Barrier after barrier:

A report to understand and critically disseminate the barriers that racially marginalised young people (18 – 35) face with regards to undertaking long-term social action and social entrepreneurship within the U.K.

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Acknowledgement

By Nikhwat and Ayisatu

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Voices from the community:

- Taraki
- The 1928 Institute
- Spark & Co
- Charity So White
- Cysters
- Expert by Experience
- Radical Routes

Note: We also had participation from individuals and organisations who chose to remain anonymous.

We hope that you are left impressed and inspired by our interviewees and take comfort in knowing that there are many out there trying to make a positive difference. By no means have we been able to capture the entire breadth of opinions and perspectives across the social impact sector in relation to racially marginalised young people, and we do not claim that our findings are definitive and immutable.

We aim simply to provide an alternative and often muted perspective for the purpose of creating a social impact. In the final analysis, the sense made of the voices remains the responsibilities of the authors.

The Authors

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Ayisatu Emore founded Idaraya Life CIC as a direct response to the gendered and racial health inequalities that became more apparent in 2020. It provides diverse, accessible and inclusive health and wellbeing activities to help women improve their quality of life through being physically active, learning stress management skills and craft skills. She also works freelance providing her project management, facilitation and strategic thinking skills. Her most recent research projects include Navigating Space Under Lockdown and Community interviews to inform the design of Greater Manchester Integrated Care System. You can find out more about her work at www.idaraya-life.org.

We hope we have made a justified representation of our interviewees' experiences.

The report includes imagery from The Delicate Mind (TDM) and Idaraya Life CIC, and credit belongs to our respective organisations.

Contents

Introduction

This project focuses on the understanding of the landscape of social action and social entrepreneurship in the context of the United Kingdom. This was in part due to the lived experiences of the authors who both have their own social vehicles which are focused on supporting communities typically described as being "marginalised". Through our own experiences we have navigated the social enterprise space, and it was in part due to these experiences that we wanted to uncover and understand what the landscape looks like for the purpose of encouraging and helping others who are already within this space or wanting to venture into it.

"The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step", [1] yet if you do not know the direction in which you are travelling it is easy to put the wrong foot forward. For this reason, we wanted an anchor point for those who are already contributing to the social impact sector or those who wish to begin to provide a 'social impact'. By social impact we mean the "effect on people and communities that happens as a result of an action or inaction, an activity, project, programme or policy"[2].

The smallest of interactions we have with one another have social impact, though we may not always be conscious of this or see the evidence of this impact. For example, when you decide to purchase your weekly shopping from your local corner shop you are having a direct impact on your local economy, the shopkeeper themselves and the supply chain. When you go to your local gym, when you study at your local library, when you smile at a stranger and ask them how they are, you are making a social impact just by these interactions.

Life is a series of interactions with some having a more significant impact than others. It is not always easy to quantify how much of an impact you are making but the effect can be significant, especially upon the wider environment. Therefore, it is important to always keep in mind that what you do matters.

For all of these reasons, and more, we are proud to present this research project to you where we have interviewed a broad range of people who are all actively involved in social action in one way or another. In our approach, we sought to surface the voices of those involved in social action projects and by doing so, to present a range of views and perspectives that remain true to their experiences. It was our hope that by interviewing and presenting the voices of those who are currently engaged in work within this space, we would be able to bring a deeper understanding of some of the challenges within the sector. Our approach is to present those voices as best we can in the form of their voices set against some key questions we believe are pertinent today.

By so doing, we provide tangible evidence from those directly involved, in contrast to reinterpreting their voices, thoughts and experiences, as we strive to unlock innovative and purpose-led solutions to so many of the ongoing challenges that we are experiencing (and will continue to experience) in the United Kingdom.

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[1] https://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/a-journey-of-a-thousand-miles-begins-with-a-single-step.html
[2] https://www.goodfinance.org.uk/latest/post/what-social-impact-and-how-do-i-measure-it

Context

Exploring the issues related to our lived experience, our wider community and desk research, we identified a list of barriers that are typically cited as reasons racially marginalised young people feel unable to engage with social action and social entrepreneurship.

Due in part to the limited availability of nuanced research into the intersectional nature of these barriers, we sought to understand and critically disseminate the barriers that racially marginalised young people face with regards to undertaking long term social action & social entrepreneurship within the U.K.

