

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Capacity Building of CCOs

As discussed in the beginning of this report, voluntary organisations are regarded as a partner of the government on welfare provision based on the concept of 'an active community' and 'best value'. In fact, the emphasis on efficiency and 'value for money' started from the previous Conservative government in 1980s, expressed in the form of Community Care Act, according to which voluntary organisations had to compete with other each to provide domiciliary care. With the publication of Compact, the current government has detailed the relationship between the voluntary sector and statutory bodies. If CCOs in the UK are to take advantage of this relationship, they need to subject themselves to 'the tests of best value: challenge, compare, consult and compete' (National Council for Voluntary Organisations, 2001: vii). This implies that CCOs have to enhance their capacities in order to provide quality services. Capacity means a range of resources such as time, skills, knowledge, expertise, and money (Grice, 2000). Even a CCO is not interested in engaging in 'partnership' with the government; it also has to enhance its capacities in order to improve its service quality and make itself to be more accountable to donors and users. Findings from this study show that CCOs have to tackle the following issues so as to strengthen their capacities.

(1) The Improvement of Management

Quality improvement and management is 'a vital necessary' rather than 'an optional extra to the UK's voluntary sector' (Quality Standards Task Group, 2000: 1). In face of strong competition on grant applications, the demand for better accountability, and the emphasis on service quality, CCOs have to improve their management in order to enhance their capacity. Firstly of all, MCs' members, like staff and volunteers, should be quipped with modern management skills as well as knowledge on current policies on social welfare and voluntary sector. Second, the number of MC members should be sufficient to give different views and provide necessary skills for CCOs. Third, MCs have to hold regular meetings to assess the development of their organisations. Fourth, effective and regular appraisal system should be set up to study staff's difficulties and provide them with effective support. The above management improvements are likely to enhance the 'efficiency' of CCOs and raise the quality of their services.

(2) Adequate Training for Staff and Volunteers

This study reveals that part-time workers (about 40% of organisations had part-time staff working for over 10 hours per week) and volunteers (half surveyed organisations had volunteers) were playing an important role in providing CCOs' services. Moreover, respondents had difficulties to employ qualified staff. This might adversely affect the quality of services of CCOs. As illustrated above, two respondents pointed out that professional knowledge of the workers should be improved. Thus, CCOs should provide sufficient training for staff and volunteers. The contents of

training courses might include (a) theories on organisational management, (b) the development of UK voluntary organisations, (c) welfare theories, (d) skills on service provision, (e) programme evaluation, (f) skills on grant applications and fundraising. Also, service package about service objectives, administrative procedures and assessment tools should be provided for staff and volunteers. In this way, both staff and volunteers are able to get the required skills to serve their clients.

(3) The Improvement of Employment Conditions

The study shows that workers of CCOs suffered low salaries and poor work benefits. For example, only one-third of postal surveyed organisations had pension schemes and policies on maternity leave. As mentioned previously, Chinese welfare workers had to manage a heavy workload, acceptable employment benefits are essential to recognise their contributions. Moreover, CCOs have to set up a good example protecting the rights of their employees. Against this background, CCOs have to improve their employees' work conditions. People might argue that limited finance has constrained CCOs' abilities to provide staff with better work conditions. However, poor services might be related to low spirit and unqualified workers. As a result, both users and workers will be victims of the existing employment arrangements. Thus, a reasonable work environment will be a good investment, which can get qualified staff to provide quality services and to get external resources.

(4) The Promotion of Voluntarism

Most respondent organisations complained about the inadequacy of human resources. On the other hand, this study reveals that the potential of volunteers in Chinese community can be further explored. Among 21 organisations which had volunteers, over one-third (8) with less than 5 volunteers. As a large number of Chinese people live in London, the existing organisations have to develop effective strategies to enhance the spirit of voluntarism, encouraging more people, particularly the young generation, women and older people, to participate in voluntary work.

(5) More Opportunities for User Participation

Of the 16 Management Committees of in-depth interviewed organisations, a quarter consisted of users as MC members. These organisations recognised the importance of their users' participation in planning and managing services. This practice can be further promoted to other CCOs to encourage users to make more contributions on the management of their services. User participation not only increases the sense of belonging of users, it also provides an effective means to assess the needs of clients

(6) Widen the Base of Resources

The move away from grants to specified contracts has profound impact on the finance of CCOs. More and more organisations have to 'learn to live with financial uncertainty' caused by short-term contracts and tighter budgets (Leat, 1995: 167). The study reveals that only one out of 27 respondent organisations had three sources of income and over two-

fifths of organisations only with one source of income. Thus, CCOs might have to widen its financial base by tapping new resources including funding from charitable trusts, foundation, and corporate sector; fundraising from the general public and business sector; and fee-charging. Several demands and challenges will be associated with a wider financial base such as better accountability to the donors and funders, good strategies on grant applications, the expectation of quality services from users, and good community relations with various stakeholders. This implies that the quality of staff and the efficiency of management will be a vital factor affecting an organisation's ability to attract more resources.

