</sup> Modood et al, 1994

## Background

### Brief history of Bangladeshi settlement in Britain

Migration from Bangladesh to Britain started long before the formation of the former Independent State of Bangladesh, in 1971, from its former entity as East Pakistan.

Bangladesh has always had a profound linkage with Britain's colonial expansion, and trade, from the days of the development of the East India Company as early as the sixteenth century. Thereon, a trail of migration occurred as men were recruited from the Bengal delta, including Sylhet, to work on ships as *lascars* and *serangs* (seamen). Many of these men originated from landowning backgrounds. Bengalis were also recruited to Britain as servants. In contrast, there were also educated professionals who travelled from Bangladesh, including Princes who paradoxically occupied prominent roles in Britain.<sup>3</sup>

Seamen and various professionals continued to come to Britain during the nineteenth century, and settled around the dock areas. These pioneering settlers shaped the foundation to the succession of Bangladeshi settlers; through lodging houses, cafes, small businesses and not forgetting restaurants (most of which in Yorkshire are actually run by Bangladeshi's).

The two World Wars considerably changed the face of Britain, mainly because of the shortage of skilled labour. Migrant workers from various New Commonwealth countries were encouraged by the British Government to enter Britain, and fill the more mundane jobs. A special voucher system was introduced as an incentive. Amongst these was an influx of men from Bangladesh, overwhelmingly from Sylhet. Some believed, as members of the British colony, that the Queen was being sympathetic to their plight (with East Pakistan) and that they were arriving in their 'motherland'! However, like other minority migrants groups arriving in Britain at the time, they were not ready for the hostility which came to be shown them. Over time, the indigenous British workforce came to perceive these migrant workers as a 'threat' to their future job prospects, and became openly hostile.

This resulted in uprisings, and gave way to policy changes together with stringent modifications to immigration laws.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, Bangladesh took full advantage of this system during the late 1950's and 1960's - coming over to Britain on a temporary basis intending to make enough money to return back to their 'promised land' and home villages.<sup>5</sup> The population was never large in comparison with other cities, for example London.

Bangladeshi migrants could not have anticipated the shift from their temporary status to one of settlement, as many made Britain their home. These increasing ties with Britain are in contrast to the diminishing ties in Bangladesh.<sup>6</sup>

In Bradford, the Bangladeshi People's Organisation was set up, as well as Tawakkuliah Mosque, catering for the administrative and spiritual needs of the settled community.<sup>7</sup> With these organisations a clear growth of the community had started - all be it later than other 'Asian' groups. By around the 1980s, more and more single Bangladeshi men in Britain married, and those previously married were reuniting with their wives and families. However, Bangladeshis in Britain have always existed in relatively small numbers - so there is a lack of extensive documentation on this group of peoples.<sup>8</sup> According to the Census figures of 2001, the Bangladeshi population in Bradford still only stood at 5,000.

---

<sup>3</sup> Visram, 1986

<sup>4</sup> Husband, 1982; Philips and Philips, 1998

<sup>5</sup> Eade, 1997

<sup>6</sup> Anwar, 1998

<sup>7</sup> Barton, 1986

<sup>8</sup> Chowdhury, 2004

## Methodology

The terms of reference for the research aspect of this project were largely set out in the funding bid – namely to sample the views and opinions of women in Bradford of Bangladeshi origin. To focus on three districts: Manningham, Barkerend and Little Horton. These areas have the highest concentration of Bangladeshi community representation.

Women were accessed through professional and personal ‘snowballing technique’, as being deemed the most culturally sensitive & appropriate method. Also for this reason, a female consultant was commissioned to carry out the research work – someone with the appropriate experience, and language skills.

### **Research Consultant**

Shamima Chowdhury, a Bangladeshi woman from Bradford, undertook the interviews and data analysis. Shamima is near to the end of completing a postgraduate degree in Research, and also teaches (part-time) sociology to undergraduates. She is going on to conduct a comparative empirical study in Bangladesh and Bradford, investigating the significance of issues affecting contemporary Bangladeshis, including social structure.