Framework for classifying barriers

The classifications we've used to organise the different types of barriers to people not getting involved in social action activism are taken from *Power to Change report (2021)*[3] which referenced the *European Commission's Migrant Entrepreneurship Growth Agenda (MEGA) Handbook*.[4]

1. business-related skills and competences (including business training, legal advice, mentoring and coaching)
2. non-business related skills and competences (including networking and transversal skills – language, communication, intercultural skills)
3. tangible resources (including access to finance and facilities provision, e.g. through incubation space)

In addition to the classification provided by Power to Change, the *Youth Social Action: Rapid Evidence Assessment (2021)*[5] also talks about some of the specific barriers that relate to these categories:[6]

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[3] https://www.powertochange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/PTC_3812_Minoritised_Ethnicity_Report_FINAL.pdf
[4] https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library-document/mega-handbook-measures-support-migrant-entrepreneurs_en
[5] Prepared for the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/youth-social-action-rapid-evidence-assessment
[6] https://www.goodfinance.org.uk/latest/post/what-social-impact-and-how-do-i-measure-it

Business-related skills and competencies

- **Lack of opportunity**

- **Lack support from established organisations**

  - Being connected

  - Building rapport

  - Securing support

  - Sustaining relationships

Non-business related skills and competencies

- **Lack of confidence or self esteem**

- **Lack of time or resources**

- **Lack of interest and identification with social action/volunteering activities**

- **Language barriers**

- **Poor IT skills**

- **Involvement in activities that are not currently recognised as social action (e.g. caring for family members)**

Tangible resources

- **Pressure on personal finances**

- **Access to and sustainability of funding and investment**

It is against these barriers and challenges that the following voices are to be understood. The aim of the interviews was, through personal stories, to add clarity and better understanding from those directly involved and engaged in purposive social action activities as defined earlier. The perspective is firmly entrenched in the lived experiences of how racially marginalised young people face barriers with respect to social entrepreneurship.

In the pages that follow, the voices of eight organisations and two individuals are represented.
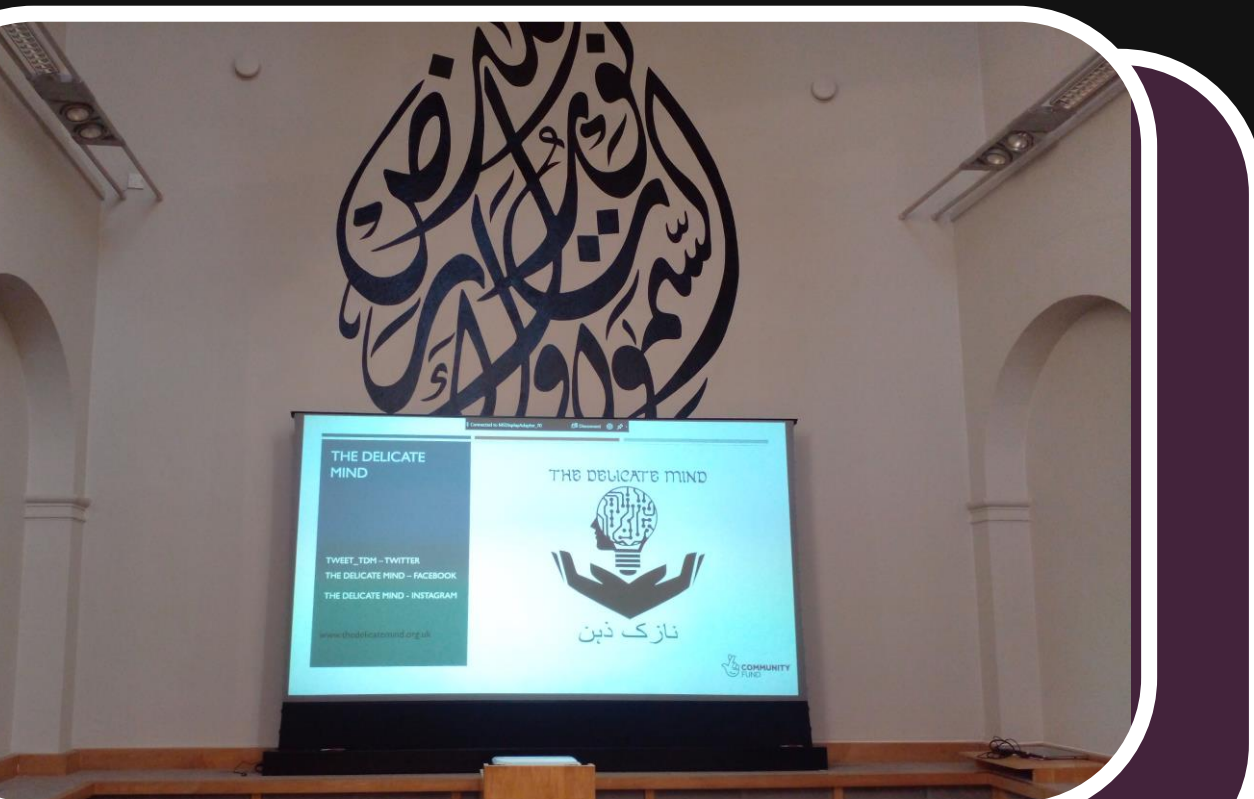
An example of the mental health support sessions that TDM run to facilitate community support and cohesion [below]. As an extension of community events like this, TDM delivers community training sessions to educate and empower marginalised communities [above].
Credit: The Delicate Mind

