Change Starts
With Us

Increasing Minority Ethnic Participation in the Northern Ireland Environment Sector

Northern Ireland
environment
link

COMMUNITY RELATIONS COUNCIL
Equity | Diversity | Interdependence

Contents

Executive Summary

Background

In autumn 2022, Northern Ireland specific research emerged out of UK-wide concern about the lack of ethnic diversity in the environment sector. The 'environment sector' in this report is defined as Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL) member organisations.

The following research strives to gain an understanding of what may be encouraging or discouraging minority ethnic people from becoming involved with the environment sector in NI. As a consequence, contributions to this research are made by those working in the NI environment movement and by representatives of minority ethnic communities in NI. It was felt important to sample this range of views. It is anticipated that this report will influence the development of a long-term plan to help increase levels of ethnic diversity in the NI environment sector.

Research content:

- A quantitative research survey was sent electronically to 68 organisations, all member organisations coming under the NIEL umbrella and NIEL itself.

- Qualitative research involved small focus groups, semi-structured interviews and thoughts expressed at a workshop involving NIEL members and representatives of minority ethnic organisations and communities.

Research focus:

- Gaining insight into those actions and initiatives already taken forward by environment sector organisations to increase the ethnic diversity of those working in the sector, volunteering within the sector, and accessing green space.

- Assessing the knowledge and understanding of organisations in driving forward change on ethnic diversity.

- Developing increased understanding of minority ethnic people's experience of and beliefs about the environment sector and their thoughts on increasing levels of participation.

The report doesn't name specific organisations or individuals who participated in the quantitative or qualitative research as anonymity was assured at the outset to allow participants to speak freely.

Research participants:

Leaders and trustees of NIEL member organisations were invited to take part in the survey. Of the 68 organisations invited to respond, a total of 14 survey responses were received within the agreed timeframe, all were from NGOs apart from one public body. Beyond the deadline one further response was returned and only qualitative data from that response has been used. In terms of the size of the organisations that responded to the survey, 86% had less than 30 staff based in NI and only one organisation had more than 50 staff.

A total of 38 people took part in the qualitative research, including staff drawn from NIEL member organisations and representatives of minority ethnic organisations and communities.

Semi-structured interviews formed the basis of two case studies drawn from those NIEL member organisations which had indicated in survey responses that they were willing to share their developing practice in this area.

Focus groups were held with members of communities involved with two Belfast based organisations which represent the interests of minority ethnic communities. They were asked to share their thoughts on environment sector employment, volunteering and accessing green space.

A total of 19 people took part in a workshop on 22 September 2022, during Good Relations Week, entitled *Change Starts With Us: Increasing Ethnic Diversity in the NI Environment Sector*. Numbers were evenly split between individuals from NIEL member organisations and participants representing minority ethnic community organisations.

Analysis of the rich data collected from these four sources provided insight into the barriers and obstacles to increasing minority ethnic involvement in the environment sector in NI. However, strong recommendations emerged for creating new opportunities to counteract these challenges.

Recommendations

Sector co-ordination

An over-arching recommendation, emerging through all aspects of the study, was the importance of employing an individual based in NIEL who would assume a co-ordinating role for the sector.

Through engagement with a range of stakeholders this individual would help clarify, at an early stage, the work best done collectively to benefit the entire sector. They would also aim to give more certainty to organisations about the type of work which is required at an organisation rather than a sector level.

The case studies demonstrated how organisations have different strengths in this area and feel the need to further develop divergent aspects of their practice, ranging from engaging with different communities to strengthening internal policies and procedures in relation to the ethnic diversity of staff, trustees, and volunteers. It will be important for the sector co-ordinator to support organisations in realising that one size does not fit all and help organisations to reflect on and pursue actions which meet their specific needs.

Raising awareness

Half of those who completed the survey in NI acknowledged that their organisation hadn't yet clearly determined or communicated 'why' increasing ethnic diversity matters. The co-ordinator should start by engaging the sector in pinning down a robust, meaningful rationale for engaging in this work as a collectively developed and agreed vision and mission will be required to inform subsequent action planning and initiative development.

Training and capacity building

On a variety of levels and topics training should be developed and delivered:

- Unconscious bias training for staff in environment organisations

Rather than making certain individuals responsible for carrying the entire weight of EDI, everyone in an organisation should be supported to reach awareness that they contribute to creating the culture of their organisation and have a role to play in developing and changing that culture to support greater ethnic diversity. Therefore, engaging in unconscious bias testing and training is recommended as an intrinsic part of the process of preparing and equipping people to embark with more awareness on the development of good practice around equality and diversity. It is noticeable that in NI that of those surveyed only 20% had taken an unconscious bias test and 27% had received unconscious bias training.

There can be overt and covert resistance to change which relates to mindset, and unconscious bias testing and training can help surface personal biases and support people in appropriately challenging unacceptable behaviour in the workplace. It is recommended that this training is delivered by a training consultancy which is highly aware of the history and demography of NI and able to tailor training with the NI context in mind. The NIEL based co-ordinator could source appropriate unconscious bias training suitable for environment sector organisations. Training should be made available to Board members as well as staff.

- Recognising gaps in the knowledge and experience of environment organisations in working with people from diverse ethnic backgrounds, it was thought important to provide training sessions and events to increase knowledge levels and share good practice.

- Volunteer co-ordinators (or staff who work with volunteers) should avail of sector training as an integral element of their new priority to engage minority ethnic volunteers.

- Leadership training, equity training and training on relevant policy and legislation should be made widely available.

Guidance and advice

Advice and guidance would form a crucial aspect of the co-ordinator remit and be developed in a range of areas including those listed below:

- Developing good practice in the use of ethnic monitoring data in terms of collection and analysis and working towards consistency across the sector.

- Sharing best practice in reviewing policies and procedures in relation to increasing and retaining ethnically diverse staff.

- Reviewing recruitment practice to ensure minority ethnic people are not disadvantaged by recruitment processes.

- The appropriate use of positive discrimination with regard to recruitment and funding packages.

- Guidance on how to increase diverse representation in organisational leadership around EDI.

- Reviewing how information about volunteering and jobs in the sector are promoted to help reach minority ethnic people (including improving organisational websites).

Building relationships and co-design with minority ethnic communities

On the basis of feedback from focus groups, the workshop and the needs expressed through survey responses and case studies, it was recommended that the co-ordinator should reach out to minority ethnic communities to assist environment sector organisations in building collaborative partnerships as follows:

- Environment organisations should be supported to co-design asset-based eco programmes and education sessions with minority ethnic organisations.

- Initiating a service which connects qualified and skilled asylum seekers or refugees to skilled volunteering roles or academia opportunities in the environment sector.

- Supporting organisations with developing meaningful volunteer roles which provide:

  - work experience relevant to potential future employment.

  - beneficial and relevant training and development opportunities for volunteers.

  - expenses which fully cover all out-of-pocket costs to incentivise volunteering.

- Creating a database of local proof-readers to support those operating in a second language with completing application forms for work and volunteering roles.

- Encouraging organisations to create apprenticeship/shadowing opportunities which are available at different levels within organisations and designed not only for young people but also for those with qualifications, skills, and experience.

- Exploring the possibility of a link between the UU, QUB and the environment sector with the possibility of each university offering sponsorship for a small number of refugees or asylum seekers to study courses which feed into careers in the sector.

- Encouraging environment organisations wishing to increase the ethnic diversity of their users to link in with relevant ethnic minority organisations to offer space for celebrations such as Eid, Diwali, Chinese New Year etc.

Funding

Lack of long-term, targeted funding to ensure sustainable progress was referenced sporadically throughout all elements of the study. Identifying core funders who appreciate that the NI environment sector is engaging in a change programme which will take time to show progress will undoubtedly be a challenge. It would be beneficial for NIEL to lead on a co-ordinated approach to funders rather than a range of environment organisations competing for funding from the same key funders.

Leadership

Unclear where to start the process of trying to increase ethnic diversity, through the survey 40% accepted that their actions were still at a preliminary stage as they hadn't yet given much thought to what would be required. A lack of confidence (with only 13% confident about taking action) and feeling daunted may be at the root of inaction.

The survey revealed that zero percent of respondents consistently implement a plan of action. Consequently, ad-hoc implementation may exacerbate feelings of under-confidence as perfunctory approaches are unlikely to instigate change. A NIEL co-ordinator could develop or harness a range of programmes to support leaders in developing knowledge, devoting time and space to planning and reviewing, accessing resources, and sharing practice.

