

FAITH BASED  
**FbRN**  
REGENERATION  
NETWORK uk

# **DEVELOPING AN OFFER TO FAITH BASED ORGANISATIONS**

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Photo: Matty Farah

# INTRODUCTION

## Research brief and methodology

This report was commissioned by the Faith Based Regeneration Network (FbRN) and carried out in June 2011 by Anna Allen, an independent consultant. The purpose of the research was to assist the Trustees to evaluate the effectiveness of FbRN and to provide them with information to be used in strategic planning.

This report summarises the research findings across the following themes:

- Gaps in the provision of services to local faith based organisations
- Priorities within those needs
- Sensitivities that the delivery of such services might entail.

The research used qualitative and quantitative data collected as follows:

- One to one telephone and face to face interviews with 20 participants that included FbRN members and voluntary sector infrastructure organisations. Additionally, one focus group with FbRN staff was carried out. Where members were interviewed, we made every effort to make sure that organisations from all main faith traditions and geographical locations were offered a chance to contribute. Interviewees included representatives of all 9 regions and at least one representative of each of the following faith traditions: Baha'i, Buddhism, Christian, Judaism, Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and Zoroastrian. Seven interviewees were women. Participants were representing a wide range of organisations, including local faith based organisations, voluntary sector and faith based support agencies and faith based social enterprises. Many were working for multi faith organisations or in a multi faith context. Participants' roles within their faith tradition and organisation included a fair spread of faith leaders, members, volunteers and paid workers.
- The results of a survey conducted in June 2011 by the Faiths and Civil Society Unit of Goldsmiths, University of London. The survey was sent out to all 854 contacts with email addresses on the FbRN database 67 responses were received.
- The responses from a questionnaire sent out to FbRN Trustees in June 2011.

## Observations

- It was made explicit to all participants that the key focus of this report was on the local level of faith based social action and on local faith based organisations.
- The individual opinions expressed through interviews are not representative of all faith or voluntary and community sector organisations. The report does not claim to portray a complete picture of the faith based organisations or present an outlook for the future. Nevertheless, the individual views and reflections of participants provide a useful insight on the key questions raised by this research.
- One individual from each organisation was interviewed and we accept that their views might not always represent the experiences across their organisation.
- Some stakeholders had previously been approached for another piece of work for FbRN Trustees. The decision was made not to contact these stakeholders again for this research.

## Terminology and abbreviations

The focus of this report is on local faith based organisations. This report defines faith based organisations as local, regional and national faith based organisations that are engaged in social action.

This report uses the existing FbRN's definition of faith based social action: Faith based social action happens when people of faith work together, often with others outside their faith community, in order to achieve real and positive change within their local community, or in wider society. It springs from the application of spiritual principles, for the betterment of society and the improvement of people's lives.

FbRN does not have members in the sense of people who pay a subscription or sign up to a set of principles. The contacts on the database are the members of FbRN and where the report uses 'members' it refers to these contacts.

Abbreviations used in this report are included below:

- **CVS** – Council for Voluntary Services
- **FbRN** – Faith based Regeneration Network
- **VCS** – Voluntary and Community Sector
- **BAME** – Black and Asian Minority Ethnic.

We are very grateful to all participants who took time to get involved in this research.

## Summary points from a literature review

A brief literature review was undertaken to examine previously reported evidence on:

- Support needs of faith based organisations
- Gaps in services and issues that they might have accessing support
- Sensitivities that service providers need to take into consideration when dealing with them.

Below is a short summary outlining key points of this review.

1. It is evident from the previously published reports that the extent of faith based social action across the country is immense. There is a rich variety of activities carried out across all areas and communities, contributing daily to the quality of our community life (Dinham 2007; DCLG 2008; Evison 2010; Pearman with Hatamian 2011; Spratt with James, 2008). Organisations do not have to be faith based to participate or to benefit from these activities (Evison 2010). The ways in which different faiths structure and carry out voluntary activities also vary (Boeck et al 2009). This has an impact on what support they might require and how they prefer to access it.
2. It is known from the previous research that the support needs of faith based organisations are diverse (Dinham 2007; Evison 2010; Pearman with Hatamian 2011; Spratt with James, 2008). Many perceived gaps in support to faith based organisations have been reported before. These include help with “practical tasks such as fundraising” and achieving financial sustainability, “skills development in areas such as recruiting, supporting and managing volunteers, and writing business plans and strategic documents and governance” (Boerk 2009: 45). Specific areas for capacity building established through the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund included for example project planning and administration, trustee retention, governance issues, ability to access funding, volunteer development and evaluation skills (Spratt with James, 2008). Small faith based organisations responded best to tailored face to face support (Spratt with James, 2008; Evison 2010).

3. Lack of funding and resources has been a challenge for faith based organisations (Finneron 2007; Evison 2010; Spratt with James, 2008). Uneven distribution of resources between different faiths and perception among faith communities of being treated unfairly in the allocation of public funding were cited by Chapman (2009). Five out of eight priority needs identified by Boerk (Boerk et al, 2009) related to funding or financial resources.
4. Although faith based organisations usually have a considerable input from volunteers, there are some tasks and areas of work that volunteers cannot cover. Resources are needed to employ permanent staff (Evison, 2010).
5. In terms of accessing support from voluntary sector organisations, it was acknowledged that the relationship between faith communities and the wider voluntary sector remains uncertain (Boerk 2009) and there is sometimes suspicion when faith groups deal with secular agencies (Spratt with James, 2008).