PROMOTING MENTAL WELLBEING AMONG MUSLIM COMMUNITIES

A free day of learning, food and community engagement!
EVERYONE WELCOME!

Successes

From the interviews we have been impressed by the success that each individual and organisation has managed to achieve. However, success is subjective and relative to what each person's understanding of what "success" means. Here, we delve a little deeper into what "success" means.

Making a difference in communities

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It's really nice to be recognised as someone that **people trust to come and give solid thoughts and recommendations on how to support the community with their mental health and wellbeing".**

Case Study Participant

"

It's so nice to go from speaking to the individuals in the community to being able to deliver and improve the provision that they're able to access *and how they were able to understand how to access it, that's been a huge success."*

Case Study Participant

Nurturing talent and providing inspiration

"

I think the first one is these tiny little moments where I know that the team is happy doing the work that they do, and I know that they feel seen or heard or welcomed. There was a moment where someone told me my entire career, I thought I had impostor syndrome, and after a year of working with Spark, I realised that I didn't have imposter syndrome. I am good at what I do. And I love what I do. I've just been working in really exclusionary spaces, and actually working somewhere that I felt actually welcomed, made me realise that it wasn't imposter syndrome, it was inclusion, or when people are able to say what they want and need to".

Case Study Participant

"

*The final thing I'm proud of is, I was walking with my youngest brother who is thirteen. He looks at me and goes **I'm really proud of the work that you do with Taraki**. I was like that's fantastic. Even hearing those of kind of conversations in and around mental health within my family, that's essentially being able to happen that way because of the practice and work that we do."*

Case Study Participant

Influencing the sector's response to racism

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Personally, one of the biggest successes **has been the work with funders**. *To influence the sector to do better around racism, we feel like it's important to follow the money and think about the terms in which money is allocated to organisations and get funders to take on more of a strategic role around promoting anti-racism and equity as part of their grant programmes."*
Case Study Participant

Connecting people of colour

"

And then lastly, not to underestimate this, but ***just connecting people of colour in the charity sector has really warmed my heart because there's so few of us,*** *it can feel isolating, being the only person of colour within their organisations. But actually, we have a lot of collective power. And the more that all of us keep connecting and sharing intelligence and stuff has really been making a difference on a sort of personal morale level."*
Case Study Participant

Challenges

Building and sustaining trust in communities

There is no mistake that young people from racially marginalised communities are passionate, driven and feel a responsibility to positively affect their community. Engagement with their community is a significant challenge that is faced, and this is due in part to limited trust in communities. When initiatives such as mental health programmes, research or co-productions projects are introduced to a community a lot of time and energy is put into establishing that there is no hidden agenda.

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> *It was really difficult establishing trust within the community, building that trust and constant question marks, 'Are you a spy for the Indian government?'; 'Are you a spy for the UK Government?'; 'What is your agenda?'; 'What is your intention?' – because there's so much mistrust in the community, and people assume that we would have an agenda. And it's been really difficult to kind of communicate that actually, '**We are a community platform.**'"*
>
> Case Study Participant

Access to funding and resource (people and time)

Equally, however, pockets of people within the community help push projects and ideas when trust has been established and they feel a need is being met or seen and heard.

