

Environments for All

Baseline review of BTCV's work with disadvantaged communities

by Black Environment Network – February 2002



BTCV Environments for All

BTCV Environments for All provides opportunities for people from marginalised, black and minority ethnic (BME) communities to get involved in looking after their local environment. It is a three year programme funded by the Community Fund with support from Barclays PLC. Currently, the environmental sector fails to adequately reflect the diversity of the UK's communities. Traditional environmental volunteering opportunities are often not appropriate or relevant to these audiences, for reasons varying from culture to poverty. BTCV Environments for All programme will tackle this by piloting and developing different approaches suited to each communities' local needs. The lessons learnt will then be shared across the organisation to help all levels of BTCV reflect Britain's richly diverse society and to establish best practice within the environmental sector as a whole.

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Executive Summary

BTCV supports over 130,000 volunteers to take hands-on action each year to improve the rural and urban environment. It helps individuals and communities to address social exclusion, health, regeneration, training and development needs as well as traditional conservation. Over the years BTCV has been working to expand the boundaries of conservation to fully include disadvantaged communities, especially minority ethnic, disabled and low income groups and individuals. BTCV recognised that to be effective in this work there was a need to review its present and past work in this area and focus resources. As part of a major Community Fund supported UK initiative “Environments for All” we undertook this review to identify the lessons that can be learnt and to set improved standards for new projects involving BTCV and other environmental organisations.

The Black Environment Network (BEN) carried out this independent review which examines the types and locations of disadvantaged groups that BTCV is working with, the other partners involved and the outcomes in the communities and in BTCV itself. The review highlighted that BTCV has become much more involved with training unemployed and disadvantaged people, often using the environment as a focus. But BTCV (and the environmental sector in general) still display a weakness in widening participation for disadvantaged communities. The review emphasises that when the needs of disadvantaged communities are placed first, a range of apparently non-environmental needs can be met through environmental action.

Participatory dialogue and case studies identified that BTCV’s work with disadvantaged communities has a greater impact on the quality of life in these communities compared to more affluent areas. It also

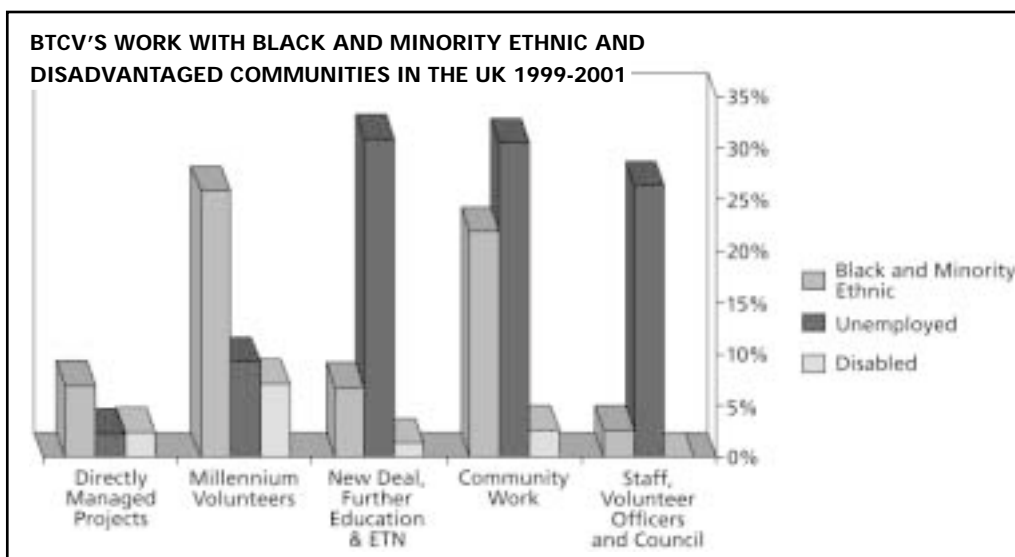
showed that the learning experience and impact on BTCV’s staff and Volunteer Officers was greater when undertaking this work. The case studies also identify the impact of the work and highlight the potential for improvement.

The findings of the review highlight strengths: BTCV is working with a wide range of disadvantaged groups in many parts of the UK and there is a very strong commitment from staff. It identified that many disadvantaged people live in areas where environmental work can lead to real improvements in their quality of life and that BTCV has a variety of methods and channels to build effective relationships with these communities.

In spite of these strengths there are current weaknesses which act as a barrier to effective work with disadvantaged communities. BTCV has a high turnover amongst community staff. Examples of good practice and case studies could be more effectively communicated. BTCV needs to share ownership and kudos generated by the “Environments for All” projects with the communities, and a system of soft indicators should be adopted to evaluate this area of work.

There are a number of opportunities when BTCV supporters can act as champions within the communities to promote BTCV and there is a large Volunteer Officer base that can support staff in reaching out to communities. BTCV also has a plethora of good case studies and practices which need to be communicated more effectively. But it needs to develop closer working relationships with specialist network organisations and to make better links with the funders who are keen to support projects targeting disadvantaged communities.

