

### Consultation Submission Form

The Commission on Integration and Cohesion would like to ask seven key questions to national bodies, local bodies and individuals about what practical measures we can take to improve cohesion and reduce tensions in local communities. You may wish to answer all the questions or just those you feel most relevant to you. We also welcome written submissions and examples of local good practice.

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Are your comments on the questions for national bodies, local bodies or individuals?	<b>As Lilith is a pan-London body, we are answering the national bodies questions, as these are more suited to describing the diverse London communities that we support.</b>

#### Key Question 1

What does 'cohesion' mean to you? What does 'integration' mean to you? What might a community which is both integrated and cohesive look like?

Cohesion is a state where all parties in a community are equally respected for their differences as well as their similarities, and actively work towards maintaining this harmony and improving the community.

Cohesion can only exist in a culture of respect regardless of differentials such as gender, race, age, sexual orientation, caste, disability or any other status

Integration is the process whereby new members are welcomed into a community and share its general aims and moral structure.

An integrated and cohesive community would be a culture based upon respect of each member's own skills and beliefs, and the contribution he or she makes to the community. It would also feature a total abhorrence of any forms of violence, as this would promote inequality.

The United Nations describes violence against women (VAW) as 'one of the greatest obstacles to the achievement of the objectives of equality, development and peace'. (Beijing, 1995).

Violence against women damages the cohesiveness of a community by targeting and victimising a significant part of the community on the basis of gender. This practice encourages the proliferation of stereotypes, increased segregation, and inevitably, increased control over women's lives and restriction of their activities.

An example of this occurred in Ipswich in December 2006. Following the murder of six women involved in prostitution, women were instructed to stay at home 'for your own safety' because violence was perpetrated against women in the community. Instead of the onus being put on men to cease committing gender violence, women were made the guardians of their own safety, with the implication being that any woman who was out at night and was murdered as a result was at fault. In addition, the women who were murdered were extremely marginalised, as all were also heavily involved in substance misuse and were working as street prostitutes with very little official support or assistance.

Lack of integration in these terms negatively affects the opportunities available to members of the community, and defeats the aims of equality and dignity.

## Key Question 2

What do you think are the main tensions between different groups in our communities? What factors do you think contribute to these and what are your thoughts about how to tackle them? What role can local leaders play in tackling them?

Tensions initially develop in communities when the dominant culture seeks to discriminate against marginalised cultures, for example by withholding services or offering unequal rates of pay. In the UK the gender pay gap currently stands at 17%, with women having to work almost 15 months to earn

the same pay as a male counterpart would in 12. In part time and caring professions, which are female dominated, the gap is even larger. It is also worth noting that these professions have a proportionally larger workforce comprised of BME women, who often experience double discrimination.

Tensions based on gender are exacerbated by peer pressure and popular representation. Thanks to the constant barrage of images of women binge-drinking and stories of 'she got drunk and alleged rape', a 2005 poll by Amnesty International and ICM found that 30% of a cross-section surveyed believe that a woman who drinks at all is at least partly responsible if she is raped. Similarly, the sexual objectification and casual harassment of women in public spaces has dramatically increased since strip clubs, pole dancing and the 'new Lad' magazines have become popular. Women are taught from a young age that their bodies are public property and that they will be commented upon and groped whenever the dominant male culture feels like it.

Organisations like WOMANKIND Worldwide, which works in secondary schools around the country, report that similar tensions are developing in the school environment. Several young men interviewed in school sessions admitting bringing pornographic images to school on their mobiles and forcing young women to view it, and in one school in Thamesmead in 2006, 50% of the young women in the WOMANKIND sessions said that they had been inappropriately touched whilst on school grounds or in the classroom. In an ICM poll reported in *The Sun*, one in four young women aged between 16 and 20 knew a friend who had experienced domestic violence in a relationship (2006). WOMANKIND and Amnesty International both advocate peer-led working to reverse these attitudinal changes, which tend to deepen with age.

The perception of tension or cultural difference can be equally damaging. Until recently police were encouraged to avoid helping Muslim women escape a situation where they were experiencing domestic abuse because it was more culturally sensitive to allow the violent partner access for 'mediation' with faith leaders. Similarly, media stories exoticise and perpetuate cultural stereotypes such as arranged and forced marriage, honour killings and 'crimes of passion'. The recent case of Misbah Rana is a case in point, with the majority of newspapers claiming she was the victim of a forced marriage when she had simply gone to live with her father in Pakistan. This assumption of cultural stereotypes can harm cohesion and place women at risk, as it generalises individual circumstances and masks other issues. Furthermore, assumptions ghettoise women, resulting in a mistaken belief that only Asian women are at risk from honour killings and only African women undergo female genital mutilation, when both practices occur throughout the world in almost every culture.