> "One of the main things that I'm very grateful for is that **it was truly pushed by people within our communities, we had very little support from big organisations or big community organisations**. And you know, people who were public figures in our communities, really none of them really supported us very much."
>
> Case Study Participant

This hard won trust is often tenuously held due to the next challenge of acquiring and continually securing fiscal support. With inconsistent funding comes easily shifting priorities within organisations to maintain momentum and engagement, which in turn means that trust can be disrupted within the community - as one's reputation can be easily damaged. Funding is also a challenge to get in the first place as the application process can be laborious - in time, skills and network resources - and it means that racially marginalised young people who are often without a lot of experience or social capital are not able to capitalise on their vision, passion and skill sets.

> "For the first 18 months, all we did was COVID-19 response work, a lot of stuff around navigating resources, connecting people to help and support. Then as we kind of got into 2021, our funding started running out, no one was interested in funding us **anymore because from their perspective, the worst of the pandemic was over…**

*… **And we just really had to find a way to become sustainable.** So, we then started doing kind of client work, we started bidding and pitching for research projects, or workshops around equity and inclusion. And now we actually make more revenue. Once we started, we were 100% grant no revenue. By the end of 2021, we were 50% grant and 50% revenue. This year, we are probably looking at being 75% revenue 25% grant. So, we've gone from being just a responsive COVID support thing to social enterprise."*

Case Study Participant

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*"...**I was a social activist. I set up a coding school in my hometown. It was social activism because in 2019 I'm taking people that are unemployed, and trying to see if I can get them into tech**. It was only during the pandemic that there was suddenly funding available to make tech more accessible. I was doing it before then. My local council hadn't been supportive, and I ended up getting some investment from a local Housing Association."*

Case Study Participant

> **"**
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> *One of the reasons my coding school is still not a thing is that I really struggled to unlock finance. The business model relied on a corporate business partner or a Government commission."*
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> Case Study Participant

> **"**
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> **Finance, financing, and how to get finances is probably still the biggest issue**, *I have no idea where to go, I don't know how to actually do that process."*
>
> Case Study Participant

Managing capacity was also a consistent challenge for the racially marginalised young people interviewed. Strategically navigating social action or running a social enterprise with limited resources and even less guidance means that a lot of effort is wasted on mismanaged capacity.

Learning how to take a strategic approach

Understanding how to run a social enterprise or influence policy to affect social change comes with a steep learning curve for any young person with limited experience in their field of choice. With the added challenge of capacity building programmes that focus on acquiring funding and skills from institutions that are not typically structured to support racially marginalised communities, it becomes a challenge to progress as an individual or enterprise beyond reactive measures that developed when the political and fiscal landscape happen to align with one's goals and vision.

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> *…Because it's really hard to have, planned time that you're going to spend on it [social action], because it feels like you have to spend all of your free time. And it is very draining**, it's so much about being able to identify people to work with and having that capacity and identifying where you have capacity and where others have capacity.***"
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> Case Study Participant

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> *I think again the **lack of a clear strategic plan and focus** just meant because we really wanted to make an impact. We were saying yes to a lot of things that exceeded our capacity to respond, so that was really the issue. **I don't think you can successfully run volunteer-led groups and organisations when there's a lack of a clear strategy and plan and division of labour around things.***"
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> Case Study Participant

The Moseley Exchange: One of the venues used by The Delicate Mind to deliver community training to educate and empower marginalised communities. This venue was used for sessions ran in partnership with Birmingham Public Health.
Credit: The Delicate Mind

www.idaraya-life.org
www.thedelicatemind.org.uk

Support Requirement

Access to specific types of funding

A common theme that came up during our interviews was core costs requirements and the call for unrestricted funding – funding that can be used at the organisation's discretion for the purpose of developing the administrative and managerial side of social action and entrepreneurship.

> *"*
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> *I think it would be really helpful to* **have an infrastructure fund."**
> Case Study Participant
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> *"*
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> **I'd love to see funding being made more accessible**. *I know so many people who want to do this work, but they get hit by barrier after barrier and that takes so much energy and work. I think it's having faith and understanding in the communities who are actually making change on the ground. I think it should be almost like a bit of a programme where they give* **core unrestricted funding** *for a year for you to build your structure."*
> Case Study Participant

It was a commonly held belief that a relatively small amount of investment would suffice to support this development. Further to this, a targeted and advanced programme is considered to be the natural progression beyond the point of committing to take social action or set up as a social entrepreneur.