Embedding and facing some uncomfortable realities

A minority ethnic focus group participant raised the importance of employing equity (rather than equality) in order to offer opportunities which will attract and support the retention of those from minority ethnic backgrounds. When, for example, this involves allocation of additional resources, welcoming statements to attract applications from minority ethnic candidates, changes to recruitment processes to remove disadvantages to those who speak English as a second language etc. Careful thought and communication are required to share with others in the organisation that these steps are being taken in the interest of equity. It was only in the focus groups with minority ethnic participants that 'racism' was mentioned as a reality. In response to the statement 'working in the environment sector would be a good career for anyone, no matter what their race or ethnicity' one participant opted to neither agree nor disagree and added the comment that 'in an ideal world working in the environment sector would be a good career but issues exist such as racism and sexism.' Attracting more ethnically diverse people into the sector through employment, volunteering and increasing their use of the environment is merely the beginning. Honest reflection, insight and expertise need to be developed by organisations wishing to embed good practice rather than minority ethnic people feeling they have to assimilate or disengage from the environment sector if they cannot carry the responsibility for catalysing change by themselves.

> **There are challenges, and it will take a lot of really conscious work, but increasing access to the environment and participation of ethnic minorities will benefit everyone... wellbeing and mental health benefits, increased community cohesion. Most importantly I hope that we will fulfil our duty to fairly serve everyone in the community.**
>
> *NI environment organisation leader*

Section 1
Introduction

> **Urgent change is needed...to help reach our climate and ecological goals. Groups that have been historically marginalised in modern environmental conversations don't simply need equality, they need equity to allow their agency to be heard and acted upon.... with clear insight and open minds, a rebalanced planet and a more humane society is possible in the near future, but we need action today.**
>
> *Roy Kareem, COP 26, November 2021*

The 'green sector' is now four times larger than manufacturing in the UK according to the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2021) but a view has been expressed by Manu Maunganidze (RACE Report, 2022) that while growth of the green sector should meet the environmental agenda, it is important to ensure that agenda is delivered by and benefits as wide a cross-section of society as possible.

The environment, climate, sustainability, and conservation sector is one of the least diverse in the UK with the proportion of people identifying as BAME recorded as 4.81% amongst environment professionals and an even more stark figure of 0% recorded amongst conservation professionals. This compares with 12.64 % across all professions (ONS, Annual Population Survey 2020-21). This demonstrates minimal progress since the think tank Policy Exchange (2017) developed a report which ranked 'environment professionals' as the second least diverse profession in the UK with just 3.1% of sector staff designating as belonging to minority ethnic groups, compared to 19.9% of the general UK workforce.

The following year the Institute for Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA), the National Union of Students (NUS) and the Equality Trust researched the issue further. Their scoping study entitled Race, Inclusivity and Environmental Sustainability (2018) surveyed race and ethnicity data from five large environmental charities as well as several government departments and agencies working in the environment sector in England and Wales. This data revealed how the representation of minority ethnic staff members ranged from 1.81% at Natural England to 16% at Defra. In the five participating sustainability charities that range registered between 5.8% and 16.6% and the two participating environmental consultancies reported approximately 10% of their employees identifying as minority ethnic. Only two of these organisations shared data regarding their board members, noting that all were white. Also, responses revealed a lack of data existing amongst participating organisations on the race/ethnicity of supporters and volunteers.

The same study also accessed Higher Education Statistics Agency data to explore the issue with regard to students, discovering that (compared to 22% of UK students in higher education overall) merely 9% of students studying feeder subjects related to environmental professions identified as non-white minorities.

However, it is worth noting that the collection of ethnic monitoring data within environment sector organisations varies in terms of recording and consistency. While this reflects the situation in England there is even less clarity in NI where no onus is placed on organisations to carry out full ethnic monitoring. The out-workings of the NI Racial Equality Act (2015) provided an ethnic monitoring template, but it has yet to be rolled out beyond the Health Sector in NI. Consequently, there is a lack of accurate data in relation to ethnic diversity in specific professions in NI.

NI has historically had less ethnic diversity than other parts of the UK. In 2011, 1.72% of people who completed the census identified as belonging to a minority ethnic group with that figure doubling to 3.4% in the recent census (NISRA, 2022). NI is set to become increasingly diverse and NIEL is exploring how this growing diversity can be embraced for the benefit of the environment sector.

The NI study takes its cue from research commissioned by Full Colour (August 2022) which gives insight into what is helping and hindering the environment sector in England in its pursuit of becoming more ethnically diverse. While this study offers insight into employment within the sector, the NI research has also been designed to consider participation of minority ethnic communities in terms of volunteering and accessing the natural environment. Research was conducted in 2008 which studied barriers to under-represented groups, including those from minority ethnic backgrounds, engaging in recreation in the natural environment (CAAN, 2008). The design of the 2008 review has been helpful in developing qualitative aspects of the NI research, particularly in relation to conducting focus groups with representatives of minority ethnic communities.

Section 2
Methodology

Introduction

The rationale for the methodology is explained in this section of the report. The research design is described to provide clarity as to why the participant populations were chosen and to identify the process for collecting and analysing data.

2.1 Preparatory research

Desk research was conducted to assess the literature available with regard to minority ethnic participation and barriers to participation in the environment sector in the UK. NI-specific research was also sought in relation to minority ethnic people accessing green space and volunteering.

The most appropriate methodology to achieve best results, within the project's time constraints, was designed and is described below.

2.2 Research design

Scope

The environment sector

The intention of the research was to focus on NIEL members as they represent a significant proportion of the environment movement in NI. Quantitative and qualitative data was sought from them via an online survey, one-to-one interviews as the basis of case studies and participation in a workshop.

Minority ethnic participants

It was considered essential to gather the views of a range of minority ethnic people residing in NI. The most appropriate methodology was thought to be focus group meetings and a workshop. The advantage of this qualitative approach is in the value of the information gathered through in-depth discussion around topics, where participants have an opportunity to fully explore attitudes, views, and perceptions, allowing investigation that would not be possible through quantitative techniques.

Confidentiality

As some issues explored through both the quantitative and qualitative research were potentially sensitive, assurance of anonymity was given to participants to enable them to contribute freely and openly. Therefore, no organisations or individuals are named in this report.

2.3 Quantitative methodology

Research objectives

The research objectives for the survey with NIEL members were to measure:

1. Levels of knowledge and understanding of ethnic diversity and inclusion in relation to own their organisations and the environment sector in NI.

2. The extent to which organisations collect, monitor, and make use of diversity data.

3. Actions already taken at an organisational level to become more equal, diverse, and inclusive.

4. Planning for developing good practice.

5. Drivers for change in the sector.

6. Barriers to change in the sector.

7. Collective action to benefit the NI environment sector.

Survey content

Survey questions were modelled on a selection of those included in research which was conducted in England by Full Colour on behalf of Wildlife and Countryside Link and Natural England (August 2022).

Target audience and dissemination

The survey was communicated by NIEL via email to key contacts within its member organisations. Organisations were invited to nominate someone in a leadership capacity to complete the survey. The survey was aimed at leaders, encompassing roles such as the organisation's CEO, staff with senior leadership responsibilities including in HR, the Chair of the board of trustees or non-executive directors. Fieldwork took place between 13 September to 14 October 2022**.**

Managing the online survey

A total of 68 online surveys were distributed and on the final closing date for receiving responses, reminder emails with attached surveys were sent to non-responders. Refer to Appendix 1 for a copy of the survey. A response rate of 22% was achieved which just exceeds the average response rate for postal questionnaires, reported by NISRA to be 20% (NISRA, 2022). A further response was received some time after the deadline. The quantitative data from this organisation has not been included in the report (but some qualitative comments have been derived from it).

Limitations of the quantitative research via survey

Out of 68 NIEL organisations invited to take part, a total of 14 survey responses were received during the designated timeframe. Whilst the sample size is relatively small, it represents an average response for an online survey. Whilst it cannot claim to be representative of the entire sector it is still possible to draw interesting insights from the data.

