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Anti-racist Wales evidence report: North Wales Africa Society

A report by the North Wales Africa Society following dialogue within their communities of peoples' experiences of racism relating to climate change, environment, and rural affairs matters.

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About this report

This report is a record of conversations and testimonies of people of ethnic minority background in Wales talking about their experiences of racism and their ideas and ambitions for climate change and environmental matters.

Many of these conversations were held in languages other than English or Welsh and translated by the dialogue convenors or conversations were held in English, bearing in mind, for many participants, English is a second language. As these reports reflect what was actually said, they have not been translated into Welsh.

Introduction

The Welsh Government launched its Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan (ARWAP) in June 2022 with Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs not included in the initial phase of the plan. A more comprehensive action plan was purposed to include work on climate change, rural affairs and the environment, based on evidence from data to be collected from the live experiences of Black Asian Minority Ethnic people across Wales.

Figures from the **ONS census** conducted in 2021 have shown that the proportion of Black Asian Minority Ethnic individuals and households in Wales has risen from 4.4 % in 2011 to 6.2% in 2021, with the Welsh government now recognising that locally and globally ethnic minority people are disproportionately affected by climate change and practices that are environmentally damaging.

The government has also identified that the experience of racism by Black Asian Minority Ethnic communities in the environment and green spaces, their desire, and views on what would make this part of life more inclusive have been largely

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undocumented. In line with this, the Welsh Government has initiated an evidence programme covering climate change, environment and rural affairs issues, to support policy in the further development of the evidence base and support thinking in developing and implementing an Anti-racism Action Plan covering these policy areas.

In order to have our voices heard and contribute to the national dialogue, the North Wales Africa Society (NWAS) secured funding from the Welsh Government Environment Rural Affairs sector in support of the Anti-racist Wales Action Plan (ARWAP). NWAS is a membership-based community for people of African and Caribbean descent living in North Wales. Its members consist of a high number of students and others in various professions. Our vision is to achieve a vibrant inclusive society that supports, integrates, and sustains our diverse community while our mission is to strive to attain a vibrant society focusing on social, education and business (SEB).

This report is aimed at understanding the views of the minority ethnic community's resident in the North Wales region, where the human population is evenly spread across six counties. Most especially the Gwynedd County which has a largely multicultural population as a result of the location of Bangor University and the Hospital (Ysbyty Gwynedd) in the county. In Bangor City (Gwynedd area) the **proportion of Black Asian Minority Ethnic individuals (students)** has risen from 21.5% in 2018 to 30.9% in 2020. Therefore, the BAME community in this region will most likely have residents who have lived longer in the community/region and are more likely to contribute to the discussion.

There is little research investigating race inequalities concerning the environment covering climate change, environment, and rural affairs issues. This study hopes to fill a significant information gap. This study sets out to investigate:

- the experiences and effects of climate change to the minority ethnic

communities most especially young people, students, and women across the North Wales region

- the motivation for some members of the minority ethnic communities to visit green spaces
- the impact of the use of local green spaces, parks, and recreational locations on well-being of BAME group

Methodology

This study used a range of qualitative and quantitative research methods:

- semi-structured interview questions (focus groups discussions (FGDs)) and walking interviews were used to collect qualitative data
- to obtain relevant data, semi-structured interview questions (FGDs) were conducted for youths, students and younger members of NWAS on the 7th of October 2023 and for women only on the 14th of October 2023
- the focus group discussions incorporated a range of age groups from 12 to 65. In all FGDs, a set of pre-determined questions was used, but the structure was flexible depending on the general flow of the conversations. Both FGDs were 90 minutes long and were not limited to the following topics
- how to access and use recreational green spaces such as gardens and parks
- local environment, recycling and reusing
- food and food cultures, experiences of racism in food purchasing for home consumption and outside the home
- growing own food for community, health, dietary choice, environmental or climate change reasons among residents.

There are various types of walking interviews, but the methodology can simply be described as a researcher interviewing participants while walking on a determined location or route (Evans and Jones 2011).

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Walking interviews were conducted during the beach clean on the 21st of October 2023. Previous literature suggests that walking with interviewees offers an intimate way to engage with the landscape and encourages a sense of connection with the environment, thus allowing researchers to access people's capacity and attitudes about their environment (Evans and Jones 2011). The beach clean was conducted at Rhosneigr beach located in a village south-west of Anglesey, North Wales. Conducting the interviews during the beach clean also helped to make the research process informal and convenient for participants.