Shamima would like to express her thanks to BEAP, and Bradford Council, for the opportunity of undertaking this study. She would also like to thank the participants for their time and trust, without which this research would not have been possible.

### **Method**

Interviews took place in focus group sessions, divided into two age demographs, and again for each of the three districts. Therefore, there was a session for women aged 25 and over (representing the older women), and another for women aged 13 to 14 (representing young Bangladeshi women).

Conversations with the women were tape recorded and conducted in English/ Bangla (Sylhet). Younger women preferred to speak in English whilst older women favoured Bangla and some spoke in both languages necessitating code switching and translation on my part. Questions were semi structured and framed around the themes which inquire about women’s perception of Bradford, health, education, employment, the environment and leisure. The women were pleased to contribute to this research as they were assured that their opinions would be corresponded truthfully.

The method employed – accessing female candidates initially through ‘gatekeepers’ (various professionals and individuals) meant unavoidable restrictions on pre-assessment, avoiding issues of character similarity in the samples. However, time constraints of this study, along with other issues of accessing Bangladeshi women, overrode other options of more balanced sampling. Nevertheless, the report as a whole encompasses and depicts the views and opinions of women from a variety of perspectives; and broader experiences of Bangladeshi women of different; ages, marital status, education, and employment, which will resonate with women within and beyond the themes of inquiry and sampled areas.

Final points of note:

- Taking into account political sensitivity, the ‘Bangladeshi /Bengali women’ in this research are women were either born in or have lineage in Bangladesh,
- All the women who took part in this research are of Islamic faith,
- Women voluntarily took part in mixed aged focus group sessions, despite occasionally hindering conversations due to cultural sensitivity towards particular issues.
- The women in all sessions made their own free judgements of the topic themes, in relation to themselves and their families.

## Research Findings

### **Manningham: Women aged 25 years and over**

The majority of the women who took part in this focus group were over 40 years old with the exception of two who were under 30 years old. All the women were married and unemployed. The older group of women considered themselves to be performing in the expected cultural role for women of this age. They all attested to be fit and appeared mentally active, however the majority of older women interviewed were illiterate.

#### **Topic: Bradford**

Women's opinion of Bradford was very positive. Many liked living in Bradford, specifically the Manningham area because of its strong sense of the Bangladeshi community and its close proximity to core services. However, women showed evidence of disappointment and regret as they realised that they were missing out on a lot of opportunities:

#### **Topic: Education**

- Many older women expressed an interest in participating in educational activities such as arts and crafts in order to keep their minds active.
- The younger women in this age group stated that they would like to continue with education for personal development. They recognised that this would inevitably have repercussions for the whole family, as they become confident.
- Distance to services and transport were barriers preventing women from participating in activities. The women were also fearful of travelling alone.
- There were requests for information to be provided (in Bangla) about life long diseases, which many have, in order that they be better informed about prevention and to minimise deteriorating.

#### **Topic: Environment**

- Women were keen to learn more about conserving the environment.
- There is a large gap in women's knowledge and awareness of recycling. Women demonstrated willingness to learn about conserving the environment.

*"Actually...we are living among Bengalis that is why no one points out others faults. If we were living among English people we would not get away with dropping a little litter. They would complain. We have to conserve the environment if we want to live in this area. If we think that my bin will fill up, I will go and throw it on the street...that's not right...obviously it is important".* (Translated, Anonymous)

#### **Topic: Health**

- (See also Topic: Education)
- Many women are dependent on their GP's to gain up to date information regarding their health and information of health initiatives.
- Women would like health practitioner's who are willing and are able to communicate with them in Bangla.

#### **Topic: Employment**

- Childcare prevents women from employment.
- Bangladeshi women were not aware of voluntary work opportunities.



### **Topic: Leisure**

- Distance to travel, cost and lack of knowledge of leisure activities prevents women from their pursuing leisure activities
- Failure to access the library services was put down to distance issues.
- Women would like to build on spiritual and religious knowledge.

### **Manningham: Women aged 24 years and under**

The young women who participated in this focus group were predominantly in employment. Some of the women were in some form of education, and one was in higher education.