Data Analysis

Primary analysis was carried out shortly after the end date for returns and a snapshot of results was included in a short PowerPoint presentation at a workshop on 22 September 2022 with quantitative and qualitative results analysis shared. Secondary analysis involved comparing responses to survey questions from participating NI organisations with those from the original research conducted with environment organisations in England (Full Colour, August 2022).

2.4 Qualitative methodology

Questionnaire design – focus groups

Focus group topics of discussion were devised with questions designed to be open and semi-structured to allow for maximum input from participating individuals. Questions fell into 3 main topic areas in order to explore:

1. Attitudes, perceptions, behaviours, and barriers to accessing the natural environment.

2. Attitudes, perceptions, behaviours, and barriers with regard to volunteering for environment focused organisations.

3. Attitudes, perceptions, behaviours, and barriers to seeking employment in the environment sector.

Recruitment and selection

One-to-one interviews

Those invited to participate in interviews around developing practice in relation to increasing ethnic diversity offered to contribute to further qualitative research via their survey response (refer to Section 3). The two case study organisations were chosen for one-to-one, semi-structured interviews based on their contrast in terms of organisational size. The interviews were conducted online via Zoom.

Focus Groups

In order to gain approval for and support with organising focus groups with representatives of the minority ethnic communities, online communication and face-to-face meetings were conducted with a range of organisations and agencies. Two in-person focus groups were established: one with asylum seekers and refugees (taking place on 13/9/22) and the other with the Chinese community (on 14/10/22). Engagement of members of the Chinese community, as the largest and most established minority ethnic group in NI (NISRA, 2022) was thought important.

Workshop

An in-person workshop was organised for 22 September 2022, as part of the Community Relations Council's Good Relations Week activities. This event was promoted amongst and limited to representatives of environment sector organisations and those representing minority ethnic community organisations. Numbers taking part in *Change Starts With Us: Increasing Ethnic Diversity in the NI Environment Sector* were evenly split between the two interest groups with a total of 19 people taking part.

Limitations of the qualitative research

Both focus groups were located in Belfast with the majority of participants living in Belfast and nearby urban areas. While Belfast is the most ethnically diverse part of NI (NISRA, 2022) care must be taken in terms of extrapolating to other parts of NI.

Data Analysis

One-to-one Interviews - Case Studies

Responses to interview questions (shared in advance with those participating in one-to-one interviews) were recorded. The written records were compared, and summary findings are included in section 4 of the report.

Focus Groups

Focus group discussions were recorded on a sound recording app, with permission from all participants, and additionally in writing on a pre-prepared template. Written records and sound recordings were examined, and the findings described in Section 4.

An attempt was made to replicate a selection of questions from previous research in relation to barriers and opportunities for increasing access to green space for underrepresented groups (CAAN, March 2008).

The wording was altered slightly from the CAAN research as 'environmental space' and 'natural environment' were terms explained and used to replace 'countryside recreation' in the original study. It was hoped that in analysis some comparisons could be directly made with this earlier research. The same question format was then adopted for questions related to volunteering.

Also included were questions about the importance of minority ethnic people's perceptions of diversity in the environment sector in relation to employment. Some of these were replicated from a scoping study by NUS, December 2018.

Online surveys

Data from the surveys was collated via Survey Monkey and subsequently analysed. A selection of questions had been derived from research on what is helping and hindering the environment sector in England from becoming more ethnically diverse (Full Colour, August 2022). Results are described in Section 3.

Workshop

Following a presentation of initial findings from the online survey with environment organisations, the majority of time during the workshop was devoted to generating ideas in relation to two questions about:

1. New opportunities which could be created to increase ethnic diversity in the environment sector; and

2. Challenges or barriers which might need to be overcome to increase ethnic diversity.

Participants were divided into three small groups to share their thinking. Ideas were recorded in each group and collated following the workshop. Workshop notes are included in section 4.

Conclusions

The research design involved both qualitative and quantitative methods, including focus group discussions, an online survey, individual interviews, and a workshop. Groups and individuals from a range of organisations in Northern Ireland were included in the research design to ensure good understanding of the issues.

Fifteen organisations and 38 individuals took part in the research and their views have been carefully recorded and analysed. Results are described in the following sections of the report.

Section 3
Quantitative Results and Analysis

Quantitative results were derived from an online survey with NIEL member organisations. There was an overall response rate of 22% within the original time limits for completing the survey. Most organisations that completed the survey were relatively small in size with 86% having less than 30 staff and only one organisation with more than 50 staff in NI. The request was that those in a leadership capacity should complete the survey. There was also a qualitative element to the survey with opinions gathered. Because the quantitative and qualitative elements of the survey are inextricably linked, in some instances, analysis of both is presented in this section of the report. In some instances, the results are analysed and compared with research conducted with leaders in member organisations of England's Wildlife and Countryside Link (Full Colour, August 2022). The aim was to provide a snapshot in time of how environment organisations thinking in NI on increasing ethnic diversity compares with their counterparts in England.

There was also a small quantitative element to the focus groups with minority ethnic community representatives which involved replicating questions originally included in a scoping study with students about their perceptions of working in the environment sector (IEMA, NUS & Equality Trust, 2018). Analysis of responses are included in this section of the report.

3.1 Online Survey

1. **Knowledge and understanding of ethnic diversity and inclusion in relation to own organisations and the NI environment sector**

> **The only way to advance as a species is to learn from different cultures and work together...**

A thought expressed in NI around hopes and ambitions for increasing ethnic diversity in the environment sector

The majority of those who responded to the survey (93%) said the environment sector in NI should consider ethnic diversity 'highly' or as 'fairly' important yet only 6% declared it to be a current priority. This shows a greater disparity than in the results of the survey conducted in England where those figures stood at 86% compared to 22% in response to a similar question.

When questioned, 87% indicated that increasing ethnic diversity would have a positive or strongly positive impact on the sector as a whole. This breaks down into 47% choosing a 'strong positive impact' and 40% a 'positive impact'. These results are similar but slightly higher than the outcome of the English survey in which 42% of executive leaders said increasing the ethnic diversity of the sector would have a 'strong positive impact' and 33% a 'positive impact'.

In terms of the perceived impact on their own organisations in NI, 73% estimated that increasing ethnic diversity would have a strong positive impact, 7% signified a 'positive impact' and 20% felt there would be 'some impact'. This is a more emphatic outcome than from the English survey where 30% of leaders said increasing ethnic diversity would have a 'strong positive impact' and 40% a 'positive impact'.

2. Organisational readiness for change to become more equal, diverse, and inclusive

In NI, 53% identified that they were already taking action to tackle the lack of ethnic diversity in their organisations compared with 90% of CEOs in England who said they had taken some action. In England the most common actions involved identifying barriers, consulting all staff on ethnic diversity issues, and setting objectives. In NI, activity ranged from planning to diversify the ethnicity of trustees to action ranging from appointing EDI specialists or staff, developing an EDI framework or action plan, reviewing recruitment practice, designing, and delivering projects with under-represented groups and awareness and equality training for staff. However, out of those surveyed in NI, zero percent could claim to 'consistently and regularly implement a plan of action'. And 40% accepted that their actions were still at a preliminary stage as they hadn't yet given much thought to ethnic diversity issues.

The least frequently cited actions in England were consulting with ethnically diverse staff and establishing internal networks for ethnically diverse staff, possibly due to the minimal levels of staff diversity within organisations. One organisation in NI shared that they had 'established an Employee Network involving raising awareness of diverse cultures and supporting ethnically diverse colleagues to thrive, empowering and educating allies, and acting as expert advisers for senior leadership'.

3. Extent to which organisations collect, monitor, and make use of ethnic diversity data

One of the practical steps organisations can take is to be consistent in their collection and monitoring of data on ethnicity. Asked about the consistent collection of ethnic monitoring data, organisations indicated data was collected under categories as follows:

Staff 60%, Boards 57%, Volunteers 43%, Applicants 40%, Leaders 21%, Supporters 20%.

When explored, CEOs in England said their organisations were more inclined to hold ethnicity data about leaders, trustees and staff as compared to volunteers, members and supporters. There was some deviation from this in NI in that 43% collected ethnic monitoring data on volunteers and 40% on applicants with a smaller number at 21% recording data on leaders.