(7) Systematic Training on Grant Application

The study found that over half of organisations needed external support on grant applications. Some respondents from in-depth interviewees also said that professional skills were essential to applying grants. New organisations particularly need 'information about funding and assistance with making applications' (CBF, 1999a). Against these needs, systematic and comprehensive courses on grant applications including the requirements of different grants, the skills on writing grant applications, and the management of grants have to provide for CCOs, encouraging more organisations get external resources for developing services.

(8) The Improvement of Facilities

Apart from human resources, the efficiency of an organisation also depends on facilities. Chinese organisations with a limited budget found it difficult to squeeze resources for upgrading computing facilities. However, many of them have a strong motivation to use modern information technology on their services. As this study shows, most interviewed organisations needed training on information technology. Since the overwhelming majority of UK Chinese organisations are too small to employ technicians for maintenance work, a computing service unit providing technical support for Chinese social service agencies in London is likely to be more cost effective. The unit can be part the proposed CCVS (see the following sections for details) which conducts computing training for concerned agencies.

Government's Commitment to CCOs' Core Services

This study clearly shows that inadequate resource was the greatest obstacle for CCOs to develop itself as a strong and effective partner with the government. Unlike other big and well-established voluntary organizations, most CCOs were very small, which were 'less popular and less marketable causes' for attracting public donations. They also lacked 'the technical expertise to establish their credibility and compete for resources' (Gutch, Kunz & Spencer, 1990: 8). As illustrated above, the studied organisations performed some crucial functions that were hardly substituted by mainstream organisations because of language and cultural factors. Unfortunately, most organisations had long been suffered from financial uncertainties, low paid staff, and the termination of some services while facing inadequate resources. In a respondent's (R15) words, 'our difficulty is lacking money and human resources'. Against this

constraint, many Chinese organisations could only provide a minimal amount of services, not to mention the expansion of services for meeting new social demands. Obviously, this phenomenon has excluded many UK Chinese people from receiving necessary services. Because these organisations were helping the government to achieve objectives such as social integration, the alleviation of poverty, and the promotion of voluntarism, it is crucial for both the central and local governments to work closely with these organisations, accessing their needs and providing sufficient resources for meeting their core services. As a community worker (R7) stressed, 'To develop Chinese community services, the government must provide sufficient grants'. The government's support for CCOs is an effective means of combating social exclusion in the UK Chinese community.

Effective Communication

Limited communication between the UK government and the Chinese community created resentments as well as formed an obstacle to meeting needs. A respondent community worker (R4) directly pointed out that the Home Office's paper about racial harassment on the UK Chinese people was far from the truth. A manager (R12) of another organisation observed that mainstream society had little Chinese language information on mental health. Other in-depth interviewees also expressed similar views. Obviously, effective communication should be established between Chinese organisations and both central government and local councils. Findings of the present study are consistent with other studies (Law, et., 1994; Lau, 1997; Yee, 1997; Yu, 2001; Green, et. 2001) which stress the language barrier is the fundamental factor excluding a large section of Chinese people from fulfilling their welfare rights and undermining their sense of dignity accordingly. To expect adults and older people to have better English through education in a short period would be unrealistic. For meeting their needs, information about the main welfare benefits such as Child Benefit, Council Housing, NHS, and Travelling Card for older people, should be translated into Chinese and easily accessed by Chinese users. It is likely that a sense of belonging and citizenship can be better cultivated through approachable, caring welfare measures as well as an acceptable social and political culture. Persistent neglect and welfare exclusion only deprive UK Chinese citizens' basic rights, damage their civil pride and, more importantly, discourage their integration into mainstream society. So, more effective communications are likely to facilitate integration and combat social exclusion.

For facilitating communication between the UK Chinese community and local authorities, regular contacts (e.g. three times each year) between them are essential. It is only through closer contact that the needs of Chinese society can be identified and the impact of public policies on them gathered. Also, in view of the fact that a significant number of respondent organisations had difficulty in accessing official documents on race policies, government departments have to evaluate their existing communication mechanisms in order to send their messages effectively to the concerned Chinese organisations.