Threats exist because there are people who view the organisation’s aims as purely nature conservation and are resistant to broadening its scope. Also staff working with the communities need to be consulted and supported more effectively, and it must be accepted that much of this work is innovative. Barriers that prevent community groups from having significant control over project activities will hinder sustainability, and the environmental sector is still perceived as white, male and middle class.



Issues raised by the review include high staff turnover and the fact that the community work takes longer and requires more resources than expected. Project staff need more effective training to understand the needs of communities; several BTCV internal publications should become essential reading for this type of work but need amendment to meet the special needs of the diverse communities. BTCV must also encourage a feeling of innovation so staff feel supported when working with communities; it must recognise that unsuccessful projects can often provide the most poignant lessons and it must develop a more effective way of sharing good practice and applying the lessons learnt. Using conservation work to achieve social cohesion is also seen to be a very effective tool in places of strong social divide. Finally projects funded with the sole aim of working with disadvantaged groups need to be seen as a transitional stage for targeted groups to be integrated into BTCV as a whole.

The conclusions identify good practice in terms of communication and highlight the need for clear ownership which involves effective partnership from the beginning of projects. Practicalities are identified such as using social activities to lead into environmental action, and the need to signpost to other organisations. Also emphasised is the need for trust, knowledge of customs and the need for projects to have direct environmental value to the community. The importance of sustainability is raised: putting the needs and concerns of disadvantaged people before conservation work is vital, as is the recruitment of local people to run and support the project and the training and support of a wider group of individuals to sustain it. There must also be commitment, continuity, a planned approach and the use of participatory appraisal techniques to evaluate effectively.

It was emphasised that the success of a project should be assessed by 'soft', non-quantifiable, indicators as well as traditional quantitative indicators.

It was also noted that to move the organisation's culture forward, support from senior directors and project staff was vital.

The conclusions also outline that taster activities are very relevant to work with communities, that issues of continual support are real when dealing with certain groups such as those with mental health problems and that incentives such as T-shirts and free training are important. Finally the point was made that in terms of changing BTCV and supporting the groups, the goals set should be achievable and manageable.

Overall the review identified that BTCV is successful in working with disadvantaged communities in general but less so in working with Black Minority Ethnic community groups. Staff working with these groups do not have the appropriate tools to measure project outputs and outcomes, and community groups working in partnership with BTCV need more ownership of their work. The work

with disadvantaged communities is influencing the organisation's policy on nature conservation but the information about the work is not being co-ordinated and disseminated effectively within BTCV and its partnership networks. Also general community development training for staff does not always provide the necessary skills and the confidence to work with particular groups. The funding of the projects is a major consideration for BTCV. Well trained staff and the commitment of resources for work with disadvantaged groups have major implications which must be addressed if progress is to be sustained.

The review outlines action to address the shortcomings identified and to embrace the opportunities that exist, thanks especially to the excellent work of the "Environments for All" project staff and all the other staff within BTCV who are currently working with disadvantaged communities. BTCV needs to develop a more appropriate system to measure this work, especially relevant soft indicators. It must work with other environmental organisations to persuade funders to value and accept these indicators. BTCV needs to develop a social policy relevant to work with minority ethnic communities and must develop a more effective way of co-ordinating and disseminating information on the work with communities. It needs to adopt positive action measures in service delivery and recruitment to help change the perception of the organisation among minority ethnic communities. BTCV must also address the needs and concerns of present and future staff working with disadvantaged communities. Our present work with non-environmental organisations includes young offender and disability groups, careers services, housing associations, minority ethnic organisations and health projects. This needs to be promoted at all levels within the organisation and BTCV needs to ensure that the government and potential funders recognise the role and value of this holistic approach to community regeneration and social cohesion.

Through the "Environments for All" programme and other major initiatives BTCV has recognised the issues raised by the review and plans are in hand to address many of the identified actions. In addition, an "Environments for All" first year progress report will be published which will use this review as the benchmark, communicating progress and the challenges faced and identifying further action.

1. Introduction

1.1 BTCV

BTCV is the UK's largest practical conservation charity. Founded in 1959, it helps over 130,000 volunteers take hands-on action each year to improve the rural and urban environment.

BTCV comprises the BTCV charity which operates across the UK as BTCV in England, BTCV Cymru, BTCV Scotland and Conservation Volunteers Northern Ireland, plus the trading subsidiary BTCV Enterprises Ltd. The BTCV group also includes the associated charity Trust for Urban Ecology (TRUE) and an additional subsidiary company BTCV Contracting Ltd.

BTCV has a strong commitment to quality standards, exemplified by the renewal of the Investors in People status in 2001. Working through over 10,000 partnerships at national, regional and local levels, the group has an extensive history of developing, managing and delivering community assistance, land management plus employment and training initiatives. In 2000 / 2001 the BTCV group's income was in excess of £23.5m and delivered £30 million worth of voluntary activity.