Lukka et al (2003: 71) pointed out that “the faith based sector exists as a parallel universe to the mainstream voluntary and community sector”. Relevancy, access and affordability of support were considered the key issues for consideration (Boerk 2009).

6. In terms of sensitivities, the relationships between faith groups and secular organisations are often set back by the lack of understanding or acceptance of faith values and practices (Boerk 2009).

## Structure of the report

This report has an Introduction and two main sections.

**Introduction** gives some background information on how this report came into existence and summary of points from a brief literature review.

**Key Findings in a nutshell:** this brief summary contains significant findings and was created with busy people in mind.

**Findings:** this section narrates a summary of views expressed by people interviewed for this research. It has three parts:

- What local faith based organisations need to thrive
- How faith based organisations access support
- Reflections on emerging issues and priorities for support for local faith based organisations.

We hope you enjoy reading the report.

## KEY FINDINGS IN A NUTSHELL

### What local faith based organisations need to thrive

Local faith based organisations are interested in support and services that would bring them to better address needs of their community. Local faith based social action has extensive reach and scope.

The needs of local faith based organisations are very diverse.

To do well they need:

1. Clear vision and values with focus on social outcomes.
2. Professional tools. Faith based organisations need to access a range of effective professional tools covering all aspects of setting up and running organisations and projects. They also need to have an understanding of rules, regulations and policy context in which they operate.
3. Resources, including people, money and buildings.
4. Networks, contacts and partnerships.

### What is missing: gaps in service provision

Securing sufficient income and funding remains a key challenge. In terms of support, brief and timely information about income generation and funding opportunities is helpful but support on practical level is considered most useful.

The swiftly changing economic and policy environment may challenge an organisation's hold on its vision and values; small grassroots faith groups may particularly feel isolated and may need support and encouragement.

Local organisations need to know where to find information on the laws and regulations that specifically apply to them. They are keen to keep up with relevant policy changes and welcomed brief and timely policy updates that are relevant to their work.

With increasing pressure on local volunteers, local organisations need support creating a nurturing environment for people to work in.

Practical support on a variety of issues is in demand. There seems to be an issue with finding concise and practical 'how to do' resources when they are required.

Faith based organisations are considering a wide range of solutions to address the lack of funding. Many consider it necessary to move away from a reliance on grants and find other ways to diversify their income streams.

Practical help to broker relationships and set up working consortia and partnerships locally and regionally is needed.

Networks take a lot of time to develop and some communities seem better connected than others. The national picture remains inconsistent. The disappearance of many regional bodies and networks has led to gaps in communication on the sub-national level.

There is a need for a "platform and opportunities for sharing practice and learning" for which infrastructure organisations are seen to have a main facilitation role.



## How faith based organisations access support

There is sometimes a lack of understanding that different faith groups may need different levels of support and ways of engagement.

The support available to local faith based organisations varies for different communities and from one area to another. As a result, local faith based organisations often use unique combinations of support.

Concerns were raised that there may be less support available as some support networks and infrastructure organisations struggle for funding and may have to close down.

Local faith based organisations are already affected by changes in their regions, in particular by the closure of some regional networks and Regional Faith Forums. Participants said that existing links and support mechanisms might need to be re-negotiated frequently over the next few years.

While local faith based organisations might access support from a variety of sources, their first call is often their own community and faith tradition. This autonomy and internal focus may be a strong and positive demonstration of their resourcefulness: it could sometimes be a hindrance where external support is concerned.

Support organisations encouraged faith groups to come forward and request their support: support will be more effective if the communities and groups themselves initiate requests.

Local faith based organisations wish to see national organisations coming more to the regions and running events and activities accessible to local groups.

Some faith based organisations identify themselves on one hand as being distinctly faith and, on the other hand, as part of the voluntary sector. Many organisations see some practical commonalities between their own experiences and the voluntary organisations around them and acknowledge that there are opportunities for learning.

Not all faith based organisations have equal ability and willingness to engage with organisations outside of their immediate circle of contacts. There are also those that might not have confidence or know how to engage effectively. Support organisations working with the faith and voluntary sectors need to take this into consideration when approaching local groups.

## Emerging issues and priorities for support for local faith based organisations

Faith based organisations are finding that they need to change the ways in which funding is secured. They are keen to develop a better understanding of how to approach different income generation streams and to find out more about suitable financial models.

On a wider level, a concern was expressed that the capacity built through the central government sponsored programmes in previous years is weakening and is likely to be lost without further investment.

There is a stronger than ever need to collaborate. There was a shared view among the participants that the whole nature of partnerships will need to be reconsidered.

Support with developing new kinds of partnerships and sharing of good practice is considered of high value and is a priority.