### **Topic: Bradford**

The young women had a reasonable perception of Bradford. They commented on the negative attention it receives from outsiders. However, all the women considered Bradford to be their 'home'. Nevertheless, they felt the area in which they lived in to be "claustrophobic" causing them to divide their private and public lives because of the lack of resources and opportunities available within the community to combine both. This was partly due to cultural attitudes as well as lack of awareness of provisions:

*"[W]e need to be aware of the provisions. The elder's need to be aware of these provisions so that they understand it and they know their daughters and kids are in safe hands, and they know what they are doing". (Anonymous).*

### **Topic: Education**

- Young women feel isolated once compulsory education ends.
- They felt that local voluntary services need to provide educational activities, which would enhance women's life skills as well as their professional careers.
- Young women felt it was important to educate their elders of the activities available in the area, emphasising the effectiveness of participating.
- Family can be problematic, when activities take place within the community, because of the negative stigma attached to some of the voluntary services.
- Young women want to learn more about Bangladeshi culture, language, and history. Increased knowledge on their part would dispel issues of confidence of conversing in Bangla. Furthermore it would allow them to promote their Bangladeshi identity better amongst the wider community.

### **Topic: Environment**

- Young women are assertive of the need to conserve the environment. However, they feel that they are not provided adequate information about environmental programmes in their area.

### **Topic: Health**

- The cost of travel, transport and location prevents young women from participating in fitness activities.

### **Topic: Employment**

- Young women discussed how the experience of seeking employment to be daunting, because of the lack of support and information available to them.
- Young women conveyed elder's poor reaction to voluntary work.

**Topic: Leisure**

- There are few places/facilities where young women can socialise in within the community.
- Young women would like to build on their spiritual/religious belief. They feel separated from the mosque.

**Barkerend: Women aged 25 years and over**

A number of women who participated in this focus group had joined their husbands from Bangladesh and were under thirty years old. Others have been resident for a long period. All the women were unemployed.

**Topic: Bradford**

Women's viewpoint of Bradford was generally positive. Women liked living in the Barkerend area. However, women felt marginalized and excluded by services providers in the area. Women conveyed a great urge to be involved in self-development and community activities:

*"They don't ever ask us [service providers]. No one has informed us of the facilities and activities available". (Translated, C. Rauf).*

*"Service providers need to use someone who is able to communicate in Bangla to explain their services and the benefits of activities. If things are explained well, then people will surely take advantage of opportunities". (Translate, Ibid).*

**Topic: Education**

- Women have encountered educational providers who have a limited range and level of courses.
- The availability of spaces on courses refrains women from participating.
- Lack of awareness of educational activities hinders women from participating in educational activities.
- Women would like to develop their basic skills in language (spoken English), literacy, numeracy and IT skills.
- Distance, transport, childcare and times of activities inhibits women participation.

**Topic: Environment**

- Women would like more information about the environment (in Bangla).

**Topic: Health**

- Women would like more information of health initiatives, in Bangla.
- Women's inability to read or understand written English or Urdu means that they often miss important health programmes or appointments.
- Women want to take part in fitness activities. However, some are not aware of provisions and are curtailed from taking part because of difficulties concerning transport, childcare and cost.

**Topic: Employment**

- Lack of support from service providers prevents women from taking part in employment.
- Women would like to learn skills and techniques to a construct a CV.

- Women would like to know more about and gate ways to voluntary work in order to build on skills and experience.

**Topic: Leisure**

- Women would like more opportunities to venture out with their families.
- Advertising of leisure activities needs to be expanded.
- Women would like to meet Bangladeshi women from other areas and women of other backgrounds.

**Barkerend: Women aged 24 years and under**

The young women who contributed to this focus group were predominantly single and in education. A large number of the women were in further education, whilst others were in compulsory and higher education. Two participants were married, one had come to live in Bradford from Bangladesh, and another had lived in Bradford a long time and had a child. Both latter women were unemployed.