1.2 Background to review

Over the years, BTCV has been working to expand the boundaries of environmental conservation to fully include disadvantaged communities, especially black and minority ethnic, disabled and low income groups and individuals.

BTCV has recognised that in order to be effective in its work with disadvantaged communities, there is a need to focus resources and review its present and past work in this area. As part of a major Community Fund supported UK initiative "Environments for All" we undertook this review, to identify the lessons that can be learnt to set improved standards for new projects involving BTCV and other environmental organisations.

In order to examine its work with disadvantaged communities, BTCV commissioned the Black Environment Network (BEN) to carry out an independent review which aims to:

- identify the profile of BTCV's work with disadvantaged communities, in particular black and ethnic ethnic groups
- identify the impact of such work on BTCV and the communities it worked with

- draw up good practice and make recommendations for BTCV and other environmental sector organisations.

To achieve these aims, the review examined the types and locations of disadvantaged groups working with BTCV, other partners involved in the projects, and the outcomes of the projects to the communities and BTCV.

1.3 Methods used to conduct the review

- Study of relevant BTCV reports and other publications.
- Questionnaire informed by dialogue with BTCV staff and community project members involved in case studies. A list of those consulted is given in Appendix 1. A sample questionnaire is given in Appendix 2.

2. Study of BTCV reports and other publications

2.1 Background to BTCV's work with disadvantaged groups

Over the last 10 years, in response to volunteer needs and government policy priorities, BTCV has become much more involved with the training of unemployed and disadvantaged people, often using the environment as the focus of work experience and training. This work with a wider constituency coupled with the realisation that conservation must reflect the priorities and needs of local communities led the central focus of BTCV's latest Strategic Plan; Expanding the boundaries of conservation volunteering (date?). This states BTCV's belief that voluntary action offers individuals the opportunity to become knowledgeable, active and responsible citizens who effect positive environmental change while improving both themselves and their community. This embraces everyone whatever their circumstances, wherever they live and in whatever way they choose to become involved.

BTCV's stated aspiration is not just to work with disadvantaged people to improve their environment, but also to support them to engage in the democratic process of BTCV governance.

For some years BTCV has recognised a weakness in widening participation for disadvantaged groups, especially from black and ethnic minority communities. Research by BTCV has highlighted the need for active participation by local communities in all the stages of environmental improvement. This research is detailed in People's Places Research to support a BTCV bid to the Green Spaces and Sustainable Communities initiative of the New Opportunities Fund, Project Partners Research, March 2000. Further UK research (Building Communities – Community led Development, Wales Council for Voluntary Action Report 1999) also identifies the need for local, accessible and responsive support services, to empower local communities to take action that meets and reflects their cultural, economic and social needs. BTCV Wales Environments for All Report (June 1999) provides supporting evidence for the fact that environmental organisations in general have a poor track record of working with marginalised groups and highlights the flexibility required to engage well. The research showed that environmental practical action for disadvantaged communities is often low in the hierarchy of need. However, it also showed that community driven environmental practical action not only helps to make small-scale improvements, but the process brings other socio-economic and environmental benefits.

The BTCV People's Places research supported by English Nature examined the needs of urban communities and

highlighted the positive benefits of undertaking community environmental practical action. However BTCV understands that inevitably issues of education, employment and health are often at the top of the priorities for disadvantaged communities.

In spite of these other priorities, BTCV's experience has shown that where the needs of the disadvantaged community are placed first, a range of apparently non-environmental needs can be met through environmental practical action.

Over the years BTCV has steadily improved and enhanced its ability to deal with the needs of less advantaged people, with geographically patchy results. Some good work has been undertaken and recorded in the BTCV publication, Report on Volunteering Development 1994-1996.

2.2 Contacts with other organisations

BTCV is in regular contact with the major environmental voluntary sector players including the Wildlife Trusts, Groundwork, Encams, the Civic Trust, The Shell Better Britain Campaign, the Black Environment Network and Forum for the Future. All of these players are involved with less advantaged communities in differing ways and to differing degrees. BTCV's democratic membership structure and focus on people highlights the priority placed on involving and engaging the individual. BTCV works with these national partners on a number of different levels, developing joint initiatives, using each other's specialism or expertise and complementing the work already progressed. In the broader social sector BTCV has well established links with Community Service Volunteers, Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation, Rathbone, NACRO, the Community Development Foundation and the Princes Trust Volunteers. On a government level BTCV is in regular touch with DEFRA, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, DfES, the Employment Service, the Home Office and the Active Community Unit, the Northern Irish and Scottish Parliamentary Departments and the Welsh Assembly Departments. BTCV was involved in UK and Welsh Task Forces in New Deal, is a member of the Urban Spaces Task Force and has contributed to a number of working parties examining social exclusion and sustainability issues. BTCV has no land holdings of its own so traditionally has relied upon various partnerships to facilitate the undertaking of beneficial environmental practical action which in turn has required a partnership philosophy.