When the demand for local volunteers is high, the ability to cater for them and offer them supportive structures to make their experience of volunteering more enjoyable and valuable might be decisive factors in encouraging them to stay.

## Reflections on observing sensitivities when working with local faith based organisations

People need to be aware that there is a whole spectrum of opinions on observing sensitivities. Having this awareness would help to bridge any gaps in misunderstanding.

When working with people of faith:

- Make consideration for and respect people's values
- Be aware of generalizations and assumptions
- Understand that trust and respect are important in relationship building
- Respect identity
- Make allowances for language issues
- Learn about and respect religious, cultural and gender differences
- Be aware of the importance of ethical funding sources.

Not all of the sensitivities are around religion or culture as some of these issues may be common for both faith and voluntary sector groups, such as awareness that the resources and capacity of small faith groups might be limited.

Voluntary sector participants encouraged faith based organisations to be pro-active, to make people and organisations aware of any sensitivities and not wait for others to act first.

### Questions to take forward

These conversations started to shape an aspiration and a picture of a healthy faith based organisation that is well-equipped to be involved in social action.

They also touched on some deeper underlying issues that would require more in-depth discussions and we hope that these conversations will continue.

To encourage these discussions to take place we include a list of some of these questions below:

- What do we mean by a thriving faith community or congregation? What is a healthy faith community?
- What do different faith groups and organisations understand their calling to be?
- What does it mean to be a faith community or congregation in relation to other organisations around?
- What is the role that faith communities have and how does it fit together with other voluntary and community organisations that are doing similar work?

# FINDINGS

## What local faith based organisations need to thrive

We asked local faith based organisations themselves what they need to be able to thrive. We also wanted to know what external support they were using and what support was lacking. We talked to some infrastructure organisations that provide support to see what they think was needed.

One of the key messages that came out of these conversations was that **the key purpose of local faith based organisations was to support and care for their communities**. Local faith based organisations were interested in support and services that would bring them to better meet these community needs.

The interviews demonstrated the extensive reach and scope of local faith based social action and they also showed that the needs of local faith based organisations are very diverse.

From the interviews, to do well and achieve their key purpose local faith based organisations need:

- Clear vision and values with focus on social outcomes
- Professional tools
- Resources, including people, money and buildings
- Networks, contacts and partnerships.

### 1. Clear vision and values with focus on social outcomes

Many local faith based organisations see the importance of delivering projects according to their own faith principles. Projects designed with clear vision and values were better able to achieve this balance and bring about social outcomes that are really needed in their community. This view is strongly supported by infrastructure organisations who see their role as encouraging faith groups to ‘hold on to their values’ and in helping them to build confidence to communicate their purpose to funders and the agencies around them.

To operate well a faith based organisation has also to be mindful of how the needs of their local community might change.

#### Clear concept and values: gaps and support required

Not all local organisations are able to address these issues equally well. The swiftly changing economic and policy environment may challenge an organisation’s hold on its vision and values; small grassroots faith groups may particularly feel isolated.

Some participants admitted that there is still work to be done to align their faith and project values with needs of the local communities.

*“Sometimes these projects are very good and very worthy but sometimes I wonder whether some of them are there just to keep the [organisation] going.”*

Participant, local faith based organisation

Opportunities for sharing experiences and one to one support were quoted as most helpful.

Infrastructure organisations were keen that local faith based organisations focused on what they are doing and their reasons for doing it as well as on the impact they want to achieve and the difference they were looking to make in their local community.



## 2. Professional tools and skills

To thrive, faith based organisations need to access a range of effective professional tools covering all aspects of setting up and running organisations and projects. Though the combinations of tools might be different for different organisations, the ultimate aim is to create a “well run” and legally compliant organisation that has suitable governance structures and is responsive to the local community.

To achieve that, faith based organisations are likely to need some of the following tools.

### a) Practical resources

The nature of social action calls for practical tools that have real use on the ground. Local groups said that what they needed most were practical resources and practical hands-on help covering how to “set up and run activities well”, “manage day to day activities and affairs” and “do practical stuff.”

As one organisation may have different requirements to another, there needs to be a variety of resources available to cover the different practical elements of running organisations and social action projects.

Some of these resources are easier to find than others. A participant from a local organisation commented that whilst they can always find training and support on management and governance, there are much fewer other concise ‘how-to-do’ resources.

*“I want all the brick and mortar’s help, all the type of real practical stuff, not management.”*

Participant, local faith based organisation

Other organisations wanted to learn from best practice on governance and management, as they wanted to demonstrate to external bodies that they deliver services of professional quality.

*“Things like business plans so other people know that this is good quality service.”*

Participant, local faith based organisation

### b) Understanding of rules and regulations that apply

Faith based organisations operate within a wide societal and legal framework. To achieve their aims well, they need to understand how to be compliant with the rules and regulations that govern their activities.

Support agencies were aware of the challenges involved and were encouraging faith groups to come forward:

*“Enthusiasm is there, their heart is in the right place, but they also need to make sure that all legislation, regulations and criteria are being met from health and safety to employment, and that could be a very steep learning curve.”*

Participant, faith based infrastructure organisation

### c) Understanding of policy context

Faith based organisations also need to understand how to work within an environment of rapidly changing government policies. They need to be aware of these policies in the context of their work and their impact on the local community. They also need to know the future direction of these policies.