Only a quarter of CEOs whose organisations collect ethnicity data in England use it regularly to inform decision making. In NI this figure was very similar at 23% with an additional 23% reporting on the data but not using it systematically to make decisions. A further 31% collect but do nothing with the data and 23% admitted to a lack of knowledge about how data was used post collection.
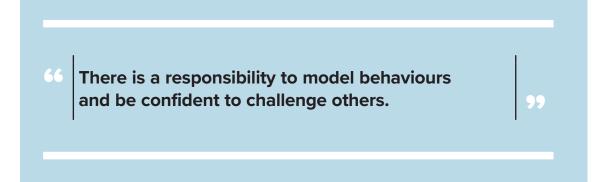
For those NI-based organisations that shared figures from their organisations, two recorded Black and Asian staff ethnicity at 20% and just under 3%. Volunteer diversity figures stood at 15% or less and two organisations also recorded board / trustee ethnic diversity at 16% and 10%. No NI organisation recorded having leaders of Black or Asian ethnicity.
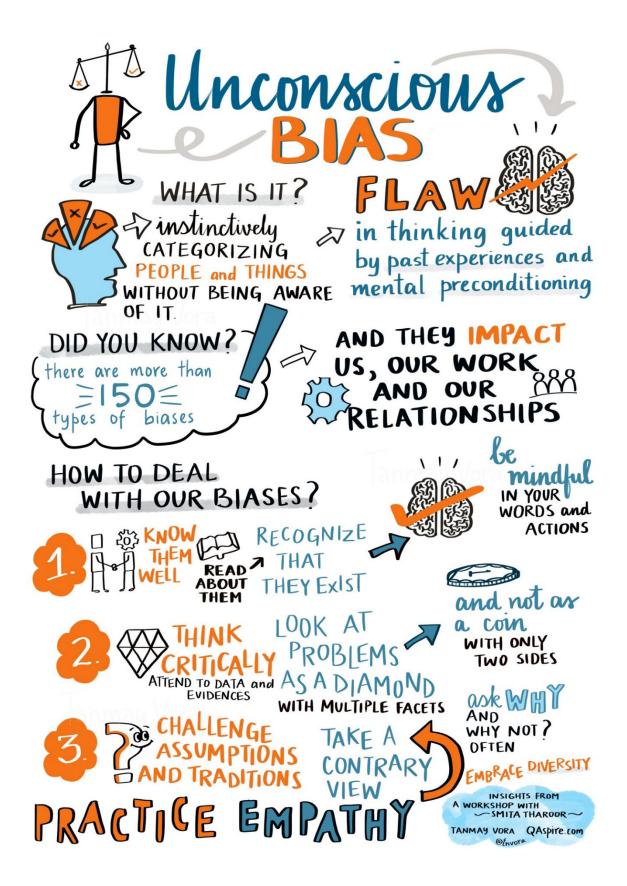
4. Planning for developing good practice

> " **Being fair, open, and bringing awareness to any unconscious biases that may exist...** "

Engaging in unconscious bias testing and training is now regarded as an intrinsic part of the process involved in increasing equality and diversity for those embarking on the development of good practice. It is noticeable that in NI only 20% had taken an unconscious bias test and 27% had received unconscious bias training. In England the use of recognised unconscious bias tests was rated much higher in organisations further along the path towards greater ethnic diversity at just under 50%; whilst just over 10% of those at the early stage of the process had taken a recognised unconscious bias test.

> " **There is a responsibility to model behaviours and be confident to challenge others.** "

Unconscious BIAS

WHAT IS IT?

→ *instinctively* CATEGORIZING PEOPLE and THINGS WITHOUT BEING AWARE OF IT.

FLAW → in thinking guided by past experiences and mental preconditioning

DID YOU KNOW?

there are more than ≥150≤ types of biases

→ AND THEY **IMPACT** US, OUR WORK AND OUR RELATIONSHIPS

HOW TO DEAL WITH OUR BIASES?

be **mindful** IN YOUR WORDS and ACTIONS

1. KNOW THEM WELL — READ ABOUT THEM → RECOGNIZE THAT THEY EXIST

2. THINK CRITICALLY — ATTEND TO DATA and EVIDENCES — LOOK AT PROBLEMS AS A DIAMOND WITH MULTIPLE FACETS

and not as a coin WITH ONLY TWO SIDES

ask **WHY** AND WHY NOT? OFTEN

3. CHALLENGE ASSUMPTIONS AND TRADITIONS — TAKE A CONTRARY VIEW

EMBRACE DIVERSITY

PRACTICE EMPATHY

INSIGHTS FROM A WORKSHOP WITH ~SMITA THAROOR~ TANMAY VORA QAspire.com @tnvora

5.   Drivers for change in the NI environment sector

In terms of leaders driving change, a much higher level of confidence was expressed through the English survey around talking about ethnic diversity issues as 81% of trustees and 64% of executive leaders said they were confident. In NI confidence levels were expressed at a much lower level with only 47% of respondents having a 'reasonable' to 'high' degree of confidence whilst 7% admitted to not being confident at all. Likewise, in NI only 13% felt 'confident' about 'taking action' related to increasing ethnic diversity while most provided a neutral response. This resonates with previous results which noted a much higher level of initiation of activity in England by 90% of CEOs compared with 53% embarking on action in NI.

However, respondents in NI had some clearly articulated aspirations around how they would personally drive internal change such as 'by increasing senior role models and making ethnic diversity a strategic priority' and via 'promotion of the EDI agenda as an organisation and through delivery of programme areas, set targets and report on progress'. Another approach to driving change also took into account external connections: 'actively seeking contact with a range of community leaders and organisations to encourage applications and participation.'

6.   Barriers to change in the NI environment sector

> " **I would be concerned that smaller organisations in particular are complacent in thinking they welcome everyone and are unaware of the hidden barriers at work.** "

In NI when asked if their organisation had a clearly developed answer as to 'why' increasing ethnic diversity matters, approximately half indicated 'no' or expressed uncertainty. Clearly this is fundamental and important for organisations to clarify and articulate the reasons why increased organisational ethnic diversity matters.

When questioned about specific barriers to change on ethnic diversity the most frequently cited reasons were a lack of awareness and knowledge about people from diverse backgrounds living in NI as well as references to the absence of a strategic approach and plan of action. Competing priorities were also mentioned. It is interesting to compare this to the study in England where lack of capacity and competing priorities were identified but when this question was asked across a broader range of research participants (including staff) further barriers to progress emerged including insufficient buy-in from boards and senior leaders, fear of getting it wrong leading to failure to act at all, cynicism and the complexity of the issue.

7. Collective action to benefit the NI Environment Sector

> **Possibly the first step should be to reach out to minority ethnic communities to get their perspective on this question.**

> **It's a bit the same as cross community work, throwing money and targets at it can be counterproductive. It takes time and building up relationships... (as well as) core funding for established organisations and long-term funding for programmes.**

One survey respondent described the aims of collective action by the sector as 'an increased percentage of people from different ethnic backgrounds involved at all levels - from volunteering to decision making'. In order to strive towards this as a sector, a range of suggestions were made which have been grouped under the headings below:

Dedicated EDI Officer

Proposals were made for an individual to be appointed to co-ordinate EDI work sector wide: 'central supporting and advisory officer for the whole sector in NI where we can seek advice and avail of best practice ideas and projects'.

Internal sector development

There was widespread support for training being designed and delivered for organisations across the sector as well as the staging of relevant events and conferences. It was also felt that networks should be developed, strengthened, and promoted to enhance collaboration and partnership working.

EDI action plans and policies were referenced and sector wide support with developing good practice in this area was welcomed.

Employment

A number of organisations referenced support in terms of recruitment. One suggested, 'a joint analysis of the gap in representation and a communication and recruitment plan to address the imbalance' and support to appropriately 'consider positive bias in developing participation'. Retention strategies were also thought beneficial: 'offering clear career paths to progression in the sector' was mentioned as an aspect of increasing diversity in the workforce which would benefit from a sectoral focus.

Volunteering

In terms of the perceived lack of diversity amongst volunteers it was suggested that '...more efforts to be made by organisations involved in volunteering to address this' but it was felt by some that this could be achieved more effectively if considered at a sector level than by organisations carrying out solo work.

Relationship building with community organisations representing people from diverse ethnic backgrounds

An awareness of the importance of connecting and relationship building was raised and support for successfully initiating and maintaining this. Ways of doing this as a sector were considered: 'maybe translating more of the local impacts of the climate and nature crisis and what action people can take? Communicate in appropriate languages and in groups.'

