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Anti-racist Wales evidence report: Climate Cymru BAME

A report by Climate Cymru BAME 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 and 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 and Minority Ethnic people in the environment and green spaces, their

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ambitions, and views on what would make this part of life more inclusive have been largely undocumented. In line with this, the Welsh Government has initiated an evidence programme covering climate change, environment and rural affairs issues, to support policy teams in the further developing and implementing an Anti-racism Action Plan covering these policy areas.

The environmental sector performs a vital role in protecting the planet and confronting some of the most high-priority global challenges, such as biodiversity loss and climate change. However, despite the focus on equity and fairness, bringing diversity to the environmental profession and wider sector has been challenging. The Welsh Government has also acknowledged this challenges that the profession has faced and its one of the issues that's the action plan will strive to address.

In order to contribute to the national dialogue, Climate Cymru BAME, a climate action group set up to support the work of Climate Cymru wider group among ethnic minorities communities in Wales secured funding from the Welsh government to undergo this study. The group consist of approximately 20 members made up of students and professionals who have interest in environmental preservation and protection, who work with North Wales Africa Society (NWAS), Sub Sahara Advisory Board (SSAP) and the Northwest Wales Climate Action Group.

This report is aimed at understanding the views of the minority ethnic people resident in the North Wales region, students and professionals in the environmental sector. As it has been reported that the environment profession is one of the most least racially diverse professions in the UK, with just 4.81% identifying as Black, Asian or from other minority ethnic groups, compared to 12.64% across all UK professions ([Racial Diversity Report 2022](#)). While it has been reported the Black Asian Minority Ethnic student population in the Bangor university (Gwynedd area) has risen from 21.5% in 2018 to 30.9% in 2020 ([Microsoft Word Student Equality Statistics Report 2020](#)). Therefore, the minority ethnic 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 people living in the north Wales area, including students and professionals in the environmental sector
- 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 ethnic minority people

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.

Focus group discussions were conducted for members of Climate Cymru BAME and NWAS at a documentary screening and discussion event held on the 9th of September 2023. A virtual focus group discussion (FGDs) was also conducted for professionals and students in the environmental sciences on the 16th of September 2023.

The FGDs incorporated a range of age groups from 16 to 65. In all FGDs, a set of pre-determined questions was used, however, 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
- environment and climate change issues
- access and use of recreational green spaces such as gardens and parks
- local environment, recycling and reusing
- food cultures, experiences of racism in food purchasing for home consumption and outside the home
- growing own food for community, health and wellbeing, environmental or climate change reasons

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 complying with the Welsh government's ethical process. Formal consent included requesting permission for the recording of focus group discussions.

The Climate Cymru BAME and NWS (CCBN) FGD were held face to face at the Bangor African and Caribbean Centre (BACC) located on the high street of Bangor City Wales, while the professional and student focus group was conducted virtually. The main aim of the FGDs was to capture a range of people 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 37 participants aged 16 years and over participated. Most sessions were 90 mins long and all participants were encouraged to join in. Individuals were also deterred from attempting to dominate the discussion. The strategies of Climate Cymru BAME and NWS have afforded members of our community the opportunity to share their opinions and add their voice to the discourse.

Findings

Main outcomes of the focus group discussions

Climate Cymru BAME and Nwas (CCBN)

Majority of the participants belonged to Black African (96%), and Caribbean or Mixed Ethnic groups (4%) covered age ranges of 16 to 65. The participants were mostly constituted of international students and a few long-term residents with 40% identifying themselves as male and 60% as female (annex a).

Professionals and students in Environmental Science (PSE)

Most of the participants belonged to Black African 98%, Caribbean, or Mixed Ethnic groups 2% and aged 35 to 65. The participants were mostly constituted of international students and a few long-term residents and professionals with 57% identifying themselves as male and 43% as female (annex a).

Understanding of environmental and climate change issues

In both focus groups, all participants showed a general comprehension of climate change issues. Most especially the professional and students in the environmental science (PSE) group where references were made to unstable seasons, deforestation, ozone layer depletion, excessive flooding, carbon dioxide emitted from cars, recycling and proper waste disposal were general issues raised in both focus groups. They were more responses from the PSE group than the Climate Cymru BAME and Nwas (CCBN) group to this question. The PSE group had a member of the Environmental Impact assessment management UK (Black African male) and a member of Climate Action Bangor

(Black African Female) as some of the participants.

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

“ ‘Personally, I feel the world is facing a lot of climatic change issues ranging from human activities and some natural activities. The weather is no more stable, at times the season will change, and this has been affecting our climate. Also, some human impacts like deforestation and some construction activities have been contributing immensely to climatic changes. A lot of things that could affect our environment but mostly it could be from human activities, or it could be natural. (Black African male participant, professionals and student group) ”

The roles of individuals, society, community in adapting and mitigating climate change

Participants from both groups agreed that apart from the government, individuals and the society at large play a major role in adapting to and reducing climate change. People also recognised that there are numerous health and environmental benefits for both humans, animals and aquatic life forms when we take care of our immediate surroundings.