2.3 Examples of BTCV's work

- Work with a Bangladeshi woman's group in Luton, where a food growing initiative evolved.
- Work in Leeds, in partnership with an independent college, with people with learning disabilities. The scheme is restricted to 6 days per annum.
- Work in the North Kirklees area, to engage with a southern Asian ethnic community in partnership with the local community arts organisation (CHOL Theatre). This scheme involves a community not traditionally interested in conservation or volunteering.
- Work in Southwick, North Sunderland with disaffected young people, whose long term unemployment, homelessness, physical and mental health problems and learning difficulties are often compounded by drug and alcohol problems and resultant criminal records. BTCV staff and an experienced community youth worker have managed to engage some of these young people in conservation volunteering.
- Work in Northern Ireland, through the CVNI Millennium Tree Campaign, supported by the Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities, and involving the Indian, Chinese and Travellers community.
- Work with the Welsh speaking community west of Swansea, offering people in relatively disadvantaged rural areas the opportunity to volunteer on their own cultural terms and to communicate in their preferred language.

The following three projects are examined in detail in section 3.2.

- Work in Lambeth with Accra Youth centre in Brixton involving predominantly Afro-Caribbean youth.
- Work by BTCV Lea Valley with Whitefield school for 16+ students with autism and specific communication disorder.
- Work in partnership with the Scottish Refugee Council and the Black Environment Network in Glasgow.

BTCV also has further historical examples of good projects with disadvantaged groups in London, the West Midlands, the South West, the North West, Wales and Northern Ireland.

3. Participatory dialogue and case studies

Information in this section is based on participatory dialogue and a telephone survey of BTCV staff and community groups.

3.1 Summary of participatory dialogue

Impact on BTCV of engaging with disadvantaged communities:

- staff members have a greater sense of achievement
- BTCV staff develop community and other skills traditionally unavailable within the environment sector
- increase in stakeholders across different sections of our community
- access to additional funding and good publicity to carry out the wider aims and objectives of BTCV
- BTCV learns new approach to conservation work from disadvantaged communities
- new opportunities to work with and learn from organisations that are not traditionally environmental.

Impact of BTCV's work on communities:

- community members develop sense of being valued
- community members develop new skills to enhance career prospects
- the work brings communities together
- environmental improvements benefit the local community
- creates a new area of opportunities to improve quality of life
- inspires confidence in community building
- the perceptions of BTCV among beneficiary communities becomes positive and inclusive.

The result suggests that BTCV's work with disadvantaged communities has a greater impact on the quality of life in these communities, compared to similar work in more affluent areas. Likewise, it has also shown that the learning experience and other impact on BTCV staff is greater when work is with disadvantaged communities, compared to more affluent communities.

3.2 Case studies

The case studies have been selected to represent the following areas of work:

- young people of ethnic community background in low income area
- working with disabled people
- refugees and asylum seekers.

3.2.1 ACCRA CRAWFORD YOUTH CENTRE, BRIXTON AND BTCV LAMBETH

The Accra Crawford Youth Centre is a centre for 5-18 year olds in a community of mainly Afro-Caribbean origin. The Centre has a long association with BTCV Lambeth, which is presently a partner organisation to the Youth Centre.

The Centre runs an environmental programme with support from BTCV Lambeth, which is funded with the aim of working with community groups. BTCV provides advice to the Accra Centre's environment programme, and supports the Centre in accessing funding to carry out project activities including nature conservation, murals and environmental fairs. The present BTCV environment worker had links with the Centre and sits on the environment sub-committee. The BTCV environment worker works with 3 staff from the Accra Centre.

Impact of work on BTCV:

- Staff training embraces community development and social awareness skills
- Publicity materials are starting to reflect ethnic diversity issues and concerns
- Achievements are being promoted through publicity materials to help motivate all in the organisation
- Good practice is being disseminated to other BTCV staff through information sharing events, e-mail groups and job shadowing.

Impact of work on Accra Crawford Youth Centre:

- Funding experience and knowledge has been developed, which has helped to sustain funding to provide more opportunities for young people and the community.
- The capacity to own and develop projects has led to sustained environmental work.

- The Youth Centre has been able to develop environmental projects which have a direct benefit to the local community.
- A special relationship has been formed with BTCV through their staff being active members of the Centre's environment sub-committee.
- The Centre has been provided with a focus for whole community approach instead of just youth. In 1995, as part of European Nature Conservation Year, an environmental day run by the Centre was enjoyed by 150 local residents.
- Developing the interest of young people and the wider community to enjoy and contribute to nature conservation and other environmental issues.

3.2.2 WHITEFIELD SCHOOL AND BTCV LEA VALLEY PROJECT

Whitefield School caters for students of 16 years and older with autism and specific communication disorders. BTCV Lea Valley conservation group has been working with the school for approximately 1 year. Contact with the school was established through BTCV's local volunteers who are involved in the project. Teachers and helpers from Whitefield School provided additional skills in working with students. The project is funded by the London Borough of Waltham Forest.