3.2 Focus Groups

Perceptions of diversity and inclusion in environment organisations

All members of the two focus groups comprised of minority ethnic participants were asked for their overall perceptions of the importance of diversity and inclusion within the workplace, as well as how this relates to their perceptions of the environment sector. They completed this anonymously through a tick box activity. Results revealed that 95% importance was given to an organisation prioritising a diverse workforce and inclusive culture.

Similarly, in response to the statement 'working in the environment sector would be a good career for anyone, no matter what their race or ethnicity' there was 95% agreement. One ethnic Chinese participant opted to neither agree nor disagree with this statement and added the comment 'in an ideal world working in the environment sector would be a good career but issues exist such as racism and sexism.' Analysis of these results shows a similar trend when compared to the outcome of these questions being put to students in English universities as part of the scoping exercise carried out by the NUS in conjunction with IEMA and the Equality Trust (2018, page 39). Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic students (excluding white minorities) agreed at 79% and 74% to these initial two statements.

There was a split in opinion in both focus groups over the statement 'I'm discouraged by the lack of diversity of Black, Asian and other racial or ethnic groups in organisations working in the environment sector'. 58% of asylum seekers and refugees agreed to being discouraged by this with a similar trend occurring in the ethnic Chinese group of 43% feeling discouraged and one commenting that they were 'disappointed'. This is interesting when compared with the 2018 study with students in which 34% of Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic students (excluding white minorities) agreed compared to 17% of their white peers.

Section 4
Qualitative Results and Analysis

Introduction

Qualitative data was gathered from three sources:

- One-to-one interviews with representatives from two organisations that completed the survey. Their interviews formed the basis for case studies which were subsequently compared and analysed in light of their efforts towards increasing ethnic diversity.

- Two focus groups of people from minority ethnic communities were interviewed using the same semi-structured interview template. Their views were later analysed particularly in relation to their views on what would encourage and discourage them from accessing environmental green space, volunteering and employment in the environment sector.

- A workshop brought together representatives of the environment sector and minority ethnic communities to share ideas on new opportunities which could be created to help increase minority ethnic participation in the environment sector. Analysis was carried out of the ideas generated by three small workshop groups.

4.1 One-to-One Interviews

The two organisations invited to participate in interviews about developing their practice, in relation to increasing ethnic diversity, offered to contribute to further qualitative research via their survey response (refer to section 3.1). Both NGOs have main offices in England, but one is small in terms of the staff complement in NI and works to empower community organisations engaging in environmental activity while the other has a larger, more widely spread staff and manages activity from a central base in NI. The case study organisations provided one-to-one interviews, the details of which are included in **Appendix 2.**

The catalyst for developing or changing practice

It is noteworthy that both cited the injustice surrounding the death of George Floyd in the USA and the global response which emanated from that as the catalyst for their organisations developing their practice towards increasing ethnic diversity. In the case of the larger organisation the process for doing this was instigated by the organisation's leadership while in the smaller organisation staff raised the issue with SMT that the organisation as a whole lacked up to date policies and procedures in relation to equality and diversity.

Initial steps

The small organisation's NI office sourced and invested in online EDI training sessions delivered by Craic NI for the local team. This helped with the process of talking about diversity issues as a team and a series of subsequent initiatives emerged from that. A different approach was adopted by the larger organisation's central office based in England which hired an external consultancy to review internal processes and organisational culture UK wide. From their recommendations an EDI programme was developed, and an EDI team established.

Internal organisational change

Considerable work has been carried forward by the EDI team in the larger organisation. They have developed an action plan, are working with HR to improve recruitment processes and use of staff ethnic monitoring data as well as developing and agreeing a narrative as to why EDI matters, to promote a shared understanding of the importance of EDI. Unconscious bias training has also been provided to managers and staff to allow personal reflection on assumptions and encourage people to become more aware of how their biases relate to work environments and practices. A different approach has been adopted by the smaller organisation. When NIEL forwarded the NI survey about increasing ethnic diversity in the environment sector the manager of the team in NI forwarded it to other staff throughout the UK and drew attention to the content and the possibility of working on these issues. Out of this action it was discovered that relevant policies had not been revised or updated for a number of years. The Executive team gave the go ahead for self-selecting staff, representing each of the nations, to come together and begin to look at current policies, procedures, gaps etc. The first meeting of this EDI group was scheduled for the middle of October 2022. Those involved were mindful of differences which might need to be taken into account in the different nations of the UK, particularly when giving consideration to legal responsibilities. They also wished to consider ethical responsibilities, future responses, and the importance of seeking HR and Board buy-in.

New initiatives or practice with minority ethnic communities

The larger organisation is keen to replicate the success of some other country teams in building links with minority community groups, as well as seeing greater diversity and representation within the wider governance structures. During the Covid pandemic the smaller organisation forged ahead with engaging a diverse range of people in their work. Choosing to focus on environmentally sound gardening techniques adopted in different parts of the world, the NI team consciously adopted an asset-based approach ensuring everyone had the opportunity to contribute something from their own background, knowledge, and experience. In the context of climate change, it was thought beneficial to hear from a range of people about a wide variety of techniques, species and problem-solving which had emerged in different parts of the world. Three NI residents from New Delhi, Nepal and the Basque Country in Spain were filmed sharing the experience they have carried with them. This inspired a webinar, well attended across the UK, creating connections via original ideas but also discovering similar approaches, such as poly-culture techniques adopted in different parts of the globe. Also, in an attempt to increase ethnic diversity in their work, the smaller organisation deems it beneficial to adopt a collaborative model by relationship building with successful organisations that work at a community level with locally based people from diverse ethnic backgrounds. This approach recognises the knowledge and expertise developed by others and strives to avoid overawing local groups which are already initiative heavy.

Outcomes or impact

It was recognised that increasing and sustaining greater levels of ethnic diversity was a process requiring long-term application. It was stressed by the larger organisation that measuring impact would require good monitoring and evaluation in the longer-term.

Future sector initiatives

Both identified the importance of future initiatives at an organisation level but also supported the idea of a more co-ordinated approach from the environment sector in NI through actions and links which could be taken forward in a collaborative, meaningful and sustainable way.

The smaller organisation identified NIEL, as one of two umbrella organisations best placed to provide support to the range of organisations in the sector and felt training for staff would be beneficial to aid the normalising of EDI concepts as well as running a conference to highlight the basics of good practice. The larger organisation intimated that they would be keen to devote time and energy if active groups were identified and engaged so that potentially a steering group with a clear focus could be established. The smaller organisation also referenced the requirement for core rather than short-term funding to ensure the sustainability of long-term programmes, recognising that building relationships and embedding best practice takes time.

4.2 Focus Groups

Two focus groups were held with people from minority ethnic communities. The semi-structured interview template used is included in **Appendix 3**. Seven people attended the focus group with representatives of the Chinese community while twelve participated in the focus group with asylum seekers and refugees from countries of origin including Somalia, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Syria, Palestine, Yemen, Sudan and Namibia. Both focus groups had a mix in terms of gender and were located in Belfast which has the largest minority ethnic community in NI at 7.1% (NISRA, 2022). There were differences in the age demographic for each group with the Chinese community participants all over 40 years of age while the other focus group had a younger demographic, starting at 18 years and including participants all within working age.

A record of the interviews is included in **Appendix 4**. In cases where the issues and barriers discussed at the focus group meetings were common to all participants, comments from each group have not been reported individually, except where there were obvious differences which have been highlighted and attributed to the specific focus group. The opportunity was taken to ask about accessing managed environmental spaces, volunteering and also working in the environment sector. Responses in each category are analysed in turn.

4.2.1 Accessing the natural environment

Perceptions, attitudes, and participation levels

Both focus groups had a sound understanding of the type of places they could potentially visit and the benefits for both mental and physical health. Relaxation and time to reflect were also mentioned as benefits.

In the focus group with Chinese participants a few expressed how they currently (one participant for over 20 years) or previously have been members of the National Trust and enjoyed visiting natural and built heritage sites.

However, the majority opted for visiting local parks on a regular basis and emphasised the importance of sites being within walking distance due to costs associated with public or personal transport. It was mentioned in the focus group of asylum seekers and refugees that being confined to an urban environment meant that awareness of places to visit was also somewhat restricted.