One participant stated that:

“ We know very well the greenness around supplies more oxygen to the atmosphere which is good for climate change and then keeping everywhere clean. Moving around North Wales and Cardiff areas, I discovered that there are some households who don't make use of their gardens and lawn areas, they leave it just bare. I believe that when they

try and plant something it has a way of helping no matter how little as that is being directly involved as individuals. It's good for individuals to get involved as the government has done very well. (Black African female participant, professionals and students' group)

“ Another way we can reduce, the effect of climate change is by also reducing CO2 emissions which can also come from our cars because the more vehicles we have on our roads and the more mileage we cover in a day contributes to CO2 emissions. This gets into the atmosphere and contributes to climate change. From what I have observed, UK has a very well-structured transport system, so if we can reduce the number of cars, we have on our roads it would help to reduce the amount of CO2 we put into our atmosphere on a daily basis. (Black African female participant, professionals and student group) ”

Participants from both groups also acknowledge the efforts of the Welsh government in adapting to and mitigating climate change. One participant, however, wants the government to do more:

“ Yes, the society has a big role to play, and it must start from sensitisation because a lot of people don't know the actions or impact of the activities going on in the environment. Take for instance, in the construction aspect there are a lot of construction projects going on and they don't think of its impact on environment, and the ecosystem, so sensitisation is very important. (Black African male participant, professionals and student group) ”

Participants of the CCBN group were asked about what they felt about recycling and waste management. Most of the participants (80 %) expressed satisfaction with the current waste management system in Wales. About 10%, were not satisfied with the system and felt it needed improvement, while the remaining

10% were indifferent. One participant recounted a negative memory of racial inequality encountered with the contractors responsible for recycling/refuse bins collection around the Bangor local council area.

“ Where I was staying in Bangor, we discovered that when you put out the plastic, paper and the food those who are supposed to come and pick it don't but when you put it in the big green bin, they do. (Black African female participant, Climate Cymru BAME and NWAS group) ”

Awareness and use of local green spaces and parks

Participants in the CCBN group were asked this question, and a range of motives were given for visiting green spaces, but the consensus was for relaxation/unwind, to play with children, fresh air, to enjoy the scenery, and to experience nature. Most Participants agreed that ethnicity was not a hindrance for much younger children going to parks and local greenspaces. As previous studies suggest that childhood visits to green spaces are mostly associated with frequency of green space use (Ward Thompson et al., 2008).

“ During summer, me and my kids took advantage of going to the parks. My own key observation when it comes to interaction is that the kids are very free and I don't think they recognise colour they just recognise gender, boys gravitate to boys and girls to girls...I won't say the guardians or parents are racist, I will say that they are not familiar. Kids are more open than adults. Adults move and group themselves according to their ethnicity and with little or no interactions between parents/guardians of this children. Although sometimes there is a bit of interaction but generally everyone stays with their own ethnic group while the kids are there mingling. (Black African female participant, Climate Cymru BAME and NWAS group) ”

Almost all participants (black African) male and female stated that the much older individuals from minority ethnic communities usually don't mix with the locals (White British), but they form attachments with their fellow ethnic minority people when visiting green spaces and attending social gatherings as they usually feel a sense of 'estrangement' and 'isolation' in local green spaces.

One participant describes the situation as:

“ I can say that the issue of people being in their own niche in terms of colour and race happens quite often with the adults and I have noticed from the places I have been to. Like most times I go out with my black African colleagues, I think it's on one single occasion that I have gone out with the white folks here. (Black African male participant, Climate Cymru BAME and NWAS group) ”

Participants were asked if this attitude was normal, most people were of the opinion that the much younger locals were not very sociable and engaging, in the presence of people of different ethnicity, compared to the much older residents.

The most mentioned local green spaces by participants were local parks, and open fields, and sport pitches. Most participants reported visiting local green spaces sparingly,

“ I go once a week to play football (Black African male participant)

“ I go 2 times a week. (Black African male participant) ”

Some participants reported work, school and family commitments as the reason which had led to reduce levels of use of local green spaces, with 1 black African male participant stating, 'it not in our culture',

“ Where we are come from, we really don’t have these facilities, so it takes an extra effort...but on getting here you are now in a new environment and a lot of things are now available to you, so it takes some time to adjust. (Black African female participant, Climate Cymru BAME and NWAS group) ”

Growing own food

Participants in the Climate Cymru BAME and NWAS group described the idea of growing own food as; ‘very nice’, ‘good idea’ by majority of the participants especially the older female participants. One participant reported that:

“ Our local food, the seasonal fruits, and vegetables, it is beneficial to cultivate our food locally because importing food of any sort is contributing to the problem and impacts climate change... so people should produce and consume their food locally.’(Black African female participant, Climate Cymru BAME and NWAS group) ”

Participants were also asked if they were familiar with any community growing programs in their local area. To which all black African female and male participant stated ‘no’.