The data collected was transcribed and analysed, creating key concepts and ideas from the outlined discussion topic. All participation in this study was voluntary and the research was compliant with the Welsh government's ethical process. Formal consent included requesting permission for the recording of FGDs. To maintain the anonymity of the participants, identification codes were assigned during transcription.

The FGDs were held at the Bangor African and Caribbean Centre (BACC) located on the high street of Bangor City, Wales. The main aim of the groups was to capture a range of young people and women to broadly mirror the areas demographic makeup. As a thank you for their contribution, participants received an African and Caribbean store voucher. All total of 30 participants aged 12 to 65. Most sessions were 90 minutes long and all participants were encouraged to join in. Individuals were also deterred from attempting to dominate the discussion.

To obtain pertinent data, this project information was also shared with newcomers and older members during the NWS welcome party of new students. The interview of the young people and student focus groups held on the same day (7th October 2023) with a total number of 57 people (37% males & 63% females) in attendance and participating in the discourse. The strategies NWS employed have afforded members of our community the opportunity to share their opinions and add their voice to the discourse.

Focus groups discussions (FGD)

Young people and students group (YPS)

Most participants belonged to Black African (95%), and Caribbean or Mixed Ethnic groups (5 %) and covered age ranges of 12 to 25. The participants were mostly constituted of international students and a few long-term residents with 20% identifying themselves as male and 80% as female (annex a).

Female only focus group (F)

Majority of participants belonged to Black African (98%), Caribbean or Mixed Ethnic groups (1%) and White British (1%) and aged 35 to 65, the participants were mostly constituted of international students and a few long-term residents and professionals (annex a).

Findings

Main outcomes of the focus group discussions

Understanding of environmental and climate change issues

In both FGDs all participants showed generally awareness of climate change issues and described the environment as very 'precarious', 'appalling' and 'unsafe'; references were made to ozone layer depletion, deforestation, air pollution, greenhouse gases, carbon dioxide emission from cars, methane release from dairy cows, and shrinking of the arctic sea ice per decade due to

warmer temperatures, were general issues raised in both focus groups. They were more responses from the younger members (YPS) than the female only (F) group to this question.

For instance, 1 participant described how he feels about the environment and climate change issues:

“ I feel like whatever we actually do right now in terms of the environment, recycling, and planting of trees does help our climate because of the ozone layer. For example, our ecosystem is interlinked and works hand in hand. If 1 thing does not work out it kind of damages the chain and at the end of the day, it affects us as humans. Black African male participant, young people and students’ group. ”

Another participant stated that:

“ When I think of the environment and climate, I think of crisis like nothing is safe at the moment, with everyone working towards something to change it, Black African female participant, young people and students’ group ”

Participants were asked if they were involved in climate change advocacy, across both groups, only the much younger members (YPS group) stated that they are using information communicated to them through educational materials at school (eco - posters).

Awareness and use of local green spaces, countryside and coastal areas

Participants in both groups were asked these questions, and a range of motives were given for visiting green spaces, but the consensus was for physical health (sports, exercise), recreation and social escape. Several of the participants

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mentioned also going to the green spaces for social connections (festivals, carnivals, events) with family and friends as a general motivator. As previous studies suggest that childhood visits to green spaces are mostly associated with frequency of green space use (Ward Thompson et al., 2008).

For instance, 1 female participant stated that:

“ I usually go to Bangor pier with my mum and brothers for a nice walk, open fields like the roman camp for picnics while my brothers play football, hiking on Snowdon. So, in generally I try to use all the green spaces around me. Black African female participant, young people and students’ group ”

Most participants from the YPS group reported visiting local green spaces relatively regularly,

“ we go once a week depending on how busy or free, I am (*Black African female participant*)

“ I go 3 times a week. (*Black African male participant*). ”

Some from the participants from the YPS group reported feeling a bit unsafe in local green spaces which had led to reduce the levels of use. The most mentioned local green spaces by participants were parks, open fields, and sport pitches, with the use of coastal areas not mentioned. The reason for the lack of use of coastal areas by participants appeared to be because of the proximity of these coastal areas to urban areas and the requirement for either private or public transport to access these areas.

The use of the green spaces varied by gender, with males reported going for a walk alone in a local parks and sport pitches, while all the Black African females were drawn to local parks and the pier. The Black African females, however

stated that they always go with friends or family due to feeling of fear and insecurity, fear of attack and racism going alone to the park or surrounding local green spaces.