Barriers to participation and planning considerations

Out of nineteen participants across two focus groups, only one individual expressed a lack of desire to participate in such activity due to physical health issues. Others agreed that while erratic weather can be off-putting there are a range of other crucial considerations and barriers to participation.

Accessibility was raised as a main barrier as those without cars felt some well promoted destinations were difficult to reach via the public transport system which they considered to be poor in NI. Concerns were raised by Chinese participants that because many in the community ran small businesses, they were only available at restricted times to engage in such activities and often felt let down by a lack of regular and available public transport or limited opening hours at the venues they wished to visit. Interestingly, these same issues about public transport were raised in the research about countryside recreation (CAAN, 2008) which was published more than 14 years previously.

Additionally, participants seeking asylum felt that transport costs were prohibitive because government policy at the time of conducting this study dictated that all those seeking asylum should be domiciled in hotels and merely receive £8 per week beyond the board and meals provided to them. They emphasised that overall, they did not feel that public transport costs were excessive but that in their circumstances they were too costly. Another practicality highlighted for asylum seekers was the restrictions on available time due to set mealtimes at hotels preventing wider exploration for longer periods during any one day.

Picking up on the findings of the 2008 research, prompt questions were asked directly around any perceived need for information to be provided in mother tongue languages. The focus group of asylum seekers and refugees indicated that while this would be very welcoming, they would not consider it essential for their needs. Similarly, when females were asked if safety was a concern, they indicated strongly that they felt these environments to be safe and friendly.

There was concern expressed by ethnic Chinese participants that the cost-of-living increases from late 2022 onwards would have a detrimental impact on this type of recreation. Furthermore, this group discussed a 'middle class exclusiveness' that can be felt or perceived around visiting properties such as those managed by the National Trust. It was thought very pricey, but that membership was beneficial if you planned to visit regularly. All in the group believed it to be quite exclusive and not an option for people on lower incomes. They expressed disappointment that this was the case.

Encouragement to participate

One participant speaking on behalf of asylum seekers noted: 'Many people are traumatised due to the journey they have taken... Green spaces would be healing, holistic and good for people's wellbeing rather than being trapped in a city centre hotel.'

Due to the nature of the issues experienced by asylum seekers the idea of organisations offering organised activities with transport provided or funded was very popular. An example was given of a recent beach visit planned for young asylum seekers. It was considered hugely beneficial. The provision of food would also be really welcomed due to the issue of possible missed mealtimes. Wet weather gear or specialist equipment which could be borrowed was referenced by some younger members of this focus group. And whilst signs and literature in different mother tongue languages was not needed it was felt that this would be extremely welcoming.

The ethnic Chinese group viewed it as important for free parking to be offered at all places of interest to prevent a range of people from being excluded and as an incentive to visit.

4.2.2 Volunteering

Perceptions, attitudes, and participation levels

A few amongst the ethnic Chinese group had already volunteered for environment charities such as Conservation Volunteers as part of a Saturday Group during the Covid Pandemic. They found it to be a positive experience. Another had recently moved from England and was seeking volunteering opportunities but didn't come across anything environment linked. In the other focus group, many had previously volunteered in their countries of origin in activities such as environmental education, beach clean-up days, litter pick up in towns and tree planting.

Having an interest in the mission of the organisation and finding an NGO with a good reputation were amongst the main priorities when choosing to volunteer, according to those of Chinese ethnicity. Individuals sought to 'connect with like-minded people' and gain socially from the experience. According to one participant, 'a sense of making a contribution is very important and brings more awareness to people. If everyone gave a few hours of their time to volunteer each week it would change a lot of things in society'.

Awareness raising, advocacy and education for young people were some of the activities mentioned by the group of asylum seekers and refugees as well as an interest in a broad range of environmental themes and the importance of a connection to 'personal values'. The main benefits recorded were helping with integration, counteracting loneliness, and isolation, 'feeling you have something to offer to society' and gaining valuable work experience in a new work context.

Barriers to participation

A lack of appropriate skills and experience or no recognition of qualifications gained in counties of origin was cited by asylum seekers and refugees: 'There are PhD students sitting here and doing nothing.' But these were also seen as reasons to volunteer.

Poorly designed volunteer experiences which do not enhance skills, knowledge or experience were a concern: 'generally organisations don't focus on excelling the skills of volunteers but if someone commits their time over 6 months and you invest in their skills, knowledge and passion will transform someone into a supporter and campaigner.' Additionally, replacing paid employment with volunteering, in the long-term, was considered negative and off putting by some.

A different train of thought emerged from ethnic Chinese participants who identified extreme activism, such as some of the campaigning activities of Extinction Rebellion, as a turn off.

Encouragement to participate

The group comprising asylum seekers and refugees had very clear ideas about how they would be encouraged to volunteer. Primarily they felt that awareness needed to be raised and spoke about 'getting the right information via the internet' in order to 'find out where to start'. They also referenced the importance of receiving 'a welcome' and felt this could be best achieved through 'an engagement officer' devoted to encouraging the recruitment of volunteers from minority ethnic backgrounds. On the practical side it was felt that transport costs and expenses should be fully covered.

A clear structure to the volunteering experience was emphasised and one Chinese participant, who had volunteered in the environment sector previously, underlined the need for 'useful training for volunteers which goes beyond health and safety.' Also, gaining or working towards a qualification was considered beneficial and the group of asylum seekers and refugees stressed the importance of volunteering experiences that provide a pathway to work. One participant put forward an idea for a volunteer programme:

'It is important to invest in your asylum seekers through sponsorship. Recruit ten places every year for asylum seekers and link this to universities to get qualifications. Give them an advantage and incentivise. Invest in the individuals through training and there will be a long-lasting impact in terms of the individuals and the environment.'

The positive mental health benefits for volunteers who are seeking asylum in NI was recognised by both groups but with the caveat that environmental organisations also need to learn about and be sensitive to the circumstances of asylum seekers.

Ethnic Chinese participants were also particularly interested in volunteering on projects with an end product or lasting legacy.

In the words of one participant from the Middle East, currently volunteering in the sustainable development sector, 'volunteering must be a win-win. Volunteers must gain something from volunteering. If properly designed and delivered this will create campaigners and supporters for the long-term.'

4.2.3 Work Opportunities

Both sets of focus group participants were asked to write three words or phrases on post-its to sum up what sprung to mind when working in the environment sector was mentioned. The results from the first focus group with asylum seekers and refugees are included in the word cloud above.

Barriers to participation

A participant from Somalia voiced concern: 'Often it is a tick box exercise around diversity. People will disengage. I am concerned... that there is a lot of tokenism and that needs to change'.

Many perceptions and assumptions were expressed around paid employment in the environment sector ranging from a belief that roles would be poorly paid to a view that very few jobs exist, just volunteering opportunities. People seemed to be concentrating mostly on practical roles, working outdoors in the environment. Both focus groups, however, included one participant who was qualified and experienced in finance. A female participant from Zimbabwe admitted to being 'discouraged by the lack of information and not knowing what the expectations would be of me' whilst a male Chinese participant pointed out a challenge in submitting an application: 'The application forms are designed for someone whose first language is English and it seems like I would be at a disadvantage at application stage compared to someone who has English as their first language.'

Another barrier noted was the potential for organisations to be unprepared for supporting people from diverse ethnic backgrounds to work in the environment sector. It was pointed out that new arrivals can face extra challenges and obstacles in terms of their new workplace as they don't yet have work contacts and links in NI. This should be taken into consideration and support mechanisms put in place to help them adjust and learn about any new work environment.

Encouragement to participate

In each focus group there were references made to how working in the environment sector matched personal values such as being 'involved in tackling global issues like climate change.'

However, for people to be fully convinced that the environment sector in NI is committed to becoming more diverse they felt there must be buy-in at a strategic level with organisations needing to develop new ideas, interventions, and support. It was strongly advised that 'any new initiatives must be long-term, sustainable and genuine.'

'We need the focus to be on equity rather than equality' said a participant from Yemen. He recognised that focused, additional initiatives and new ways of working might be required if the environment sector was truly committed to engaging and developing a more ethnically diverse workforce.

It was also felt that a long-term investment in young asylum seekers would represent a positive commitment to those who could join the workforce and make a valuable contribution to wider society.