Impact of work on BTCV:

- Sharing of good practice with other BTCV staff through job shadowing
- Developed confidence of local BTCV team to work with people with autism through hands on learning experience
- Promotion of achievement to funders and the public through publicity materials
- Job satisfaction through getting the benefits of conservation work to people who need it most.
- Desire and commitment to expand project to involve more BTCV staff and volunteers and students.

Impact of work on Whitefield School:

- Allowed students access to relevant work experience.
- Raised issues of citizenship.
- Links were developed with ASDAN award scheme, an environmental science module.
- The students were given the experience of working in a group without special needs.

- The students' knowledge of local sites of interest was broadened.
- The students learnt specific skills which will be of use in post-school day placements, many of which have access to gardens and parklands.
- The experience of working with a group of adults not related to Whitefield was valuable in terms of preparing for adulthood outside school.
- The practical nature of the work led to a clearly defined sense of 'completion', a concept which is essential to people with autism if they are to derive satisfaction from their achievements.
- The conservation work was fun; a quality which is intrinsic to learning.

3.2.3 BTCV SCOTLAND AND GLASGOW REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

NOTE: BEN was involved in the refugees and asylum seekers project. Care has therefore been taken, as with the other case studies, to represent the true views of the beneficiaries of the project. BTCV has given consent to include this project in the review.

The Refugees and Asylum Seekers conservation programme is a partnership between BTCV Scotland, the Scottish Refugee Council, the Black Environment Network and Cashel Farm, owned by the Scottish Forestry Society.

The Scottish Refugee Council (SRC) is the only organisation in Scotland providing a range of services, encompassing legal and benefits advice, support for health and housing, and drop-in centres to refugees and asylum seekers who have fled persecution, torture and conflict. SRC provided direct link with the Refugees and Asylum seekers communities.

Black Environment Network (BEN) is an organisation supporting the participation of ethnic communities in the built and natural environment. BEN provided the networking and funding opportunities and also the liaison work within the partnership.

BTCV Scotland is Scotland's leading conservation body, and provided practical conservation skills to the project.

Cashel Forest for A Thousand Years is a Millennium Forest for Scotland project at Loch Lomond, working to build community involvement in the reforestation of the countryside. Cashel Farm provided sites for the conservation activities.

Contacts between SRC and BTCV were established by BEN. BTCV established further contacts with Cashel Farm. The project was funded by Scottish Natural Heritage and Forward Scotland with the main aim of working with refugees and asylum seekers.

The focus of the project was the creation of woodland with indigenous tree species at Cashel Farm by the refugees and asylum seekers. About 500 refugees and asylum seekers were involved in the project.

Impact of work on BTCV:

- BTCV staff found the project to be fulfilling because they saw the positive impact it had on the refugees and asylum seekers.
- The project widened the scope for BTCV's partnership work, and also extended the range of project opportunities.
- BTCV staff gained skills in working with vulnerable groups.
- The project provided opportunities for other innovative work, such as Environments for All.

Impact of work on refugees and asylum seekers:

- It helped build beneficial relationships between local people and refugees, many of whom suffer from feelings of isolation.
- The refugees, some of whom were originally from rural areas, enjoyed being away from the stresses of the city and felt restored by spending time out in the countryside.
- The project allowed refugees to make a positive contribution to the local environment, so helping to break down the negative images often portrayed in the media.
- The project helped refugees establish themselves as individuals, rather than just being part of a homogenous group. By getting to know local people, individuals felt they could shed the stigma of being labelled as a refugee, and instead re-establish their own personalities.
- Social, cultural and historical meanings are embodied within environmental activities such as the planting of trees, which can be combined with ceremonies of dedication of the trees to those who have died or been left behind. The plot of newly planted trees is acting as a valuable tool for multicultural interpretation of the environment, becoming a heritage for the Scottish community as a whole. Its educational benefit on refugee issues is significant in helping to build social cohesion.

4. Findings and issues raised by review

4.1 Findings

4.1.1 STRENGTHS

BTCV has strengths in working with disadvantaged groups in the following areas:

- BTCV is working with disadvantaged groups in many parts of the UK, through its extensive network of local offices. (See Appendix 4 Analysis of BTCV's work with Black Minority Ethnic and Disadvantaged Communities)
- There is a strong commitment from many BTCV staff, who want to reach out and work with disadvantaged communities.
- Many disadvantaged people live in areas where environmental work can lead to a real improvement in their quality of life.
- BTCV has a large volunteer base to support work with disadvantaged communities.
- BTCV is resourceful in seeking funds to support its work with disadvantaged communities.
- BTCV is able to use a variety of methods and channels of communication to build relationships with disadvantaged communities.

4.1.2 WEAKNESSES

In spite of BTCV's strengths, there are current weaknesses within the organisation which act as barriers to hinder effective work with disadvantaged communities.