## Professional tools and skills: gaps and support required

Not all local organisations have equal access to the resources that they need and there seems to be an issue with finding concise and practical ‘how to do’ resources when they are required.

Mentoring on a wide range of issues tailored to an organisation’s needs was considered a very valuable support. Faith organisations involved in FbRN’s VISIBLE programme were very positive about their experiences with mentors.

Small grassroots faith organisations are particularly challenged when trying to make sense of the fast changing government policies and regulations. Local organisations need to know where to find information on the laws and regulations that specifically apply to them ranging from updates on employment law to help with applying for planning permissions. Practical advice on how to apply them is welcomed.

Local faith based organisations were keen to keep up with relevant policy changes and welcomed brief and timely policy updates that were relevant to their work. There were concerns raised that with many support organisations struggling for funding, this type of support might not be accessible to all in the future.

### 3. Resources

Local faith based organisations involved in social action need resources. Participants from local faith based groups were clear that ‘resources’ does not always mean funding and that other ways of support were also important.

*“What we need is resources. Resources are not always money, there are ways to contribute time and training and things like that.”*

Participant, local faith based organisation

These resources include people, money and buildings.

#### a) Financial resources

Local faith based organisations felt that having sufficient financial resources was a crucial element of their success and that it could be strengthened further. Many groups commented that it was becoming harder to find external resources to maintain their current level of activity, keep their buildings in good order and their doors open to their communities.

*“Our big challenge is to survive and secure stable revenue and this is becoming more and more challenging.”*

Participant, local faith based organisation

It was clear from the interviews that faith based organisations are considering a wide range of solutions to address the lack of funding. Many considered it necessary to move away from a reliance on grants and find other ways to diversify their income streams.

*“Give us more funding - I think it’s more than that...Yes you may apply for grants but you have other ways of generating income as well.”*

Participant, faith based infrastructure organisation

The tone of conversation around funding was investigational and open-minded. Some local groups were keen to explore new income streams and new ways of working with others to strengthen their position. For example, suggestions were made about forming local and regional consortia to respond to tenders and deliver services.

Some organisations were exploring opportunities to charge for training courses, while others were looking to save costs through moving from a central to a home based office. A number of organisations were looking to approach the corporate sector.

## **b) People**

Local faith based organisations and infrastructure bodies alike conveyed a shared view that the key need is to have a sufficient number of people involved, whether they be staff or volunteers.

Participants acknowledged that a lack of stable income is often the main problem where staff are concerned.

*“We can’t afford to hire enough staff to run necessary services. Need more trained people that are there on a permanent basis.”*

Participant, local faith based organisation

Those local groups that relied mostly on volunteers said it was becoming more difficult for people to commit regular hours.

*“There is an issue about capacity, about volunteers being around to be able to do all the things that we want to do, specifically in terms of consultations, inviting community members on our board.”*

Participant, local faith based organisation

More permanent solutions are needed, they admitted, whereby activities are not delivered entirely by volunteers and there are sufficient staff with relevant skills. Training and development for staff, Trustees and volunteers were therefore considered important for an organisation to function and needed some recognition and investment.

## **c) Faith buildings**

Vital community activities that used faith buildings were often dependent on the building’s state of repair. Faith based organisations feel under more pressure to secure sufficient funds and support to maintain buildings in good order.

## Resources: gaps and support required

Local faith based organisations need a strong resource base. This includes financial resource, staff, volunteers and buildings.

Finances: Securing sufficient income and funding remains a key challenge. In terms of support, brief and timely information about income generation and funding opportunities is helpful but support on practical level is considered most useful.

Practical requests included:

- Support with specific grants applications
- Presenting bids to funders
- One to one advice on funding and income generation

Brokering relationships and setting up income generating partnerships locally and regionally.

Some organisations are looking at new approaches and would welcome opportunities to network and share ideas.

Participants from voluntary infrastructure organisations suggested that faith based groups might need help trying and testing financial models that work for them. Those models based on mixed economy and diverse income sources were considered most suitable.

People: support around creating a nurturing environment for people to work in as well as training and development for staff, volunteers and Trustees was welcomed. Some organisations preferred the training to be delivered locally whilst others did not mind travelling to attend a high-quality training course organised by a national charity.

Buildings: The process of securing funds for the building repair and renovation is usually lengthy and requires a lot of time and resources. Faith based organisations need information and support whilst going through the process. There is a need for recognition and better support from the government where heritage buildings are concerned.

## 4. Networks, contacts and partnerships

Faith based social action was described as being founded on networks, partnerships and personal connections.

*“This is all about personal connections, knowing people and building a rapport with them.”*

Participant, local faith based organisation

The development of trust and relationships on the personal and organisational levels is very important for faith based organisations.

*“Bringing people together is challenging and somebody needs to make the first move. The relationship is quite sensitive at the beginning.”*

Participant, local faith based organisation

There is a need for a “platform and opportunities for sharing practice and learning” for which infrastructure organisations are seen to have a main facilitation role.