Access to information

It was universally agreed that most people receive their information via the internet and, therefore, the environment sector in NI needed to make best use of Facebook, YouTube and update their websites accordingly. One participant who had recently moved from England to live in NI had conducted a Google search for volunteering opportunities. She claimed an interest in environmental options, but no such roles came up in search results. Rather, the web search brought up information about membership, requesting funds or detail that was not specific to NI. She felt it would be beneficial to have some simple, straightforward details about what you could do as a volunteer and how to apply rather than very general information which required trawling through with no obvious opportunities.

Local libraries are still accessed widely and could carry promotional material. Also, places of study were thought useful for posting information. Organisations that link in directly with minority ethnic communities were referenced as they often post newsletters (online or paper versions) to their communities. Sports clubs and local radio stations also received one mention each.

Other notable comments

'The NI Assembly needs to commit to a strong environmental strategy and policy and communicate it to the public. Projects should emerge from that with people given the incentive to behave in environmentally responsible ways.'

Everything is short-term in NI – need long-term viable solutions which have government strategy behind them. We need fully implemented government policy for ethnic minority inclusion.

There was also a discussion about ethnic monitoring and how the Racial Equality Strategy 2015-2025 (Executive Office, 2015) had not been implemented. A template for ethnic monitoring had been part of the outcomes of that strategy but had not been used in any departments other than the Health Department where it is applied consistently. It was reiterated that strong NI government would be required to properly and fully implement the Racial Equality Strategy and any future strategy regarding the environment.

During the discussion on work opportunities the point was made that many of those seeking asylum have families and professions and are used to working and contributing. One major hurdle identified was that they are not permitted to gain paid employment until their case for asylum has been heard and approved in the UK. They wished for the system to be changed to better reflect that in the ROI where temporary work permits are issued to asylum seekers.

Additional thoughts were shared on racism by those of Chinese ethnicity. There was some reluctance to be too vocal about it, but concerns were expressed about how people might be received due to racist attitudes in society.

4.3 Workshop

19 people participated in a workshop on 22 September 2022 called *Change Starts With Us: Increasing Ethnic Diversity in the NI Environment Sector*. Numbers were evenly split between individuals from NIEL member organisations and participants representing minority ethnic community organisations. In three small groups ideas were generated in relation to questions about what new opportunities could be created to increase ethnic diversity in the NI environment sector and what barriers or obstacles might need to be overcome to carry new opportunities forward. Main points from the three workshop groups are summarised below but a full description of their ideas is included in the workshop report in **Appendix 5**.

Two of the small groups recommended the appointment of a person to work with the whole sector on increasing levels of ethnic diversity. It was recommended that this individual be placed at NIEL. The activities recommended for management by this role are summarised below.

Building the internal capacity of the sector

- The development and facilitation of an EDI network for the sector.

- Recognising gaps in the knowledge and experience of environment organisations in working with people from diverse ethnic backgrounds it was thought important to provide training sessions and events to increase knowledge levels and share good practice.

- Providing access to unconscious bias training for environment sector staff and boards.

- Developing good practice in the use of ethnic monitoring data.

- Guidance on the appropriate use of positive discrimination in relation to recruitment and funding packages.

- Guidance on how to increase diverse representation in organisational leadership.

- Sharing best practice in reviewing policies and procedures in relation to increasing and retaining ethnically diverse staff.

Outreach with minority ethnic communities

It was considered more appropriate to reach out rather than invite in minority ethnic groups, working around their regular meetings and acknowledging their competing priorities. It was also felt important to consult as to their needs and co-design potential projects rather than assuming what their needs and interests might be.

The importance of education and awareness raising as a two-way process was stressed by all three groups. Emphasis was placed on increasing awareness of environmental issues, including global interconnectedness as well as of local issues and impacts.

A number of environment organisations could be supported to run eco programmes and it would be beneficial to link with relevant community organisations to deliver them and attract participants. These groups should be engaged at an early stage in the planning so that co-design becomes possible.

The lack of education routes leading to environmental jobs was underlined and it was thought beneficial to explore ways of changing this.

One group suggested developing a service to connect qualified and skilled asylum seekers or refugees to skilled volunteering roles in the environment sector or to academia opportunities. A potential barrier identified was that people would be operating in a second language, but a possible solution could be the creation of a database of local proof-readers willing to voluntarily support people with reviewing written work (including application forms for volunteering opportunities in the environment sector or future job applications).

Volunteering

Two groups suggested that volunteer co-ordinators or staff who work with volunteers should be offered training and good practice sharing and should be primed to make engagement with minority ethnic communities a priority.

Environment organisations should be supported to design volunteering opportunities that are meaningful and relevant to future career opportunities. This should aid people retention. Also, organisations must incentivise or make volunteering feasible for people on low incomes (such as asylum seekers and refugees) by offering transport/travel expenses, lunch, and other reasonable expenses.

Apprenticeships

Effort should be put into developing new apprenticeship programmes for older, skilled people (rather than just for young people) which could be aimed at those who haven't previously felt there were prospects for them in the environment sector. A potential barrier was seen in the tendency for environment organisations to specify the need for a university degree for roles which don't always require a degree. Working towards a solution to this would be a sector wide review of recruitment practice, in light of this initiative, to attract a more diverse range of people into the environment sector.

Accessing and benefiting from green space

Environment organisations wishing to increase the ethnic diversity of their users should be encouraged to think about linking in with relevant diversity organisations to offer their space for celebrations such as Eid, Diwali, Chinese New Year etc. This would raise public awareness and help build relationships hopefully leading, in the longer term, to more knowledge about the environment organisations and more interest, shown by people from diverse ethnic backgrounds, in working for or volunteering with them.

Section 5
Recommendations

Introduction

The principal objectives of this study were to gain an understanding of what may encourage or discourage minority ethnic people from engaging with the environment sector in NI particularly in terms of employment but also with regard to volunteering and accessing green space. To that end a range of views were sought from:

- Individuals working in the NI environment movement, particularly in leadership roles.

- Representatives of minority ethnic communities in NI.

Views were recorded and collated from:

- A survey with environment organisations.

- Environment organisation case studies which emerged on developing practice in relation to increasing ethnic diversity.

- Focus groups with representatives of minority ethnic communities.

- A workshop on creating new opportunities and overcoming obstacles and barriers which was attended by individuals from both environment organisations and members of community organisations working on behalf of minority ethnic people.

Recommendations, derived from subsequent analysis, are focused on moving the environment sector forward on this issue with a range of next steps recorded under seven headings.

5.1 Sector co-ordination

An over-arching recommendation, emerging through all aspects of the study, was the importance of employing an individual based in NIEL who would assume a co-ordinating role for the sector.

Through engagement with a range of stakeholders this individual would help clarify, at an early stage, the work best done collectively to benefit the entire sector. They would also aim to give more certainty to organisations about the type of work which needs to be done at an organisational level rather than a sector level.

The case studies demonstrated how organisations have different strengths in this area and feel the need to further develop divergent aspects of their practice ranging from engaging with different communities to strengthening internal policies and procedures in relation to the ethnic diversity of staff, trustees, and volunteers. It will be important for the sector co-ordinator to support organisations in realising that one size does not fit all and help them reflect on and pursue actions which meet their organisation's particular needs.

5.2 Raising awareness

Half of those who completed the survey in NI acknowledged that their organisation hadn't yet clearly determined or communicated 'why' increasing ethnic diversity matters. The co-ordinator should start by engaging the sector in pinning down a robust, meaningful rationale for engaging in this work as a collectively developed and agreed vision and mission will be required to help inform subsequent action planning and initiative development.

5.3 Training and capacity building

Training should be developed and delivered on a variety of levels and topics including:

- Unconscious bias training for staff in environment organisations. It is recommended that this training is delivered by an organisation highly aware of the history and demography of NI and able to tailor training with the NI context in mind. The NIEL based co-ordinator could source appropriate unconscious bias training suitable for environment sector staff and board members.

- Recognising gaps in the knowledge and experience of environment organisations in working with people from diverse ethnic backgrounds it was thought important to provide training sessions and events to increase knowledge levels and share good practice.

- Volunteer co-ordinators or staff who work with volunteers should be offered training and good practice sharing as engaging volunteers from minority ethnic communities becomes a priority.

- Leadership training, equity training and training on relevant policy and legislation should be made widely available.

5.4 Guidance and advice

Advice and guidance would form a crucial aspect of the co-ordinator remit and be developed in a range of areas including those listed below:

- Developing good practice in the use of ethnic monitoring data in terms of collection and analysis.