One of the older participants from the female only group recounted an experience of a visit to a green space located in Conwy.

“ I was out with my family, when a White British male offered to take a photo of us, and he said, ‘say monkey’ and I told him off that he can’t say that as children were there. *Black African female participant, female only group* ”

Some of the participants, most especially the Black African females described the access, quality of the physical environment of some of the parks they visited as ‘unkept with overgrown grass’ and a ‘general lack of safety’ was of general concern. One black African female stated that she feels unsafe with the presence of dogs with regards to fear of attack, ‘dogs without mouth guards or leashes wandering around in parks.

“ The Bangor pier has a time limit of 7 pm and they close their gates. So, I cannot go for a walk or stroll after work because its closed. I think it’s too early. *Black African female participant, young people and students’ group* ”

Other reason for not using local green spaces, countryside and coastal areas include:

- inadequate management and maintenance of structures in these areas, with no contact information provided
- insecurity resulting from anti- social behaviour, presences of druggies in some of the local parks

- general lack of facilities suitable for younger children

Consciousness of the local environment

Participants from both groups (YPS and F), reported being conscious of their local environment. Most participants described their local environment as being generally clean, with a few residing close to densely populated student neighbourhood, pubs, bars and on the high street describing their areas as being 'noisy', 'dirty', and with 'fly-tipping'.

“ Personally, I like dogs, but I keep seeing dog fouling on the floor...the owners should walk with bags and pick it up it is their responsibility. *Black African male participant, young people and students' group* ”

A few participants from the YPS group most especially the Black African females, reported being guilty of fly-tipping, some complained of inadequate bins as a reason for fly-tipping. Participants were asked about recycling, female only group (majority of the Black African women (70 %) were more responsive, giving responses like:

“ We reuse ice cream bowls and biscuit tins.

“ We put seasonings in honey jars, tomato jars and pasta sauce jars.

“ With regards to old or used clothing, we hand it down to someone in need or a relative as it's in our African culture. ”

Participants were also asked about air pollution, with most of the participant from the YPS, group reporting racism and anti-social behaviour of some local resident/people in Bangor area who smoke cigarettes and e-cigarettes (vapes).

“ Yes, smoking, sometimes I am walking past someone and next thing the person puffs in my face. *Black African male participant, young people and students’ group* ”

“ When I first came to Bangor city in 2019, I know they used to say this thing that if you must smoke you have to stop, stay somewhere and smoke so that everyone can see that you are smoking and choose not to walk towards you. Now, it’s like no one cares...you won’t know the person in front of you is smoking and the next thing they just smoke in your face. *Black African female participant, young people and students’ group* ”

“ A lot of people are vaping nowadays, and I feel like it’s over polluting the air and you mistakenly breathe it in. *Black African female participant, young people and students’ group* ”

“ Places like the train station and narrow ways like the bus stop...when people smoke you don’t have much space to move around so you have to walk into the smoke. *Black African female participant, young people and students’ group.* ”

On the other hand, 1 participant applauded the efforts of the Welsh government with regards to the control of carbon dioxide emissions.

“ North Wales is quite good especially with CO2 emissions as we have got a lot of public transport and not a lot of roads in comparison to places like Manchester. Also, places are quite closer here so a lot of people do tend to walk and there is a lot of public transport available erm... now with the 20 miles per hour thing that might increase people taking public transport leading to reduction of cars on the roads which I think is good. *Black*

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African female participant, young people and students' group. ”

Experiences in purchasing food for local grocery stores and food waste

Several participants from both groups (YPS and F only), reported similar but sometimes varied experiences of bias and feeling of unpleasantness while shopping in local grocery stores. While most participants from both groups reported that they use the self, check out in stores, thereby reducing interactions with staff and other customers. One participant stated that:

“ I have not experienced any form of racial bias from the staff but from fellow local white customers. One time I went to a local grocery store in Bangor, and a customer moved away from me for no reason at the aisle, I didn't get what he was trying to imply, it mostly comes from older people. For the staff even if they feel that way, they don't show it. So yes, I have experienced racial bias while shopping. *Black African female participant, young people and students' group. ”*

Several participants from the F only group, reported some form of bias from fellow minority ethnic people who run grocery business, mostly especially the Asian owned grocery shops around the Bangor area. One Black African female participant suggested that 'maybe they feel like we are competing for the same space, and they need more ownership'.