Many faith based organisations talked about gaps in partnership working and that secular agencies are not always willing to engage. Some faith based organisations were keen to collaborate with the voluntary and community sector whilst others were focusing on developing better links with education, employment and other service providers locally.

## Networks: gaps and support required

Networks take a lot of time to develop and some communities seem better connected than others. The national picture remains inconsistent. The disappearance of many regional bodies and networks has led to gaps in communication on the sub-national level.

Opportunities for the exchange of information and good practice were valued; even more so was practical help to broker relationships and set up partnerships locally and regionally. Some faith based organisations wanted to see local consortia between local authorities, voluntary and community sectors and service providers but did not have time and resources to develop them. They were concerned that service providers and agencies might not be willing to engage and welcomed help on developing an understanding of how to approach other agencies.

Groups that are a part of extensive networks may not always know how to use them effectively.

Support organisations said faith groups might benefit from sharing practice with a wider range of partners and from working more effectively together. They would benefit from support and peer networks around them built with a clear purpose in mind though help may be needed to set them up.

Finally, the conversations started to shape an aspiration and a picture of a healthy faith based organisation that is well-equipped to be involved in social action.

They also touched on some deeper underlying issues that would require more in-depth discussions and we hope that these conversations will continue.

To encourage these discussions to take place we include a list of some of these questions below:

- What do we mean by a thriving faith community or congregation? What is a healthy faith community?
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- What is the role that faith communities have and how does it fit together with other voluntary and community organisations that are doing similar work?

## HOW FAITH BASED ORGANISATIONS ACCESS SUPPORT

From the interviews, sources of support for local faith based organisations might include:

- Own community (congregation) and faith tradition
- Other local organisations around them
- Infrastructure organisations – faith based and/ or specializing on faith/ inter faith/ multi faith issues
- Voluntary and community sector
- Local and central government.

The support available to local faith based organisations varies for different communities and from one area to another. As a result, local faith based organisations often develop unique combinations of support. There is sometimes a lack of understanding that different faith groups may need different levels of support and ways of engagement.

Concerns were raised that there may be less support available as some support networks and infrastructure organisations struggle for funding and may have to close down. Local faith based organisations are already affected by changes on their regional level, in particular by the closure of some regional networks and Regional Faith Forums. Participants said that the existing links and support mechanisms might need to be re-negotiated frequently over the next few years.

Infrastructure organisations encouraged faith groups to come forward and request their support: support will be more effective if the communities and groups themselves initiate requests.

### 1. Support from own community and faith tradition

While local faith based organisations might access support from a variety of sources, their first call is often their own community and faith tradition. When need arises, they do not always seek support externally and look first for local or national resources within their own faith tradition.

This autonomy and internal focus may be a strong and positive demonstration of their resourcefulness: it could sometimes be a hindrance where external support is concerned. This is particularly true where local faith based groups tend to congregate around their own places of worship and focus primarily on their communities.

*“The idea that some other organisation has got something that you need is not one that often sits very comfortably with some local groups...It’s almost as if you are forcing something upon them from the outside.”*

Participant, faith based infrastructure organisation

Some faith traditions such as Christian, Jewish and Muslim, have more established infrastructures and support networks. This level of support may not be equally available to all faiths. Infrastructure organisations that work across different faiths often step in, where there is a gap, to provide the necessary support.



## 2. Support from other local organisations and networks

Faith based organisations might benefit from peer level support or from being linked to a local faith forum or council where these networks exist. This type of support varies between areas. One participant said that they are not linked to any faith organisations in their area and the disappearance of regional level networks makes it more challenging for faith organisations to maintain regular communication.

*“Faiths groups in [the region] used to meet informally; each one of us now has to struggle on our own.”*

Participant, local faith based organisation

## 3. Infrastructure organisations – faith based and/ or specializing on faith/ inter faith/ multi faith issues

These infrastructure organisations fulfill an important role in terms of sharing information, networking, resources and updates specific to faith. They are valued for providing and signposting to resources and case studies, keeping local groups up to date with policy development, and providing a national overview on a range of issues.

Through their position and involvement in policy, national infrastructure organisations might become aware of some issues, for example patterns of gaps in services, even before they are evident locally. This ‘advance warning’ role of national organisations is particularly valuable in the current rapidly changing environment.

From interviews, there is a strong awareness of national infrastructure organisations working in multi and inter faith context. Many local faith based organisations said they are connected to them. The most frequently mentioned organisations were FbRN and the Inter Faith Network for the UK.

Some organisations see London-based national bodies as being “too far away” to have any sufficient impact and say that they prefer to use local support. They wish to see national organisations coming more to the regions and running events and activities accessible to local groups.

## 4. Voluntary and community sector

Most local faith based organisations are aware of or linked to their local CVS office, a voluntary sector or BAME local network. These networks are used for updates on funding, access to affordable local training and information sharing events.

*“In terms of training, most relevant is received from CVS.”*

Participant, local faith based organisation

Local groups value that this support is “more grassroots” and can be accessed face-to-face in their locality.