**Topic: Bradford**

The young women's had a positive attitude about living in Bradford, especially the area in which they lived in, which they realised was blighted by crime but did not directly affect them as they "kept away from it". Moreover, after evaluation of the possible service provisions, the young women came to the conclusion that service provider's were letting down Bangladeshi women. They felt services to be provided for one ethnic group, resulting in their feelings of intimidation and exclusion:

*"Not really, you would have seen a lot of women taking part in stuff. But they [statutory and voluntary services] haven't achieved that, have they? Because they [statutory and voluntary services] haven't invested enough Bangladeshi speaking women to help. They have got a lot of Pakistani women who speak the language and involve them in".*  
(Amirul).

**Topic: Education**

- Young women feel that they are not encouraged to raise their expectations and aspirations.

**Topic: Environment**

- Young women would like more information about environmental initiatives and programmes.

**Topic: Health**

- Young women would like access to more fitness activities.
- Facilities and resources need to be expanded. Facilities need to be easily accessible, safe and 'cheap'.

**Topic: Employment**

- Young women expressed a keen interest for voluntary work, which would compliment their career aspirations.
- Young mothers would like more help and support to access employment after gaps in their career because of childbirth.

### **Topic: Leisure**

- Young women would like more socialising places for younger women within the community.
- The young women would like to take part in leisure activities that would enhance their life skill, and have greater opportunities to do outdoor activities.
- They would like to socialise and get involved in activities provided for Bangladeshi women in other areas.
- Younger women, who were still in education, want more recreational activities available during school holidays and week ends, which are suited to them as young adults.

*“Our families are happy for us to go to places, but there isn’t anywhere to go” (Amirul).*

### **Little Horton: Women aged 25 years and over**

Participants of this focus group came from a wide social background. The age composition of the women varied and many were educated from Bangladesh. All the women were married and had children. A significant number of the women had young children; however, others did have grown up children.

#### **Topic: Bradford**

Women living in this area conveyed mixed emotions about living in Bradford. In general they enjoyed living in Bradford. However, they disclosed acute concerns about the area they lived in. Women had knowledge related to unlawful drug dealing within the area they lived in. This they felt bred a culture of crime in the area. The women expressed feelings of fear and were anxious about their own safety as well as their families. They were worried about the “affect” which crime of this order would have on their young impressionable children.

Women acknowledged the action, which the police were taking to a certain extent. They felt that their concerns were not reaching the right people or agencies, emphasising the need to eradicate crime from the area with better awareness and provision of services, which would in effect empower people to communicate without fear or ‘shame’:

*“Perhaps the council want to help us, but we are unable to tell the council our problem. All our information is not reaching the main area/person”. (Translated, anonymous).*

*“We are afraid of going to the shops after 3 o’clock, with our children to buy sweets”. (Translated, anonymous).*

#### **Topic: Education**

- Women wanted to take part in educational activities. However, the only activities they are aware of are not appropriate to their needs.
- Women emphasised the need for the younger generation to learn Bangla, in order to bridge gaps in communication.
- A clash of course and personal timetables prevents women from attending classes regularly and punctually.
- Distance and the unavailability of crèche service prevent women from partaking in educational provisos.

#### **Topic: Environment**

- Women would like to know about environmental programmes or initiatives within their area.

- Wanted a safe environment for their children.
- Women would like to be informed of the action taken to reduce crime in the area.

**Topic: Health**

- Women want health practitioner's to converse with them in Bangla.

**Topic: Employment**

- Women would like support to access paid or voluntary employment.

**Topic: Leisure**

- Women want opportunities to socialise with other women from different areas and social backgrounds.
- Women would like to be informed of leisure activities in their area.
- Women would like more recreational activities for their children, which are safe.

**Little Horton: Women aged 24 years and under**

The young women who participated in this focus group were predominantly in school and under the age of 17 years. However, there were two participants who were unemployed. The majority of the participants were single, apart from one who was married and had moved to Bradford from another British city. For many of the women it was the first time they had taken part in such an activity and appreciated the '**chance**' of being listened to and valued. They enthusiastically discussed issues concerning over protective attitudes of parents, which they respected but felt was undue and caused by stereotypes – with parents afraid for their safety and well being.

**Topic: Bradford**

The young women's perception of Bradford was in general pleasant as a place to live in. However, they were dismayed with the provisions of services, particularly the availability of leisure activities within their area. They described many provisions to be catering for only one ethnic group and dominated by males.