The support structure for social action and social entrepreneurship was considered to be consistently lacking in the content that helps racially marginalised communities build systems that were not reliant on the traditional bid writing, commissioning and third party funding system - the very structure they are often taking action to counteract.

> "
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> *… [on the funding landscape] It was very cliquey and still is.* **I know very few people of colour who managed to build traction and get repeat funding** *and even they struggle, despite them having some really key positions in the city."*
>
> Case Study Participant

'**New Year Moves'**: An Afrobeats Dance Class funded by Sport England's Tackling Inequalities Fund in 2022, which encourages women across the African Diaspora to get active and socialise. It also provided employment for a local freelance Dance Instructor.
An example of the benefits of specialised funding programmes. Credit: Idaraya Life CIC

Tailored, up to date, training and guidance

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> I would say for grassroots groups, it is really important to think about, if there's any sort of hosting support that organisations can provide, **definitely hosting and compliance**, the boring stuff that I personally don't have expertise around."
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> Case Study Participant

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> *I think if there was a really easy read, and I mean, completely easy overview of legal structures it would be really, really helpful for anyone."*
>
> Case Study Participant

"

I think whatever support is created, needs to be realistic and tailored to the work that we do and the world that we live in today. It feels like a lot of support that's out there is outdated. You know, especially when you look at stuff for women in social enterprise, why are we still talking about impostor syndrome and confidence building? Now, I'm not debating that those things are issues for lots of people. **But what about financial freedom for female social entrepreneurs? What about how to build and grow community wealth or personal wealth as a social entrepreneur? Or what about how to influence and lobby your MP or local government? We're still at the stage where we're saying, you can get funding, and here's how to write a pitch and write a proposal. Not at the stage where we're doing training that's like, actually, here is what you should be asking funders, and identifying whether that's right for you.**"

Case Study Participant

IDARAYA
LIFE CIC

'**Joyful Identities'**: a multicultural celebration project for the Queen's Jubilee in 2022, which was funded by the Arts Council via Forever Manchester. The funding encouraged a diverse range of creative responses to the funding which was liberating and allowed for special connections to be made across cultures. Credit: Idaraya Life CIC

www.idaraya-life.org
www.thedelicatemind.org.uk

A peer network

Networks are also difficult to establish and maintain. Yet, having a network for timely dissemination of information, peer support and truly inclusive collaboration often came up as an ask and something that those working in the sector would find useful.

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> *Our work can also be really siloed, so the connections between movements and sectors would also help.* **Having really good information disseminated through them would help** *because I would know about stuff rather than going out of my way to look for things - efficiently using our limited resources."*
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> Case Study Participant
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> ❝
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> *When I first joined, I was constantly compared to another African diasporan, who was of a similar age and worked in a similar venue. I found this problematic as people expected that we knew each other because we are people of colour, despite no evidence of us being connected.* ***It meant that people bundled us together and often felt they had ticked their diversity box if either of us were included in a space."***
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> Case Study Participant

Emotional support

Emotional support and the necessity in understanding how structures operate was a frequent call found within the interviews too.

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> *There's a bit of a gap around emotional support for people impacted by inequality and racism in the charity sector."*
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> Case Study Participant
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> "
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> *Obviously, there are unions and people are part of unions, but you would be absolutely astonished to see how many emails we get from people dealing with grievances and issues or just wanting pastoral support. And it's like, wow, you're not getting this from your organisation. You're not getting this from a union. That's been quite difficult to manage because we're not legal experts, we're not counsellors. So, that seems like it's a bit of a gap, and **the sector could do with having a source of support for people dealing with activism or like trying to push for social change within their organisations."***
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> Case Study Participant

Conclusion

Some reflections and points for dialogue

Some words on hope:

> "

"*I feel one of the biggest achievements in society is having people believe they have no power. Believing the world is the way the world is and is just too broken. There's nothing we can do about it. So just suck it up and live with it. Because it hasn't changed for 1000s of years, where the reality is, it's changed an incredible amount in just the 100 years that we've just lived through. So, a lot can happen. But people get convinced by the narrative that a lot hasn't changed we - as Social Activists - are saying 'No' there's plenty going on"*.

Case Study Participant

In summation, when considering the desk research and the interviews we have conducted, we are of the view that there are a number of key areas emerging from the interviews and representational voices to suggest further exploration would reveal some tangible solutions to some of the issues that permeate across the social action/enterprise landscape. We believe that those with political and financial power should take note of some of the voices and experiences shared as a contribution to the longstanding dialogue taking place up and down the country with regards to the lived experiences of the barriers that racially marginalised young people are facing.