- Documentation from BTCV shows that there is high turnover amongst BTCV staff who work with disadvantaged communities
- Examples of good practice and case studies of working with disadvantaged groups within BTCV could be more effectively communicated within the organisation.
- Disadvantaged community organisations must have a real stake in the project in terms of development, funding and management. BTCV should share ownership and any kudos generated by the project.
- BTCV should adopt a system of soft indicators for staff to evaluate work with disadvantaged communities. Such indicators are more relevant and effective in determining outcomes when working with

disadvantaged communities. This is because some of the very important benefits are intangible.

4.1.3 OPPORTUNITIES

There are opportunities for BTCV to use in increasing the participation and contribution of disadvantaged groups in its work.

- BTCV members with influence among disadvantaged communities can act as BTCV 'champions' to promote the organisation.
- BTCV has many case study examples and practices of working with disadvantaged communities, which need to be communicated more effectively at all levels of the organisation.
- There is a large volunteer officer base who can support staff in reaching out and working with disadvantaged groups
- BTCV needs to work with their specialist network organisations to identify and address specific BTCV needs in working with ethnic, disabled and low income groups.
- Funders and the present government are keen to support projects targeting disadvantaged communities.

4.1.4 THREATS

There are however threats to BTCV's work with disadvantaged communities.

- Within BTCV are those who view the organisation as purely a nature conservation organisation, and who are resistant to broadening the scope of BTCV work.
- Staff working with disadvantaged groups must be consulted and supported by senior managers so that their needs are understood, and emerging issues are addressed to avoid problems occurring.
- BTCV needs to accept that much of this work is innovative, and projects which falter must be seen as a learning process and not a failure.
- Barriers which prevent community groups from having significant control over project activities will hinder sustainability of projects.
- The perception of the environmental sector among disadvantaged communities in general is 'white, male

and middle class'. Although BTCV's image among disadvantaged communities is good, and the organisation is seen as accessible, further work is needed to overcome this perception.

4.2 Issues raised by review

4.2.1 STAFF AND RESOURCES

- Staff turnover in projects targeting disadvantaged groups is high. Projects of this nature come with huge responsibilities and BTCV has to examine a way of rewarding staff working in this area more appropriately. Some projects, for example work with youth offenders in Southwick, North Sunderland, were rewarded with new staff to sustain the project.
- Working with disadvantaged communities may take more time and resources than expected, and patience and understanding is needed from funders and project staff.
- Through training and other appropriate means, project staff must gain awareness and skills in working with particular disadvantaged groups, so they are prepared for issues which may arise.
- The BTCV publication A Practical guide to community development in London (2000) is essential for developing general skills in community development work. However it would be useful for BTCV to have another guide of similar size which targets ways in reaching and working with 'hard to reach' groups such as disabled people, ethnic communities, Welsh and Gaelic speakers. This guide should be produced in conjunction with organisations with expertise in working with these groups.
- The London local groups training and development project 1997-99 final report (BTCV) is very detailed in information regarding building up the capacity of local groups. Staff should be given the time to read the report. However, BTCV has to find a much easier and more effective way of communicating project report findings to their staff and other environmental organisations. Quarterly meetings and use of appropriate training material to share good practice in any areas of working with disadvantaged groups may be a way of developing staff skills in this area.

4.2.2 INNOVATION

- Putting people first in nature conservation is new to BTCV and others in the environment sector, and often staff feel alone in changing BTCV's culture regarding nature conservation.
- Unsuccessful projects can provide case study lessons to find out what went wrong and to adapt projects in future. Environmental organisations should not be afraid to try anything new.

- A need within BTCV has been recognised since 1997, when community environmental action work became mainstream policy, to share good practice regarding community environmental action. However a more effective system of sharing and applying lessons learnt needs to be developed and promoted. For example, the summary of findings of the survey carried out by Environment for All in Wales, to find out the barriers to participation in environmental activities by under-represented groups, provides useful understanding of the needs of disadvantaged groups. Such reports should be promoted more effectively within BTCV and other conservation organisations.
- Engaging Welsh speakers in community projects has been challenging, since individuals see themselves as bilingual and not a community. BTCV is learning to address this problem.
- Using conservation work to achieve social cohesion is seen to be a very effective tool in places of strong social divide, such as Northern Ireland.

4.2.3 OTHER ISSUES

- There can be initial suspicion of environmental organisations due to community perceptions.
- Although the Natural Pioneer Millennium Award Scheme project was very successful, the awards were not meant to target disadvantaged individuals. Only about 3% of award winners were from ethnic communities.
- BTCV managers and committees need to be more aware of community development work. Soft indicators are needed to measure qualitative outputs. The resources, especially time, needed to achieve results, must be acknowledged. This will help highlight both BTCV and individual staff achievements in this area, and identify the true benefits of projects.
- Direct outreach by BTCV to community organisations and projects should be encouraged.
- BTCV staff were concerned about resource implications of working with disadvantaged groups, if the project is not funded with the sole aim of working with such groups. These concerns relate to job descriptions, and allowance of time and other resources to undertake work with disadvantaged communities.
- Projects funded with the sole aim of working with disadvantaged groups need to be seen within BTCV as a transitional stage for targeted groups to be integrated into BTCV as a whole.