*"Our voices are not allowed to be heard". (Anonymous).*

*"Nothing for Bengali girls to do...guys have taken over and that is why our parents don't let us go". (Anonymous).*

**Topic: Education**

- Young women would like to pursue further and higher education. Many feel that they are not gaining adequate support from parents.
- Increasingly there will be young women arriving in Bradford, from different areas in Britain. These women require support to fit in with the specific environment of Bradford. They need assistance, which will enable them to pursue their ambitions.
- Young women felt that there were too many cultural issues and traditions that inhibit their involvement in educational activities.

**Topic: Environment**

- Young women would like to get involved with more environmental activities, related to conservation and crime.
- At present poor advertising and parental restrictions prevents them from engaging in environmental programmes.

**Topic: Health**

- Fitness is a major issue for the young women. They would like more opportunities to take part in fitness activities.
- Distance, transport, cost and poor knowledge by parents of the need for fitness curtails women's involvement.

**Topic: Employment**

- These young women have ambitions to lead professional careers. They would like to gain experience through voluntary or paid work related to their choice of career.
- Lack of knowledge about voluntary work prevents women from carrying out any work.

**Topic: Leisure**

- Young women would like facilities for socialising in their area - opportunities to meet different people.
- They want more trusted role models, from the community, to come forward.
- They would like to take part in sports activities.
- Lack of knowledge of leisure activities, issues of cost and parental trust prevents them from taking part in leisure activities outside of the home.

## Analysis of Findings

### Common themes of concern

There is commonality between areas and the two age groups interviewed. These central themes of concern are outlined below:

#### **Education**

- Courses not suited to their needs (25 + age group),
- Distances needed to travel to access services (25 + age group),
- Feeling unable to continue with further education (under 24 age group), due to a variety of issues, including lack of family support and some cultural issues.

#### **Environment**

- Unanimous votes for more information,
- Unanimously interested in being more involved,
- Requests for information in Bangla,
- Conservation came through strongly in Manningham and Little Horton areas,
- Child safety of concern in Little Horton.

#### **Health**

- Strong expressions of language being a barrier (25 + age group),
- Unanimous votes for low cost, accessible fitness opportunities.

#### **Employment**

- Poor knowledge of volunteering opportunities came through strongly,
- As did the need for service providers to give more support.

#### **Leisure**

- Socialising with others came through strongly in Barkerend and Little Horton, but was not mentioned in Manningham - Lister Park may be a factor in this?
- Otherwise, a variety of feedback.

### Recommendations

The key recommendations this report wishes to make are based on the feedback of interviewees:

#### **Education**

- Statutory and voluntary Bangladeshi organisations are a source of support in partnership, to gain the trust of parents/guardians in delivering activities. Particularly if they can help to eradicate stigmas and foster relationships with influential women from the community, acting as role models.
- Statutory and voluntary organisations need to work together with parents to enable young women to pursue education. Parents need to be aware of the help available to them and in order to allow the realisation of young women's ambitions. Educational service providers also need an effective referral system to assist women's transition to further education courses, according to their level.

- Service providers to take into account difficulties in women's lives and try to support women where possible. Voluntary and statutory organisations can help, working together to provide a consolidated support system for young women.
- Service providers, in particular, need to be well trained & versed in understanding the expected cultural roles of Bangladeshi/Muslim women.
- Community organisations and leaders, including religious leaders need to work together to promote education for women.
- Voluntary organisations in the community need to include and welcome Bangladeshi women, and increase the diversity of service provision for women.
- Crèche services need to be expanded and located near to where courses are held. Also courses need to be facilitated in places, which are easily accessible, by women - in relation to distance and time. Better travel arrangements, including pick up points would allow friends to travel together – again increasing participation.
- Organised educational activities to take place, wherever possible, in easily accessible places for these women i.e. local schools, community centres, etc. This would greatly enhance participation.
- Classes in Bangladeshi studies, including extra curricular studies in the Bangla language and history of Bangladesh, would narrow struggles between the older and younger generation. It would foster better communication and understanding of the older generations lives, and between younger and older women, building confidence in each other's presence & experiences.
- Lifelong learning providers to advertise through local voluntary services.