Participants however, echoed some barriers to growing own food such as:

- lack of garden or inadequate space/allotments
- limited knowledge on home food gardening in the UK
- lack of seeds of culturally appropriate plants (fruits and vegetables)
- lack of adequate information about community based initiative tailored towards minority ethnic communities

Participants from the professional and student groups were asked about their views and priorities around the biodiversity crisis. Most of the participants expressed varied views about their understanding of the biodiversity crisis. References were made to 'climate change', 'destruction of habitats', and 'deforestation'.

Biodiversity crisis

One participant stated that:

“ The thing about biodiversity crisis is trying to accommodate every aspect of living things in our ecosystem and the ability for animals, human beings, microorganisms, and plants to co-exist without one interfering with the other activities. (*Black African male participant, professionals, and student group*) ”

Another participant described biodiversity crisis as:

“ The involvement of humans and their environment not being in harmony especially in terms of activities from the human angle. Abusing the environment in terms of greed, at the end of the day everything will come back to us and endanger us humans, as our well-being will be largely affected. (*Black African male participant, professionals, and student group*) ”

Participants suggested several ways for which the Welsh government and local authorities can help solve the loss, decline or disappearance of biological diversity such as:

- sustainably managing the forest resources
- promote the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystem

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- promote the planting of trees as they are crucial in the fight against climate change. They can remove carbon dioxide from the air, storing carbon in the trees and soil and releasing oxygen into the atmosphere
- protect marine and freshwater ecosystems
- encourage minority ethnic communities to engage in environment and climate change issues
- more public awareness, information out there most especially for minority ethnic communities, where recycling is not in their culture

Participants from the professional and student groups (PSE) were asked about if they were familiar with the leadership structure of the environmental sector in Wales and if there is adequate representation in this sector. Majority of the Black African participants (90%) male and female were not aware of the leadership structure of the environmental sector in Wales and neither did they know of anyone in a leadership position or representative position. One participant stated that:

Leadership representation in the environmental sector.

“ Personally, I don’t know of anyone in leadership of those people fighting for climate change in Wales or those promoting the extent of minimizing climate change in Wales. I don’t know the people bringing up those policies. (Black African male participant, professionals, and student group) ”

Most of the participants also stated that there was a need for more ethnic minority representation in leadership positions of environmental institutions and agencies. Several participants also stated the following reasons for the lack of commitment of minority ethnic people to environment and climate change issues.

- the lack of diversity and inclusion in many institutions

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- lack of adequate representation of the ethnic minority people at various levels of power and leadership
- consultation with local authorities on strategies that embrace diversity

One participant stated that.

“ The problem I am having with the Welsh government climate change campaign is about how the government is engaging the minority ethnic communities, it is not just about these activities alone what about employment? That is something else that is discouraging because if you engage our people in getting information and collecting data are they being engaged in terms of employability. Most people are not even interested in anything because we are not encouraged at all. (Black African female participant, professionals, and student group) ”

Conclusions

Overall, the findings suggest that the understanding of environment and climate change issues did not vary by ethnicity. The data also suggest that the lack of use of green spaces in Wales by ethnic minority people / communities is mainly because of their lack of diversification. Failing to recognise the importance the ethnic identity has on the experiences of a mixed community access and use of green spaces. The barriers faced by minority ethnic people when visiting green spaces was also highlighted, with the most prominent stated to be work, school and family commitments. The importance of growing own food (fruit and vegetables) by ethnic communities was also emphasised and the need for increased representation of minority ethnic communities in the environmental sector.

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Recommendations

In the lights 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 led initiatives (i.e., food growing initiatives)
- encourage a greater volume of local minority ethnic people to volunteer, get involved in the environmental sector and climate change advocacy
- promote diversity in urban and rural green space areas by consulting with local minority ethnic communities / groups 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 individuals (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 people groups are related to the relevant authorities

References

Thompson, C.W., Aspinall, P. and Montarzino, A., 2008. The childhood factor: Adult visits to green places and the significance of childhood experience. *Environment and behaviour*, 40(1), pp.111-143.

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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	30	12	18	Black African, Caribbean/ mixed Ethnic
Bangor/BACC centre	90 minutes	7	4	3	Black African, Caribbean/ mixed Ethnic

Glossary

- ARWAP: Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan
- NWAS: North Wales Africa Society
- BAME: Black Asian and Minority Ethnic
- SEB: Social, Education and Business
- BACC: Bangor African and Caribbean Centre
- SSAP: Sub-Sahara Advisory Board
- CCBN: Climate Cymru BAME and NWAS
- PSE: Professionals and Students in Environmental Science

Alternative languages

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