Participants were also asked about their thoughts on food waste. Across both FGDs the importance of generating less food waste was understood, the importance of unnecessary wasting of food still in date and buying only what you need was also pointed out. The much older Black African females from the F only group suggested ways to reduce unnecessary food waste such as:

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- food mixing i.e., revamping the prepared food instead of throwing it away
- consume food like dairy, meat, and fish products when they are close to their expiry dates
- creating a WhatsApp group for minority ethnic women to swap food or share cooked food with someone who might need or want it. Instead of throwing the food away

One participant reported that:

“ Sometimes when a product is close to the expiry dates, and we can't eat it we ask who needs it or share with friends or neighbours. When I go grocery shopping, I go to the section of reduced price, and I shop fruits especially as I love smoothies. *White British female participant, female only group.* ”

The young people and students' group shared various experiences of food waste issues that they have observed or experienced such as:

“ Where I work there is a lot of food wasting 'day in, day out. Both fresh food and cooked food and at the end of the day if you do talk about it, they say its managements' money is it your money; It's their money. *Black African male participant, young people and student group* ”

“ For food waste, where I work, they ask me to throw out the rest of the milk just because I used it in the coffee maker when I can just put it in the fridge. There is no logical reason for wasting that nearly full pack of milk. When people come in and eat at the restaurant, they throw everything away even when the food is still large. *Black African female participant, young people and students' group* ”

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Growing own food

In both FGDs the idea of growing own food was described positively, 'very good idea', 'cheaper' by majority of the participants especially the older female only group participants. Some of the younger participants however, stated that they have no interest in growing own food describing the process as 'a lot of work'.

Participants for the F only group however, echoed some barriers to growing own food such as:

- the very cold weather and poor soil condition
- lack of inadequate space to garden / allotments
- limited knowledge on home food gardening
- lack of culturally appropriate seeds of plants (fruits and vegetables)
- lack of community-based initiatives tailored towards ethnic minority communities

Participants for the F only focus group were also asked if they were familiar with any community growing programs in their local area. To which all black African female participant stated 'no' apart from the only White British female who stated 'yes'. They were also asked if they would be willing to participate in community growing gardens/ allotment, if given the chance and they all echoed 'yes'.

What can be done differently to foster a better attitude from the community to engage in environment and climate change issues

Participants suggested several ways for which the Welsh government and local authorities can help integrate the minority ethnic people to engage in environment and climate change issues. Young black African participants (male and female) particularly wanted more public awareness and information for minority ethnic people, since recycling is not in their culture.

“ Minority ethnic people hear recycling when they don't know the reasons why they are doing it or the benefits it gives. *Black African female participant, young people and students' group* ”

The much older female participants also expressed the need for the government/local authorities to introduce more community-based initiatives that can provide for the diverse needs of a mixed community. However, they also mentioned that personal commitment is essential for any form of engagement / activity to succeed.

“ Most minority ethnic people in the Bangor area are students and are here for a short period of time so commitment to community-based initiatives and schemes might be difficult. *Black African female participant, female only group* ”

Several participants also stated the following reasons for the lack of commitment of Black Asian and minority people to environment and climate change issues.

- the lack of diversity and inclusion in many institutions
- lack of inadequate representation of the ethnic minority people at various levels of authority and leadership
- consultation with local authorities on strategies that embrace diversity

One participant stated that.

“ The difficulty is that the anti-racism action group in the NHS is a load of pale male and stale (being dominated by white middle-aged men). I have a friend who goes to the meeting, and she is the only person of colour there. The difficulty is how do we get participations in these meetings? It's not so easy telling people to engage as meetings hold during the day when people are at work and people who work with the NHS might not be

able to get breaks at that time and won't be able to leave their departments and so a lot of the Afro-Caribbean individuals who work with the NHS are not in management positions and so they just stick to/focus on doing their jobs and going home at the end of the day. (The NHS has more work to do in diversity, inclusion, and representation as you cannot want to implement an anti-racism policy and its white people that are deliberating and implementing as it just doesn't happen. *White British Female participant, female only group* ”

Main outcomes of the beach clean activity

Most participants belonged to Black African (91%) and Caribbean or Mixed Ethnic groups (6%) and white British (3%) ethnic background. A total of 40 people participated covering an age range of 12 to 65. The participants were mostly constituted of international students and a few long-term residents with 35% identifying themselves as male and 65% as female.