### ***Environment***

- Environmental programmes and initiatives need to be widely advertised in different media. Statutory and voluntary organisations need to work together to educate and engage women in activities.
- The young women emphasised the need to educate parents about the environment. Therefore, in this respect it is necessary for voluntary and statutory environmental service providers to work together with parents, in order to enable the engagement of young people.
- Statutory environmental services need to be advertised wider.
- Programmes developed in Bangla, which would increase women's understanding and engagement.
- The relevant agencies working to reduce crime and combat the drug dealing should inform women of developments. Information needs to be made in Bangla. Thus advertising of certain crime campaigns needs to reach Bangladeshi women. Campaigns need to be advertised in Bangla.

### ***Health***

- Health practitioners need to work with women, who need educating about certain health issues. Information needs to be interchanged in Bangla, giving women the confidence to speak about any concerns.
- Women would like opportunities to take part in fitness activities and help with problems of obesity. Therefore fitness providers need to work with health practitioners to educate parents about fitness.



- Fitness facilities need to be made accessible for young women. Activities need to take place in safe locations (also culturally). Therefore, service providers must work together to prevail over barriers of transport and cost; easy access, and economy of cost to encourage greater use.
- Sports activities; individual and team based activities need to be organised allowing young women to take part in competitions, fulfilling personal satisfaction and the prospect to meet new people.
- Alternative health information points within the community. The availability of health practitioner's in these points will make it easier for women to discuss some health related matters which are culturally sensitive.
- Health organisations could help by ensuring provision of practitioner's able to communicate in Bangla.

### **Employment**

- Statutory and voluntary organisations need to collaborate and provide better opportunities for young women's interest in voluntary work – increasing their confidence and optimism.
- School's careers service needs to play a key role in terms of support and referral processes to other agencies.
- Employment service providers must work with community organisations to assist and give women the confidence to look for employment.
- Statutory and voluntary employment agencies need to work together to address and support women who would like to re/enter employment after a prolonged period.
- Statutory and voluntary careers services must support, especially the older women who would like to develop the necessary skills required for employment.
- Women need to be encouraged to participate in voluntary work within the community. This will enhance relationships between the younger and older generation, and break down barriers.
- Women need to be informed of available childcare provision.

### **Leisure**

- Both voluntary and statutory service providers need to work together to provide a safe facility for young women to socialise. Activities need to be diverse, adding to young women's skills and afford opportunities to meet people from different areas and backgrounds.
- Positive role models from the area encouraged, and existing ones consulted & engaged with, by service providers, to break barriers of trust concerning the involvement young women in activities away from the home.
- Leisure activities in the area need to be widely advertised.
- Statutory and voluntary service providers working together with parents to provide leisure activities for children which are safe, and diverts children from imitating criminal behaviour.
- Bangladeshi organisations need to adopt a 'city wide' approach when providing leisure activities for young women. This will bring together young Bangladeshi women, reducing feelings of inequality and exclusion.

- Statutory and voluntary services to investigate ways of ensuring that women are given the opportunity to take full advantage of leisure activities, i.e. providing adequate travel and childcare facilities.
- Spiritual and religious services need to include young women in their provisions. They should hold activities in venues other than the mosque, for example.
- Voluntary organisations need to develop regular diverse leisure activities, beneficial to women.

### **General**

- Note that women will participate where they feel respected!
- Service provisions by both the statutory and voluntary organisations need to be advertised appropriately. There is a major gap in women's knowledge of service provisions, because of barriers of language on their part, but also poor advertising by service providers. Activities need to be advertised according to the target audience, in places and methods, which are relevant to them.
- Practitioners need to develop a rapport with women, ensuring that women understand and are satisfied with service provisions. This should also be useful for the evaluation and monitoring of services.
- To reach the older generation of Bangladeshi women, information needs to be translated in Bangla in written format and where possible other mediums.
- Bangladeshi organisations need to accompany each other in providing diverse, citywide opportunities and coordinated service provision.