Points for ongoing dialogue

Networks

Strengthen Existing Networks/ Community of Practice/ Peer To Peer Support

The pre-existing networks supporting social action and enterprise are ordinarily born out of specifically identified needs within their community - geographical, cultural, or socio-economical - and often have a strong grassroots foundation in their practice.

This strong foundation can result in a siloed vision of their social action. These pre-existing networks may benefit from a diversity of thought, experience and resources. Rather than reinventing networks for different communities, expanding established communities and strengthening their cohorts with variance will ensure efforts are not needlessly duplicated. For example, *The Better Way* is a network of people working together to improve services, build strong communities and bring about a fairer society. With a strong and engaged community that are often educated, middle class, based in southern England, they are making efforts to expand the diversity of their core convening team and membership.[7]

It is invaluable to speak to other people involved in social action and entrepreneurship. People learn a lot from others on the same journey as them. The recognition that a peer community means better use of resources, connection of dots and communal power is vital for societal progress and longevity.

Funding

A State Based Investment Fund and Improved Funding Programmes

The lack of consistent access to finance is a distinct barrier to sustainable development in social enterprise. The flexible priorities of third sector funders can mean that access to funding for racially marginalised communities and young people is led by government priorities or what is deemed to be a trending social issue. A state-based investment fund with long-term commitment from the government rather than third sector funders will provide a reliable source of fiscal stability and support long-term thinking and sustainable development.[8]

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7 https://www.betterway.network/

8 See Social Action – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) and Encouraging Social Action (publishing.service.gov.uk).These show the value of social action and provide updates on the trends that exist around community social action and a special section on what is being done to encourage youth social action, through programmes like the National Citizen Service; and https://www.thirdsector.co.uk/future-delayed-50m-nlcf-fund-black-ethnic-minority-led-charities-real-doubt/fundraising/article/175078 is an example of funding that was targeted at racially marginalised communities that has been shown to have an uncertain future due to shifting priorities of the grant giving organisation.

Targeted funding is beneficial but not a solution. Improving the current funding stream would ensure inclusion and an understanding of how bias and systemic exclusionary processes – such as extensive bid processes - limit developmental support, and convoluted evaluation processes limit the diversity of funding recipients.
An example of an innovative approach can be seen in the Sport England 'Get Involved' programme, where the application process was varied and allowed for support from the grant panel to ensure the application process reached as many organisations as possible. This included allowing video interviews, review of application and a grant panel made up of working grassroots community leaders.[9]

There is also the often overlooked but very real challenge of affiliation or affinity with a community being assumed to include intrinsic trust and relationships. Funders should not assume because individuals are from within a particular community that access is unproblematic, especially in relation to culturally disparate and challenging issues such as disability, mental health and sex education. More consideration should be given by funders with regards to expectations around the impact of the nominal funding provided to support racially marginalised communities. Special allowance should be given for the notionally small numbers that may be accessed in relation to these issues. It takes a lot of work to build, maintain and expand trust within racially marginalised communities and even more work has to go into this when aiming to integrate their nuanced needs into mainstream policy and activities to build an equitable society.

Capacity building

Better training/support programmes

Current capacity building and training programmes for individuals and organisations alike have a similar baseline for accessibility. They are typically suitable for traditional formal learning styles with limited additional needs. This does not reflect the range of people who participate in social action and enterprises. Programmes can be developed to expand the type of people who can engage with the learning required to engage in social action through responding to different learning styles, abilities, ethnicities and identities. Extending the training scope beyond a single line of financial understanding (i.e. not just grant funding), cultural awareness and what the current identified barriers are would be beneficial in the long term. The School for Social Entrepreneurs (SSE), for example, runs courses that equip people to start, scale and strengthen organisations that make a positive difference.[10]

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9 https://www.gmmoving.co.uk/get-involved/funding/sport-england-together-fund
10 https://www.the-sse.org/

What next?

Going forward, we will be using this report for lobbying purposes and will be taking the recommendations from our interviewees to create an online tool that will be embedded in our respective websites: www.thedelicatemind.org.uk and www.idaraya-life.org. This tool will act as a diagnostic toolkit to help individuals identify the best avenue to help them set up their own social vehicle and provide in-depth information that our interviewees have stated would have helped them along their journey for the purpose of helping others.