Casual walking interviews were conducted during the beach clean on the 21st of October 2023. However, because of the bad weather conditions (heavy rain) on the day, we could only interview few of the participants during the beach clean which lasted for about three quarters of an hour. The walking interviews were largely unstructured but guided to maintain the momentum in a narrative about the interviewee's experience of visiting green spaces. Some guided themed questions asked were focused on motivation for visiting green spaces and challenges experienced in using local green spaces (i.e., countryside and coastal areas).

More than 90% of the participants do not own cars, therefore access to green spaces was mainly by public transport which can be expensive to fund. Most of the participants living in the Bangor area reported visiting only local parks/green spaces more frequently than countryside or coastal areas. This is possibly due

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to the lack of adequate and affordable public transport to most countryside and coastal areas.

Most of the participants interviewed however, irrespective of age, gender and ethnicity mentioned that the reason for visiting the local countryside and coastal areas was to enjoy the scenery, relaxation, fun, fresh air, physical health, sports, socialize with friends and family. Several of the younger participants (male and female) emphasised that spending time with family and friends was one of the major reasons for visiting coastal areas. While the older participants highlighted getting their children outdoors, as a major motivator.

Other challenges expressed by participants in using countryside and coastal areas includes lack of funds to organise frequent visits to such places, work commitment, lack of adequate facilities for children entertainment and lightning to promote adequate security.

Conclusions

Overall, the qualitative findings suggest that the understanding of environment and climate change issues varied by age group but not by ethnicity. All participants from both groups people were fully aware and are conscious of their environment and the ongoing detrimental effects that human activities are causing to it.

This data also suggest that car fumes aren't the only example of climate discrimination / racism, and that inequality can manifest in our environment in several areas: in roads, public area and parks. With the indiscriminate smoking of cigarettes and vapes cited as an example.

The data also suggest that local green spaces are mostly used by the younger people more frequently than by the much older female people. The data also

suggest that the use of local green spaces by ethnic minority people can help promote community integration and cohesion among the diverse ethnic community. The barriers faced by the minority ethnic people when visiting green spaces was also highlighted, with the most prominent, insecurity and lack of safety mostly among black African women.

The findings also suggest that the younger people although are aware of the need to recycle, generally lack a recycling culture. The importance of growing own food and reducing waste by the minority ethnic community were also emphasised during the focus group discussions.

The data showed that the access and frequency of minority ethnic people to country and coastal areas was affected by numerous physical factors (i.e., funds, weather, availability of affordable transport and safety issues).

Recommendations

In the light of these findings, some recommendations have been summarised below:

- create a communication strategy to help bridge the gap between the minority ethnic people and community-based initiatives. This will bring together various diverse groups / societies within the broader local minority ethnic communities including students, self-employed, unemployed, etc, to interact and talk about issues relating to the environment, climate change and experiences of local green spaces
- encourage a greater volume of local minority ethnic people to volunteer, get involved in the environmental sector and climate change advocacy
- provide adequate support for community-based initiatives with ethnic minority themes
- promote diversity in urban and rural green space areas by consulting with

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local minority ethnic communities on green space strategies that encourage diversity

- create urban farming (allotments) and dog-free areas in local green spaces
- create grants opportunities, subsidies, and welfare packages (food and housing) that are accessible to students, minority ethnic people (self-employed, unemployed and asylum seekers) which will support them during their integration period and enable them commit more to environment and climate change issues
- improve partnership and network engagement between various stakeholders, groups concerned with the interests of minority ethnic people groups in the wider local community. This ensures that issues of concern within the local minority ethnic groups are related to the relevant authorities

We also suggest that in order to address the root causes of inequality and discrimination with regards to the environment and climate change, the Welsh Government should conduct an extensive review of its existing policies/ guidelines and restrictions in consultation with minority ethnic people groups, student unions and, local communities and other relevant stakeholders to better identify the root causes of racial discrimination/harassment suffered by ethnic minority people.

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Annex a: focus groups information

Focus groups information

| Location | Duration | Number of participants | Males | Females | Ethnicity |
|--------------------|------------|------------------------|-------|---------|----------------------------------------|
| Bangor/BACC centre | 90 minutes | 15 | 3 | 12 | Black African, Caribbean/ mixed Ethnic |
| Bangor/BACC centre | 90 minutes | 15 | | 15 | Black African, Caribbean/ mixed Ethnic |

Glossary

ARWAP: Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan
NWAS: North Wales Africa Society
BAME: Black Asian Minority Ethnic
SEB: Social, Education and Business
BACC: Bangor African and Caribbean Centre
YPS: Young People and Students
F: Female only

Alternative languages

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