Faith based organisations sometimes find the language of ‘business planning’ a barrier and may miss out on some governance and business planning support available from voluntary organisations.

*“VCS might be there to support but not always know how to interpret.”*

Participant, faith based infrastructure organisation

Local faith based organisations are often connected to other local forums and networks working on specific issues, such as local Health Forums, NHS networks and Police. Some are connected to and have good working relationships with their local Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE).

Fewer local organisations directly accessed support from national voluntary and community sector organisations. The most frequently cited are the National Council for Voluntary Services (NCVO), Volunteering England and the Directory for Social Change. Some local organisations are connected to networks and bodies with specific focus, such as the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services. The value of this support comes from high quality training, resources, and national-level updates on specific issues.

From the interviews, faith organisations described their association with the voluntary and community sector in different ways. Many organisations identify themselves on one hand as being distinctly faith and, on the other hand, as part of the voluntary sector. Voluntary sector resources related to generic charity rules and regulations were used and considered helpful. Many organisations see some practical commonalities between their own experiences and the voluntary organisations around them and acknowledge that there are opportunities for learning.

Not all faith based organisations have equal ability and willingness to engage with organisations outside of their immediate circle of contacts. There are also those that might not have the confidence or know how to engage effectively. Support organisations need to take this into consideration when approaching local groups.

## **5. Local and central government**

As with other routes for support, the picture of support from local government is uneven across the country. Some faith based organisations enjoy a positive relationship with their local council and have received support from them in the past. Support received ranged from funding to the use of office space.

Many participants commented that following changes to government policy and the pressures on councils' budgets it is becoming harder to get local councils' funding and support. As the routes for strategic engagement are changing or disappearing (for example Local Strategic Partnerships, Regional Development Agencies and Regional Government Offices) faith based organisations face the challenge of getting their voice heard and understood.

Having a link to central government is considered important. Support received from central government included information, funding and invitations to attend high-level events or to be involved in consultations. Some people commented that they link to government through national bodies such as FbRN and the Inter Faith Network for the UK, whilst others said that they have on occasion received information directly from the Department for Communities and Local Government.

## **REFLECTIONS ON EMERGING ISSUES AND PRIORITIES FOR SUPPORT FOR LOCAL FAITH BASED ORGANISATIONS**

We asked the participants to share their reflections on the issues that would most affect the local faith based organisations in the next few years. We also wanted to know about any support that would help them address these issues.

This section summarises their views.

### **Navigating the way through the times of uncertainty**

Faith based organisations are working in the climate of public sector cuts and uncertainty. Like many other organisations around them, they are deeply affected by the changes in the government agenda and are feeling the impact the economic crisis has on them and their communities.

There are many external factors that are affecting them, including widening gaps in service provision locally and an increased demand for services, pressures on volunteers, as well as a lack of funding and the closure of many agencies and service providers around them. As the local faith based organisations respond to the growing gap between the rhetoric of the Big Society agenda and its local implementation, there is a danger of feeling disconnected and isolated. Interviews conveyed a sense of the growing North-South divide that might impact on the relationships between national and local organisations in the next few years. London based national infrastructure organisations might need to take this into consideration when approaching local groups.

Local groups may therefore find a special value in being part of a wider national network. They might also appreciate having a national network as a ‘critical friend’ and being able to speak to someone who could have an overview on how other areas deal with similar issues. National infrastructure bodies have a real opportunity to help local groups navigate their way through these challenges and, as one participant suggested, to encourage them “not to wait for the government to decide but go and do what needs to be done locally.”

In the months to come, some small faith based groups that are currently involved in social action might find it challenging to stay active and responsive to the needs of all local community members, regardless of their faith or belief.

Local faith based groups might also find planning increasingly difficult as the economic and policy context remains uncertain. The infrastructure support agencies face a huge task to support local organisations through this process and help them remain true to their vision and communities.

To work collaboratively, groups may need extra capacity to forge new links and work out new relationships in the changing landscape of local organisational networks. Without support from trusted sources, some local faith based organisations might start turning their attention inwards and focusing on their own faith community. Support and encouragement from faith based infrastructure organisations would be important to help keep local faith based organisations tuned to social action in these challenging times.

### **Learning to deal with changes in the funding culture**

One of the biggest issues affecting local faith based organisations comes from the changes in funding culture. Funding is still considered an important source of support and is presently

lacking. There are concerns amongst local organisations about being able to survive and “keep the doors open.” Feelings of disappointment and frustration at not being able to find resources, and a sense of angst and vulnerability were voiced at interviews. Infrastructure organisations are well aware of the challenges that faith based organisations face in order to secure income and suggest that the way forward is to reconsider roles.

*“For some it is about survival at the moment and not flourishing, possibly re-thinking their roles.”*

Participant, faith based infrastructure organisation

On a wider level, a concern was expressed that the capacity built through the central government sponsored programmes in previous years is weakening and is likely to be lost without further investment.