The CCOs, on the other hand, have to pay more attention to race policies. Data from both postal survey and in-depth interview shows that

most respondents had limited knowledge of policies about ethnic minorities. With the development of new form of communication, CCOs are able to get access up-to-date official documents through the websites of various government departments. To function as a 'bridge' between mainstream service and the Chinese community, staff from CCOs have to be aware policies which affect their clients' interests, reflecting their views to the concerned bodies.

The Establishment of a Chinese Voluntary Services Council (CVSC)

Despite having settled in the UK for more than one hundred years, there is no common recognised body representing the whole Chinese community. The UK Chinese people are divided by different countries of origin, new and traditional organisations, and also by areas of settlement. The lack of interaction among Chinese organisations in different parts of the UK and the mutual suspicion between the new and old community leaders create great barriers to understanding UK Chinese people's needs as well as to the formation of joint actions to tackle the problems of Chinese community. Up to now, there is still no comprehensive and systematic study of the needs of the UK Chinese people, despite the emergence of some regional studies on particular groups such as older people, women and young people. **Lacking a representative body also creates difficulties for government consultation as illustrated in the in-depth interviews. More importantly, the lack of a united organisation means that different organisations in different parts of the UK are using their own efforts to solve community problems. In this way, their experiences have not been widely shared, nor have scarce resources been effectively used.**

Findings from the postal survey show that 86 percent of the 29 respondent organisations believed that Chinese service providers in London need to strengthen their liaison and partnership with each other. Also, one-third of in-depth interviewees (R1, 4, 11, 12, 15) understood the importance of collective efforts and urged for co-operation among different organisations. As a Chairperson (R15) appealed, **'I hope Chinese groups and organisations would co-operate with each other'**. Similar expectation was expressed by a manager (R1) of another agency: **'Chinese community feels that they should have a network uniting Chinese people. All of them believe that this is our need'**. In fact, the mentioned study conducted by the CBF (1999b: 7) reported that respondent organisations had 'high expectations for a national Chinese organisation' which provided 'a national focus' and maintained 'a unified voice for the Chinese community'. Mr. Steve Trimmins, Home Office Adviser, also said that the Chinese community needs a unified voice at national, regional and local levels (CBF, 1999a). Obviously, there is a strong motivation among the studied organisations to work together meeting the needs of Chinese community. A CCOV can perform the following key functions:

1. **A Representative Body:** gathering the views of the UK Chinese associations and reflecting them to the concerned authorities.
2. **Studying and Planning Services:** assessing the needs of the UK Chinese people and studying the mode of service provision.

3. **Co-ordinating Services:** closely working with different organisations, co-ordinating services or mobilising resources for particular problems.
4. **Training and Development:** providing essential training courses for welfare personnel and MC members, and sharing different experiences.

The establishment of such an organisation in the UK can be based on the existing foundation. The CBF, to some extent, is performing certain functions of a council for voluntary services. It can be a starting point for co-ordinating the services of the UK Chinese welfare associations. Representatives of CCOs expressed similar views in a national seminar (CBF, 1999a: 6):

“The need for an umbrella organisation such as the Chinese in Britain Forum to represent Chinese interests at a national level. The Forum can take a lead in setting up national, regional and local networks of Chinese voluntary and community organisations.”

However, it should be stressed that the success of the proposed CVSC depends on the support of a wide range of CCOs so that it is important to evaluate whether the existing CBF can represent the views and interests of various types of CCOs in the UK. An in-depth and comprehensive study on the structure and functions of the proposed CVSC is a must before its establishment. Apart from the support of UK Chinese community, the proposed council needs a stable financial environment. This means that government's financial assistance is essential to the successful operation of this council. A positive response from the government to the setting up of this council would show clearly its commitment to the well being of the UK Chinese community as well as the effectiveness of its race equality policy.

Future Research:

As the present study only includes London Chinese organisations, a large-scale study including sampled organisations from the whole of the UK will give us a complete picture on the nature, services and difficulties of the UK Chinese associations. Also, this study explored the functions of UK Chinese associations solely from the perspective of service providers, it is equally important to study the views of users. By involving both service providers and users, the role and contributions of CCOs can be better understood. In addition, some respondents of this study mentioned the difficulties in employing qualified staff and the low salaries of Chinese workers. However, the qualifications and expectations of the workers in Chinese organisations as well as their difficulties in delivering services have not been adequately addressed. Such information is essential for the designation of training packages for workers in Chinese agencies.

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