Local leaders can help in a variety of ways, such as signing up to robust compacts to end violence against women and pledging to take swift disciplinary action if any of their colleagues or employees perpetrate violence against women and girls. Organisations like the UK Corporations Against Domestic Violence are already gaining support, and the Lilith Project will be

launching its own Charter to end violence against women in 2007. In addition, local leaders can make a conscious effort to speak out against the dangers of ghettoisation and harmful cultural practices. On a financial level, borough authorities can ensure that they are adequately funding and supporting organisations working to end violence and discrimination in the local area, and more encouragement can be made to the private sector to become more ethically involved.

### Key Question 3

What things do you think help people from different backgrounds feel like they belong? Do you think there are particular values or 'ground rules' for shared life, which are or should be at the heart of society in the UK? What do you think they are?

Shared values and rules for cohesive community growth require all engaged parties to trust and respect each other, and depend on a sense of equality and working towards a shared goal. In a city as diverse as London, often groups with less visible profiles or political power feel ignored and withdraw from the process of integration.

A sense of belonging can be encouraged by giving marginalised or disempowered groups greater political power and ownership of the process of local governance. In some cases this can be as simple as ensuring that all public spaces offer some cultural ownership, such as non-Eurocentric artwork, or leaflets and signage in community languages featuring people who reflect the cultural make-up of an area. Often marginalised communities are unable or unwilling to engage with political process due to language or social barriers, such as polling days or council surgeries with no childcare or changing facilities.

Women are often socially isolated by their surroundings, particularly in areas that are perceived to be unsafe, such as Elephant and Castle in Southwark, which is blighted by poor planning such as bad lighting, deserted subways and busy roads. Female residents would feel a greater sense of belonging and could enjoy greater engagement with the community if issues of safety and planning could be taken into account by local authorities. The organisation Women's Design Service is working in London to make public spaces and built environments more responsive to women and men and their different needs. This extends to evaluating current transport systems, which are geared towards full-time commuters and ignore the needs of off-peak and late-night travellers, who are often at most risk of attack or harassment.

Several boroughs in London have a high rate of economic inactivity, with Newham having 38% of its population registered as economically inactive compared to a London-wide average of 26%. Tensions could be minimised by understanding that a large number of these supposedly unemployed people

are women working at home raising children (Newham also has the largest population of under 19 year-olds in the country), and not characterising them as lazy or unwilling to work. In this case women are being denied a sense of belonging to the community because their work is being devalued.

While this devaluing of women and marginalised communities continues, integration will be difficult. The UK is one of the few countries to not fully embrace the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as an essential part of social life. Until all communities and individuals recognise the human right of others to belong to their community and live without fear of violence or discrimination, it is impossible to reconcile the concepts of difference and integration.

#### Key Question 4

Why do you think people from different backgrounds may live parallel or separate lives? Is this negative or positive?

The issue of segregation is complex. Commentators often reduce segregation to a purely racial issue, but it is important to recognise that segregation is an issue that crosses societies, races and genders.

For many women, segregation is often a negative experience, which is forced upon them as a method of control. Single mothers isolated in council flats, homeless young women living in bed and breakfasts, Bangladeshi women who do not have access to language classes or economic opportunities, all represent aspects of segregation that have negative effects, increasing isolation and cultural mistrust. Women can also suffer from ghettoisation as perceptions, as discussed in question 2. An example of this could be a woman who reports being beaten by her partner, but because she is Asian social services will not intervene, citing cultural sensitivity.

Having said this, women can sometimes benefit from the provision of single-sex spaces. Women-only services offer a safe space to empower and support women who have experienced traumatic events, or who have become disempowered through discrimination or abuse. Young women can find women-only spaces helpful in exploring issues of control or sexual integrity and organisations like Zidaangi, which works with young Asian women, have reported great successes through the use of single-sex services.

In addition, the Equal Opportunities Commission is in the process of introducing a new duty on public bodies to ensure that they are providing services that can respond to the different needs of male and female service users. This Gender Equality Duty is a much-needed tool for organisations supporting women, as many services unconsciously exclude women. An example would be a homelessness advice centre featured in the Lilith Project report *A Woman's Place: Women and Hostel Provision in London*, which ran help sessions 6pm-9pm. These sessions were under-used by women who did

not feel safe queuing on the street to be seen. The women were then not counted in the organisation's monitoring of its client base, becoming 'hidden homeless' and their needs were dismissed as a minority problem that did not affect the (male) majority of the service users.

