

## **The Great Outdoors belongs to Us, too !**

British ethnic communities are generally not seen as full members of British society. But, we are British. The wonderful countryside, with its treasures of heritage, is also ours !

No one is in full control of the potential of one's life - the nurturing and expression of who we can be and what we may do within our lives is shaped by how we see ourselves against the pressure of how others see us. At a structural level, this may be observed most immediately through the scope of the work of organisations which are established to work directly for and with the community.

Multi-culturalism does not feature in the work programmes of most organisations. Unless significant attitudinal change at senior level takes place, most disadvantaged British ethnic persons will not be able to claim the right to the enjoyment and use of the countryside for years to come.

Through the work of the Black Environment Network, ethnic environmental participation is now on the agenda of environmental organisations. However, exclusion is maintained through goodwill that remains in the main gestural.

Millions of pounds are poured into projects for the creation and maintenance of marvellous sites from sources, such as the National Lottery and taxes, which include money from ordinary folk who never set foot on them. Some of this money can go towards strategic projects for access to the countryside on a grand scale for ethnic and other disadvantaged groups.

Organisations, whose remits state that they are for everyone, need to take a pro-active stance. We need commitment and leadership at senior level for the formulation of policies which ensure that ethnic involvement is integrated into all work programmes. They should encourage and support their personnel in generating targeted projects with properly resourced programmes of outreach by trained staff . They should aim to develop the multi-cultural interpretation of sites, and run ongoing funding schemes for transport and activities. Funding bodies can strengthen the framework by requiring applicants to demonstrate access programmes for disadvantaged groups for each site-based project that they fund, and by designating a percentage of their project funds for this purpose.

Many organisations need to work at projecting a philosophy of inclusion through featuring ethnic and other disadvantaged groups in all their publications and outreach material.

Many of us are now fourth generation British citizens and beyond. In many parts of the country ethnic groups have made up a significant part of the population for a long time. Yet most of the policies of local and national organisations indicate that we remain invisible.

We are waiting. Let's work together for the change that will unlock access on a grand scale and reverse the incipient apartheid in the countryside. The countryside will make an enormous difference to our quality of life. Ethnic groups are also waiting to make a contribution to countryside life. We can only do so as part of it.

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