5. Conclusion: Good practice, summary and action points

5.1 Good practice

5.1.1 COMMUNICATION

- Participants should be encouraged to use word of mouth to recruit other people.
- Environmental organisations need to make and maintain contact with a key person within a group, in order to facilitate communication.
- Disadvantaged groups should not be made to feel that they are doing the publicity work of environmental organisations. Any publicity work should be agreed in advance, and resources provided by the environmental organisations as necessary.
- Staff secondment of both environmental and community organisations should be encouraged as a way of developing skills and understanding of each others work for effective communication and working.
- BTCV has a wealth of information on working with disadvantaged people, including studies of successful community development projects in London and elsewhere in the UK. BTCV also has many years' experience of networking with organisations working with disadvantaged groups. Consultation with these organisations for expert advice during project development continues to be essential to project success.
- The London local groups training and development project final report indicated that BTCV's internal training in working with local groups and involving communities will be developed and delivered to BTCV staff and other environmental organisations. Checks should be made to ensure that this is happening and fully involves organisations working with target communities.

5.1.2 OWNERSHIP

- The participants who have ownership of a project include those who design the project and obtain access to funding.
- BTCV must involve other groups from the outset of project development, rather than asking groups to become involved part way through project development.
- The contribution of disadvantaged communities to projects must be acknowledged from the outset.

- Methods of effectively working together should be discussed and agreed, including processes to monitor the project. Work with disadvantaged groups is usually based on goodwill between the partners, but setting down terms of agreement on paper may also be appropriate.

5.1.3 PRACTICALITIES

- Initiating a project with a social activity can then lead on to environmental engagement.
- Start with simple, enjoyable, and readily achievable projects, before moving on to more complex projects.
- Staff working for environmental organisations should signpost communities if further support is required which is outside the remit of the environmental organisation.
- The progress of the project will be improved if the environmental organisation has a partner with knowledge about, and the trust of, the target community.
- Visits by the disadvantaged group to similar projects can help inspire and enthuse the group.
- Initial projects should be of direct environmental value to the target community.
- Projects involving volunteers should provide child care support. The need for child care support is highlighted in the Report on Equal Opportunities Monitoring, 1996, 1997 (BTCV Cymru).

5.1.4 SUSTAINABILITY OF PROJECT

- The needs and concerns of disadvantaged people should be put first in conservation work.
- If possible, either a person from the local community should be recruited to run the project, or a person with community skills and network links enlisted to champion the project.
- Local people must be active participants, and must be sufficiently trained and supported to sustain the project.
- There must be commitment from the environmental organisation so that support continues in the event of staff changes in the organisation. Groups tend to develop trust with members of staff, and effort must be put into ensuring continuity if staff leave.

- A planned approach is needed, but with sufficient flexibility to expand as necessary. This was shown by the refugees and asylum seekers partnership project in Scotland, which lacked the capacity to expand to involve more people at a time when the project became popular.
- The capacity of groups to sustain the project after existing funding ends must be addressed.
- Effective training should be given to community groups in project management and development. This may include training in fundraising, networking and other skills.
- Project assessment should include qualitative as well as quantitative outputs and outcomes.
- Indirect project benefits are often important to disadvantaged communities and must be taken seriously.
- Participatory appraisal techniques developed with community groups and organisations are effective in evaluating community projects.
- BTCV staff working with disadvantaged groups do not have the appropriate tools to measure project outputs and outcomes.
- Community groups and projects working in partnership with BTCV need more ownership of their work.
- BTCV's work with disadvantaged communities influences the organisation's policy on nature conservation.
- Information about work with disadvantaged groups is not being co-ordinated and disseminated effectively within BTCV and its partnership networks.
- General community development training for staff does not always provide the necessary skills and confidence to work with particular target groups.
- The funding of projects is a major consideration for BTCV staff, and the commitment of resources for work with disadvantaged groups has implications for them.

5.1.5 PROJECT EVALUATION

- Projects must be assessed on qualitative as well as quantitative outputs and outcomes.
- Indirect project benefits are often important to disadvantaged communities and must be taken seriously.
- Top down and bottom up support and understanding of the nature of working with disadvantaged communities promotes effective understanding of project outcomes and outputs.
- Participatory appraisal techniques developed with community groups and organisations are effective in evaluating community projects.

5.1.6 OTHER RELEVANT PRACTICE

- Taster activities are relevant in giving people a range of opportunities and interests.
- Goals set should be achievable and manageable.
- Continual support may be necessary for mental health groups.
- Incentives such as free training, T shirts and so on are particularly important in deprived communities.

5.2 Summary

- BTCV is successful in working with disadvantaged groups in general, but less so in working with black and minority ethnic community groups.