## Key Question 5

What role in contributing to community cohesion and integration do you see for organisations and institutions such as: local authorities, the police, the health service, schools, youth organisations, faith groups, inter faith and race equality bodies, housing associations, private sector bodies, voluntary organisations, theatres, art centres, sports associations and the media?

Successful community integration requires deep commitment from all parties. The process can best be summarised under the following headings:

### **Legislation and policy**

1. Voluntary agencies should work with the new Commission for Equality and Human Rights to embed human rights legislation into UK law
2. National and local government demonstrates its commitment towards cohesion by producing performance indicators to ensure all services are reaching the local community, including incorporating the Gender Equality Duty and charters to end violence against women such as Lilith's Samburu Charter. Any monitoring should be transparent and open to public scrutiny.
3. All public bodies (including the Health Service) undertake gender impact and inequality assessments to evaluate their current service provision, and rewrite policies and procedures to promote greater social cohesion.

### **Funding**

1. Local government authorities can show their commitment towards integration and cohesion by providing sustainable funding for voluntary sector organisations supporting marginalised groups, and particularly organisations offering women-only or specialist services. Specialist services, such as culturally-specific counselling or language support are often the first services to be cut when making funding cuts, yet they are often invaluable in helping women from marginalised groups to engage in society.

### **Education**

1. Voluntary agencies work to encourage more community-led initiatives to raise awareness of VAW and social inequality across society.
2. In diverse cities such as London, the development of cohesion should be an essential part of student development in schools. Initiatives such as the WOMANKIND Worldwide programme or peer-led support for

- young women and men should be a priority in all local authority areas.
3. All schools to extend their definition of bullying to cover coercion and sexual harassment.
  4. Schools should also adopt a zero-tolerance approach to inappropriate touching as a form of sexual harassment,

#### **Awareness raising**

1. Faith and community leaders and local government evolve a set of community 'codes of conduct' such as Lilith's Samburu Charter or the Alliance against Domestic Violence. These codes should be endorsed by as many community groups as possible.
2. When developing information or promotional literature, all local authority staff members seek to promote cohesion and avoid perpetuating stereotypes or cultural ghettos.
3. Voluntary and private sector agencies work in partnership to raise awareness of cohesion through sponsored outreach or publicity work.

#### **Key Question 6**

What help do new people to a community need when they arrive?  
What help do existing residents need to cope with change in their community?

People arriving in a community need different levels of support. For example, people seeking asylum from a war-affected country will have a high level of need, including a pressing need for safe accommodation and immediate provision of financial assistance. A woman escaping a violent relationship may require counselling, refuge space and legal advice. In a very general sense, anyone arriving in a new community will need assistance and support to integrate, including language classes, life skills classes and appropriate medical and accommodation support. Women are often overlooked in these provisions, particularly if they claim asylum with their husband. If a woman in this situation is then abused by her husband, she is judged as having no recourse to public funds and is invisible in terms of support, leaving her extremely vulnerable.

Once the newcomer has settled, she will need to be able to access to economic opportunities and training. In addition to this she should be able to demand assurances of the economic value of her work, rather than be penalised for being an immigrant or a woman or of a different ethnic background. All people have the right to demand to work in freedom from exploitation (such as trafficking or domestic slavery).

For a community to respond to these diverse needs, it needs to be driven by a vibrant voluntary and grass roots sector and supported by a committed local authority providing sustainable funding. Voluntary sector organisations are often able to respond more appropriately to the needs of the communities that they are based in, and provide excellent value for money compared to

statutory agencies doing similar jobs.

Local authorities and private sector businesses can also encourage cohesion through effective public campaigning to reassure the host community and undertaking risk assessments of potential triggers for social tension and taking appropriate preventative action.

### Key Question 7

What do you see as effective ways to counteract people's negative perceptions of and attitudes to people from different backgrounds?

Any response to negative perceptions would need to be tailored to the appropriate community, but in general terms the following issues should be considered.

- Education
- Early intervention and risk assessment of tension triggers
- Effective campaigning in the public sphere to reassure and empower the community
- More controls on negative portrayals in advertising and the media
- More prosecutions in cases of blatant and damaging discrimination or gender-based violence
- Effective implementation of Gender Equality Duty.

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