## Conclusion

The formation of this report has been made possible because of the participation of Bangladeshi women of Bradford. These women came from a wide range of backgrounds, illustrating the many roles and identities of these women. As a result the women have testified that Bangladeshi women are not a homogenous group, but are women who have varying needs, which require addressing in different manners and levels. Thus it is important for service providers to acknowledge Bangladeshi women as different, both as individuals but also as a group that possesses distinctive cultural traits which can hinder and support women's progress. There will always be needs/gaps in services for Bangladeshi women, since these women will continue to change.

The women who participated in these focus group challenged service providers, but also the habits of people from the Bangladeshi culture. Older women were concerned about their children's safety because of the high rate of crime in the area. Women were keen to develop themselves, where services were available to meet their needs of family life. However, they too realised responsibility on the part of Bangladeshi women to be more assertive and active in their rights. Bangladeshi women need be given the support from everyone. They need to have opportunities to meet with people of a different social background to them, allowing expectations to change:

*"If Bangladeshi people do not get involved in activities then how can Bengali people move forward...some [women] won't get involved because they're husband's will not allow them. For others their mother in law's will not allow them to get involved and others may have family problems".* (Translated, Anonymous).

The older women were keen to support the younger Bangladeshi generation in their ambitions. However, they stressed the need to preserve the culture and for young Bangladeshi people to be proud of the culture. Therefore, service providers need to distinguish between so called 'Asians', giving Bangladeshi people the opportunity & confidence to be proud of their culture:

*"The younger generation now need to go forward. They are not able to speak in Bangla properly...they need a facility which teaches Bangla".*(Translated, Anonymous).

In a similar vein younger women expressed the need to be recognised as Bangladeshis:

*"Most people are not aware of the differences and everyone assumes that we are Pakistani's".* (Anonymous).

Crucially for the young women they want opportunities to be listened to. The women wanted to be trusted to do activities. Hence they want parents to move away from stereotypes and assumptions about their behaviours. Instead they want people to hear about their ambitions. They too want to preserve Bangladeshi culture as much as it is possible. Therefore, service providers need to work together with parents to educate and inform about services. Service providers need to be aware of the need to provide facilities in a safe environment that is trusted by parents:

*"Somewhere safe, that they [parents] know you are safe, that you are in the right environment and the person you are with are trusted".* (Anonymous).

### Manningham:

Manningham has a strong Bangladeshi community, as it is evident not only because of its large population, but also because of the services within the area for the Bangladeshi community. However, voluntary Bangladeshi organisations in the area need to work with

women of all ages. They must be attuned to the needs of contemporary Bangladeshi women and strive to provide services which are diverse. These organisations need to work with the community to overcome its image of being male dominated centres. This can be done with effective partnership working with community leaders, role models, and religious services.

The older and younger women of Manningham displayed needs, which were similar to some extent. However, the levels of their needs varied. Older women require education and encouragement to participate and engage in activities.

### **Barkerend:**

The women remarked about their detachment from other Bangladeshi women in the city, believing that the Manningham area catered more resources for women there.

Barkerend's focus groups also conveyed a general feeling of exclusion and domination in some cases by other ethnic minority groups. Older women wanted service providers to provide services, which would complement their multiple roles; and therefore set at realistic times. In correlation, younger women had issues concerning space, as they felt excluded from the services within the area. Many young women requested more recreational and leisure activities, which would have a dual effect, on their health and also enhancing personal skills.

These women did demonstrate an eagerness to raise their expectations and aspirations. As a result providers need to be aware of this opportunity, but take account of the wider issues outlined in this full report. The older women were keen to learn better English, which they considered fundamental to the lifestyle they wished to lead. Similarly, younger women wanted to develop themselves, so that they too had the necessary skills to lead independent lifestyles.

### **Little Horton:**

The women who participated in these focus groups challenged not only service providers, but also the habits of people from Bangladeshi culture. Older women were concerned about their children's safety because of the high rate of crime in the area. The women were keen to develop themselves, where services were available to meet their needs & of their family life. However, they too recognised the responsibility of Bangladeshi women to be more assertive and active in their rights. Bangladeshi women need support from everyone. They need to have opportunities to meet with people of a different social background to them, allowing expectations to change:

*"If Bangladeshi people do not get involved in activities then how can Bengali people move forward...some [women] won't get involved because they're husband's will not allow them. For others their mother in law's will not allow them to get involved and others may have family problems."* (Translated, Anonymous).