5.3 Action points

- BTCV needs to develop a more appropriate system to measure work with disadvantaged groups, especially using relevant soft indicators in measuring intangible benefits. BTCV and other environmental organisations must work with funders to accept these relevant soft indicators.
- BTCV needs to develop a social policy relevant to work with ethnic communities including travellers, asylum seekers and refugees, and with Welsh speakers.
- BTCV must identify a more effective way of co-ordinating and disseminating information on work with disadvantaged communities.
- BTCV needs to adopt positive action measures in service delivery and recruitment to help change the perception of the organisation among ethnic communities
- BTCV must identify and address the needs and concerns of present and future staff working with disadvantaged communities.
- BTCV presently works with non-environment organisations such as youth offenders' groups, disability organisations, careers services, housing associations, ethnic community organisations and health projects. This approach needs to be promoted at all levels of the organisation.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: References

1. Lawrence Weston green gym video report. BTCV Bristol.
2. An independent evaluation of the Dudley urban project. Final Report by A Millward, BTCV, 1990.
3. Corby nature conservation and community involvement project. Mid project report by Christine Salaman, BTCV.
4. Sandwell community environment project. BTCV Annual Report 94-95.
5. BTCV Wales Equal Opportunities Monitoring BTCV Nov.1996 & June/ July 1997 surveys.
6. BTCV Wales equal opportunities monitoring for volunteers and new deal participants. BTCV April 2000 & May 2001 surveys.
7. Environment for all Wales. Final evaluation report, BTCV, 2001.
8. Natural Pioneer Millennium Award Scheme. Final Report by Julie Webster, BTCV.
9. The barriers to participation in environmental activities of under-represented groups. BTCV August 1999 Report.
10. A practical guide to community development in London by Edward Kellow and Del Redvers. BTCV, Sept. 2000.
11. London local groups training and development project. Final report for The Bridge House Estates Trust. Produced by Gillian Empson, Local Groups Training and Project Development Officer. BTCV, December 1997 – June 1999.
12. Expanding the boundaries of conservation volunteering. BTCV 2000.
13. People's Places Research to support a BTCV bid to the Green Spaces and Sustainable Communities Initiative of the New Opportunities Fund. Project Partners Research, March 2000.
14. Building Communities – community led development. Wales Council for Voluntary Action Report, 1999.
15. Environments for All Report. BTCV, June 1999.
16. Report on Volunteering Development, 1994-1995. BTCV.
17. Report on Equal Opportunities Monitoring, 1996, 1997.

Appendix 2: Participants involved in telephone survey

BTCV CLIENTS

- Mike Wilson – Work in Leeds with people with learning disabilities
- Mrs Joanna Dredner – Beis Malka School Project
- Ms Georgina To – Lambeth Chinese Community Association
- Oliver Burke – Accra Youth Centre, Brixton
- Margaret Malcolm – Scottish Refugee Council (Refugee Environmental Access Project) in Glasgow and Edinburgh
- Rachel – Whitefield School, for post 16 students with autism and specific communication disorders

BTCV STAFF

- Elaine Harrison – work in Southwick, North Sunderland, with Youth Offending Service and Careers Service
- Andrew Casson – work with the Leaside Project, London, Borough of Tower Hamlets, London, Countryside Agency and Harca Local Housing Authority
- Helen Able – work with Accra Youth Centre, and the Waterloo Millennium Green Trust in London.
- Jessica Duffy – work in Kirklees with south Asian community
- Matt Parkins – Barefoot Project, Awetu Project and Riverside Warehouse Project in Cardiff, Wales
- Carolyn Tuner -work with Bangladeshi women's group
- Paul Forest – work with Beis Malka School Project
- Padraic Murphy – Conservation Volunteers Northern Ireland
- Andrew Wright – with disabled young people at Whitefield School
- Ian Humphreys – Conservation Volunteers Northern Ireland

Appendix 3: Telephone survey questionnaire

BTCV STAFF QUESTIONS

- How did you get in touch with the group?
- Which other organisations were involved in the project?
- What skills did other organisations bring to the project?
- Did you have experience in working with similar groups?
- Did you receive further training/training to develop your skills in working with the group?
- What support, if any, did BTCV provide to enable you work effectively with group?
- What else could BTCV have provided for the project?
- What did you learn from the project, for example skills learnt or experience gained?
- Has the project affected BTCV as an organisation in any way?
- Who funded the project?
- Was the project funded to work specifically with the target group?
- Were there any barriers which hindered progress of the project?
- What positive results were there from the project?
- Any other relevant information?
- ### BTCV CLIENT/COMMUNITY GROUP/ SCHOOL QUESTIONS
- How did you get in touch with BTCV?
- Did you receive any support to enable you to work with BTCV?
- Did BTCV meet your needs?
- What did BTCV do well?
- What could BTCV have done better?
- What lessons should BTCV learn in working with similar groups?
- How is the project being sustained?
- Any other comments?

Appendix 4: Analysis of BTCV's work with Black Minority Ethnic and Disadvantaged Communities UK 1999 – 2001 (SAMPLE SIZE IN BRACKETS)