As fewer funding opportunities are available and the funding and support from central government is drying out, faith based organisations are finding that they need to change the ways in which funding is secured. Organisations think that they are entering “a new territory” with many uncertain factors around which they will need to readjust, think and do things differently. The interviewees communicated the need to rethink their existing vision and goals and explore new ideas around income generation to become more entrepreneurial.

For social enterprises, a key focus is similarly on increasing income. The drop in income that many social enterprises are experiencing will have wide impact as it is likely to translate into less re-investment into their local community.

Local organisations are keen to develop a better understanding of how to approach different income generation streams and to find out more about suitable financial models. Signposting and alerts to funding and tendering opportunities will help organisations to proactively plan their work on income generation.

*“Information is the key. In the fast changing environment if you don’t have access to information, you really could be left behind.”*

Participant, local faith based organisation

## **Dealing with increased pressure on volunteers**

The capacity of volunteering and other human resources comes under pressure at times of economic difficulty. Many local groups are relying increasingly on volunteers as funding and support are diminishing. Local services, such as crèche and activities for children also experience a higher demand, as families try to reduce their child care costs. Local people feel increased pressure on their time and resources and might not always be so open to volunteering.

Many participants feel that they are increasingly asked to deliver “more for less”.

*“If faith communities are going to deliver essential services, the government needs to recognise that the Big Society is not just about everybody giving their skills and expertise for free.”*

Participant, faith based infrastructure organisation

When the demand for local volunteers is high, the ability to cater for them and offer them supportive structures to make their experience of volunteering more enjoyable and valuable might be decisive factors in encouraging them to stay.

Small faith based organisations are interested to learn from good practice as to how to develop better support structures for volunteers and to find practical tools that might enable volunteers have a more enjoyable experience.

## An island of faith or a partnership

The reduction of government support and funding resulted in the increased level of competition for resources within voluntary and community sector and, in turn, local partnership working has been affected.

*“What the government is achieving by this is a divisive atmosphere, instead of joining networks and working together, people are being divided and are going to be fighting for the money.”*

Participant, local faith based organisation

In terms of local partnership working, faith based organisations are still dealing with other challenges including:

- Patchy networks where not all service provisions nor all areas are covered
- A lack of reliable working partnerships between faiths, different sectors and service providers
- In some areas organisations being reluctant to work with faith groups
- Lack of partnerships where faith organisations are involved as equal partners.

Despite all these challenges, there is a stronger than ever need to collaborate.

There was a shared view among the participants that the whole nature of partnerships will need to be reconsidered.

Many faith based organisations are looking at partnerships that can be developed into more formalised collaborations. Organisations have already started looking for new innovative ways of working together to deliver services and to increase their chances of successfully bidding for contracts. Support with developing these new kinds of partnerships and sharing of good practice is considered of high value and is a priority.

## Governance, management and business planning

Infrastructure organisations considered governance, management and business planning to be among the key gaps to be filled if organisations are to remain viable in the years to come. There is a need for all organisations to review and adjust their existing structures and not all local faith based organisations would be able to go through this process without support.

Infrastructure organisations pointed out that there are existing VCS toolkits and resources that could be used. They realise that not all faith based organisations are aware of this need and of the existing resources. As a result not all faith groups are able to take what is offered or use resources available through VCS. Infrastructure organisations saw their role in helping to make a larger number of organisations aware.

*“National voluntary sector organisations produce fantastic resources but they are not known to faith groups, partly because they don’t know they need to look.”*

Participant, faith based infrastructure organisation

Infrastructure organisations were keen to see faith based groups “not to cut themselves of the valuable opportunities” and actively seek VCS support.

Faith based infrastructure organisations say that signposting is not always an easy task because of the language issues and an inconsistency in voluntary sector support across the country. There were concerns that there will be even less support available in the next few years because of the funding cuts.

*“There is no a national standard so it’s hard to signpost as the provision could not be available from CVS in their local area.”*

Participant, faith based infrastructure organisation

For some faith based organisations, there are also issues around business and management terminology and the language used to communicate these concepts.

### **Community-specific and location-specific gaps**

Other gaps might occur that are specific to particular faiths, locations or areas of expertise. The challenge for support organisations will be to uncover these gaps and find the best way to respond to them. Issues are likely to be different depending on the location or community that is affected.

Faith based organisations usually focus on addressing the needs of their communities. Interviewees cited some examples of issues where faith organisations can contribute to improving their services. They include work to prevent reoffending and to encourage the rehabilitation of young people from different faith backgrounds and work to promote health and leisure. Support and involvement is needed from national partners in discussions on how to improve these services.

### **Lack in resources and signposting available to all faith traditions**

Some faith traditions have developed more resources and have more support networks available than others. Support that is available within a faith tradition is not always equally distributed across locations. A lack of internal expertise may leave a gap that is not easily filled. Some faith communities struggle to find the support they need and faith based infrastructure organisations are concerned that such gaps may be increasing. In some areas and for some communities, there might be a lack of resources whereas in other areas resources may exist but there is a lack of signposting to them.

There is a gap in national level funding and support provision dedicated to faith. The role that the Community Development Foundation used to play on providing capacity building support alongside funding has not been replaced. There is a view that this gap is widening.