The older women were keen to support the younger Bangladeshi generation in their ambitions. However, they stressed the need to preserve the culture and for young Bangladeshi people to be proud of the culture. Therefore, service providers need to encourage and distinguish between 'Asians', giving Bangladeshi people the confidence to be proud of their culture:

*"The younger generation now need to go forward. They are not able to speak in Bangla properly...they need a facility which teaches Bangla".* (Translated, Anonymous).

In a similar vein younger women expressed the need to be recognised as Bangladeshis:

*“Most people are not aware of the differences and everyone assumes that we are Pakistani’s”. (Anonymous).*

Crucially for the young women, they want opportunities to be listened to. The women wanted to be trusted to go out and do activities. Hence they want parents to move away from stereotypes and assumptions about their behaviours. Instead they want people to hear about their ambitions. They too want to preserve Bangladeshi culture as much as it is possible. Therefore, service providers need to work together with parents to educate and inform of services. Service providers need to provide facilities in a safe environment that is trusted by parents:

*“Somewhere safe, that they [parents] know you are safe, that you are in the right environment and the person you are with are trusted”. (Anonymous).*

## Bibliography

- Adams, C. (1987). *Across Seven seas and thirteen Rivers: Life Stories of Pioneer Sylheti Settlers in Britain*, (London, Tower Hamlets Arts Project).
- Anwar, M. (1998), *Between Cultures: Continuity and Change in the Lives of Young Asians*, London, Routledge.
- Barton, S. (1986), *The Bengali Muslims of Bradford : A Study of their Observance of Islam with Special Reference to the Function of the Mosque and the work of the Imam*, Leeds : Department Of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Leeds
- Chowdhury, S. (2004), *The Hidden Emergence: Identity: Bangladeshi-Bradfordian*.
- Eade, J. (1989) *The Politics of Community: The Bangladeshi Community in East London*, Aldershot, Avebury.
- Eade, J. (1997), 'Keeping the Options Open: Bangladeshis in a Global City' in A. Kershen (ed), London: *The Promised Land? The Migrant Experience in a Global City*, Aldershot, Avebury.
- Gardner, K and Shukur, B. (1994) "'I'm Bengali, I'm Asian, and I'm Living Here": The Changing Identity of British Bengalis', in Ballard, R (ed) *Desh Pardesh: The South Asian Presence*, London, Hurst & Co Ltd.
- Gardner, K. (1995), *Global Migrants, Local Lives: Travel and Transformation in Rural Bangladesh*, Oxford, Clarendon Press.
- Glynn, S. (2002) 'Bengali Muslims: The New East End Radicals?' in *Ethnic and Racial Studies* Vol 25(6), November 2002, pp 969-988.
- Husband, C. (1982), *Race in Britain: Continuity and Change*, Essex, Hutchinson.
- Modood T. Beishon, S. Virdeee, S. (1994), *Changing Ethnic Identities*, London, Policy Studies Institute.
- Modood, T. Berthoud, R. et al. (1997), *Ethnic Minorities in Britain: Diversity and Disadvantage*, London, Policy Studies Institute.
- Parekh, B. (2002), *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain*, London, Profile.
- Phillips M, Philips, T. (1998), *Windrush: The Irresistible Rise of Multi Racial Britain*, London, Harper Collins.
- Song, M. (2003) *Choosing Ethnic Identity*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing.
- Visram, R. (1986), *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes: The Story of Indians in Britain 1700-1947*, London, Pluto Press.

## Useful Websites

National Statistics Website for Information about the Census: [www.statistics.gov.uk](http://www.statistics.gov.uk)

Community Statistics Project: [www.BCSP@bradford.gov.uk](mailto:www.BCSP@bradford.gov.uk)

BEAP Community Partnership: [www.beapuk.org](http://www.beapuk.org).