### **Priorities for support**

Participants shared the view that a key priority will be practical support and advice on how to stay afloat and adjust to the rapidly changing external environment.

This support might include:

#### **a) Re-evaluating goals and roles, reviewing current services and creating realistic plans.**

Supporting organisations through the process of rethinking and reprioritising their roles and services will be important. One participant commented that “touching base with reality and developing plans accordingly” will be crucial.

*“...Organisations that are realistic will be the ones that manage to survive through the uncertainty of the next three years.”*

Participant, faith based infrastructure organisation



## **b) Developing sustainability plans and exit strategies**

As the picture of funding and support for local social action projects is taking shape and the policy context is becoming more defined, there is a need for faith based organisations to think through their sustainability plans or exit strategies for their projects. Many organisations are not certain how to approach this on a practical level. There is a need for a clear and simple process that is effective in a rapidly changing policy context and a tool that can be implemented in practice. There is also a need for support for organisations to go through this process. Both local faith based organisations and infrastructure bodies communicated this view.

## **c) Understanding on how to approach different streams of income generation and develop a suitable financial model**

There is an awareness that the approaches to fundraising and income generation need to change and that new income sources need to be considered. Local faith based organisations are often hindered in this process by a lack of clarity on how to go about this as well as by their limited capacity. Quality support on developing a suitable financial model is not readily available.

Practical support is lacking on issues related to:

- Funding, for example, how to meet funders' requirements and present bids to funders in a more competitive environment
- Commissioning, for example practical help on how to respond to tenders
- Demonstrating 'fitness for purpose', when accessing external funding or approaching commissioners.

## **d) Alerts and signposting to funding and income generation opportunities**

The rapidly changing funding environment brought about a growing sense of not knowing where and how to look for funding. More effective signposting service alerting to relevant funding opportunities will be of value to local faith based organisations.

## **e) Practical support on addressing specific community needs**

For example work to prevent reoffending and to encourage the rehabilitation of young people from different faith backgrounds. Local faith based organisations might struggle to respond to some of the local community needs if they have fewer resources available to them.

## REFLECTIONS ON OBSERVING SENSITIVITIES WHEN WORKING WITH LOCAL FAITH BASED ORGANISATIONS

When asked if there are any sensitivities that services need to think about when working with local faith based organisations, the responses were varied.

About half of people said that there were no specific issues. The rest of the participants responded with a number of issues that service providers might need to take into consideration.

Below is a selection of issues supported by quotations that illustrate the sensitivities:

- Being aware of generalizations and assumptions

*“Assumptions is a big area whereby sensitivity needs to be observed. You need to be aware of assumptions you are making.”*

- Making consideration for and respecting people’s values

*“Remembering that the thing we stand for is unconditional love.”*

*“Public bodies and service providers still need to develop understanding of sensitivities and awareness of the values of what we do.”*

- Understanding that trust and respect are important in relationship building

*“A lot of faith groups have fantastic integrity and they hold this integrity by not rushing into all sorts of relationships but by developing trust and respect. They need to feel that trust, when they trust you they will work with huge respect and integrity with you. In other circles people might not be used to this. Trust and respect and sensitivity to that are important.”*

- Respecting identity

*“It’s about identity, and respecting people’s identity, and the identity of culture and not just the identity of person.”*

- Making allowances for language issues

*“Help needed for members whose first language is not English.”*

- Learning about and respecting religious, cultural and gender differences

*“Respecting certain activities, observing certain places and holding cultural respect in very practical ways.”*

- Being aware of the importance of ethical funding sources

*“For us funding needs to be coming from ethical sources.”*

Not all of the sensitivities are around religion or culture as some of these issues may be common for both faith and voluntary sector groups. For example, some people say that there needs to be awareness that the resources and capacity of small faith groups might be limited.

*“Practical sensitivity in terms of money, resources and what their worries might be - need to be aware of these worries, personal issues, social stuff that’s going on.”*

*“Services need to be aware that some groups are set to be run by volunteers on a small budget and don’t have capacity to engage on full time basis. Sometime the expectations are high for voluntary groups to engage and deliver.”*

Voluntary sector participants encouraged faith based organisations to be pro-active, to make people and organisations aware of any sensitivities and not wait for others to act first.

*“It is always challenging to form new relationships... This is true for all human engagement, not just faith. If somebody does not understand you, there are more reasons to make a contact...”*

There was a very good understanding and awareness of the issues and opinions among interviewed faith based infrastructure organisations. Some organisations commented that people need to be aware that there is a whole spectrum of opinions on this issue. Having this awareness would help to bridge any gaps in misunderstanding.

*“Some communities and church leaders get quite worked up about their differences, particulars of their faith and culture. Non faith based communities and organisations need to be sensitive to the fact that might sometimes occur and some people might have a hard line view. I think the reaction is not about expecting them to change; it’s about the church opening its approaches.”*

Participants agreed that national organisations have a role to play in raising awareness to sensitivities and that FbRN is in a strong position to help and make the learning process experiential. It was hoped that some of this learning may take place through the Community Organisers programme of Locality and similar initiatives in the future.

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