- Sharing best practice in reviewing policies and procedures in relation to increasing and retaining ethnically diverse staff.

- Reviewing recruitment practice to ensure people from minority ethnic backgrounds are not disadvantaged by recruitment processes.

- The appropriate use of positive discrimination with regard to recruitment and funding packages.

- Guidance on how to increase diverse representation in organisational leadership around EDI.

- Reviewing how information about volunteering and jobs in the sector are promoted to help reach minority ethnic people. Improve organisational websites.

5.5 Leadership

The co-ordinator could develop or harness a range of programmes to support leaders in developing knowledge, devoting time and space to planning and reviewing, accessing resources, and sharing practice.

5.6 Building relationships and co-design with minority ethnic communities

The co-ordinator should reach out to minority ethnic communities to assist environment sector organisations in building collaborative partnerships, through recommended activities as follows:

- Environment organisations should be supported to co-design asset-based eco programmes and education sessions with minority ethnic organisations.

- Initiating a service which connects qualified and skilled asylum seekers or refugees to skilled volunteering roles or academia opportunities in the environment sector.

- Supporting organisations with developing meaningful volunteer roles which provide:

    - Work experience relevant to potential future employment.

    - Beneficial and relevant training and development opportunities for volunteers.

    - Expenses which fully cover all out-of-pocket costs to incentivise volunteering.

- Creating a database of local proof-readers to support those operating in a second language with completing application forms for work and volunteering roles.

- Encouraging the creation of apprenticeship/shadowing opportunities which are available at different levels within organisations and designed not only for young people but also for those with qualifications, skills, and experience.

- Exploring the possibility of fostering a link between UU, QUB and the environment sector in terms of these universities offering sponsorship to those from minority ethnic backgrounds to study courses which feed into careers in the sector.

- Encouraging environment organisations wishing to increase the ethnic diversity of their users to link in with relevant ethnic minority organisations to offer space for celebrations such as Eid, Diwali, Chinese New Year etc.

5.7 Funding

It would be beneficial for NIEL to lead on a co-ordinated approach to funders rather than a range of environment organisations competing for funding from the same key funders.

Definitions

Minority ethnic

The nature of this research determined that it was necessary to focus on understanding the views of people of colour. Therefore, in this instance the definition of 'minority ethnic' does not include those identified as white minorities.

The environment sector

Within the sector, environment organisations vary in size, location, focus and are local, national, or UK-wide. Each organisation is at a different stage in the process of embracing greater ethnic diversity. It must be highlighted that survey response rates and participation in the qualitative research does not reflect the full breadth of the environment sector in NI.

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Useful websites

Racial Action for the Climate Emergency (RACE) Report www.race-report.uk

Students Organising for Sustainability (SOS) www.sos-uk.org

October 2022

www.nienvironmentlink.org

www.community-relations.org.uk

Glossary of Terms

BAME	Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic
CAAN	Countryside Access and Activities Network
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
EDI	Equity, Diversity and Interdependence
HR	Human Resources
IEMA	Institute for Environmental Management and Assessment
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NI	Northern Ireland
NIEL	Northern Ireland Environment Link
NISRA	Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency
NUS	National Union of Students
ONS	Office of National Statistics (England)
QUB	Queen's University Belfast
RACE	Racial Action for the Climate Emergency
ROI	Republic of Ireland
SMT	Senior Management Team
SOS	Students Organising for Sustainability
UU	Ulster University

Acknowledgements

Appendix 1
Survey template

Increasing the Participation of those from Minority Ethnic Backgrounds in the Environment Sector in Northern Ireland

This survey is designed to inform how the environment sector in Northern Ireland engages with issues of ethnic diversity. Many of the following questions were included in recent research carried out with environment sector organisations in England. The same language is used to enable direct comparisons to be made.

This survey has been sent to all NIEL member organisations and a high response rate would be valued as future work in this area will be designed to directly benefit NIEL members. You can be confident that the details of specific organisations will remain confidential and anonymous in the analysis of responses.

This questionnaire should be completed by a person in a leadership capacity, preferably the Head of the organisation or Head of Human Resources.

For the purposes of this survey the focus is on Black and Asian ethnicity

1. **Personal Information**

E-mail address

Name of Organisation

Role within the organisation

2. **How many members of staff does your organisation employ part or full time in NI?**

   ○ 0-9

   ○ 10-19

   ○ 20-29

   ○ 30-39

   ○ 40-49

   ○ 50 or more

3. **Does your organisation collect monitoring data on the ethnic diversity of staff** (beyond the community background data about Protestants & Catholics required under Fair Employment regulations in NI)?

   ○ Yes

   ○ No

If your answer is 'yes' please indicate the percentage of staff members who identify as being from a Black/Asian background

4. **Does your organisation collect monitoring data on the ethnic diversity of volunteers?**

   ○ Yes

   ○ No

If your answer is 'yes' please indicate the percentage of volunteers who identify as being from a Black/Asian background

5. Does your organisation collect monitoring data on the ethnic diversity of members/ supporters?

○ Yes

○ No

If your answer is 'yes' please indicate the percentage of members/ supporters who identify as being from a Black/Asian background

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6. Does your organisation collect monitoring data on the ethnic diversity of job applicants?

○ Yes

○ No

If your answer is 'yes' please indicate the percentage of job applicants who identify as being from a Black/Asian background

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7. Does your organisation collect monitoring data on the ethnic diversity of staff leavers?

○ Yes

○ No

If your answer is 'yes' please indicate the percentage of staff leavers who identify as being from a Black/Asian background

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8. Does your organisation collect monitoring data on the ethnic diversity of leaders?

○ Yes

○ No

If your answer is 'yes' please indicate the percentage of leaders who identify as being from a Black/Asian background

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9. Does your organisation collect monitoring data on the ethnic diversity of trustees /board directors?

◯ Yes

◯ No

If your answer is 'yes' please indicate the percentage of trustees/board directors who identify as being from a Black/Asian background

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10. What use do you make of the ethnic monitoring data collected?

◯ We analyse the data and use it regularly to inform decisions

◯ We report on the data but don't use it systematically to make decisions

◯ We collect data but don't do anything with it

◯ Don't know

11. What priority does the NI environment sector as a whole give to ethnic diversity?

◯ Highly important

◯ Fairly important

◯ Low importance

◯ Don't know

12. What priority should the NI environment sector as a whole give to ethnic diversity?

◯ Highly important

◯ Fairly important

◯ Low importance

◯ Don't know

13. What do you perceive to be the impact of increased ethnic diversity on the NI environment sector?

○ Strong positive impact

○ Positive impact

○ Some positive impact

○ No impact

○ Negative impact

14. What is the perceived impact of increasing diversity on your own organisation?

○ Strong positive impact

○ Positive impact

○ Some positive impact

○ No impact

○ Negative impact

15. Is your organisation taking action to tackle a lack of ethnic diversity within it?

○ Yes

○ No

16. If you answered yes to the above question please indicate examples of actions you are taking:

17. Has your organisation adopted an approach to addressing ethnic diversity? Which answer below best reflects the approach adopted?

○ Not yet thought about it

○ Set goals and targets

○ Developed a plan of action

○ Taken some actions but do not directly link to a plan

○ Consistently and regularly implement a plan of action

18. Have you taken a recognised unconscious bias test?

○ Yes

○ No

19. Have you received unconscious bias training?

○ Yes

○ No

20. How confident are you in talking about the issues around ethnic diversity?
Provide a rating on a scale of 1-7 where 1 is not confident and 7 is very confident

○ 7 Very confident

○ 6

○ 5

○ 4 Neutral

○ 3

○ 2

○ 1 Not confident

21. How confident are you in taking action on ethnic diversity issues?
Provide a rating on a scale of 1-7 where 1 is not confident and 7 is very confident

○ 7 Very confident

○ 6

○ 5

○ 4 Neutral

○ 3

○ 2

○ 1 Not confident

22. What are your hopes and ambitions for increased ethnic diversity in the NI environment sector?

23. What are the factors enabling greater ethnic diversity in the NI environment sector?

24. What are the factors restricting progress on achieving greater ethnic diversity in the NI environment sector?

25. What do you see specifically as your role in driving change in ethnic diversity within your organisation?

26. Does your organisation have a clearly developed answer as to 'why' increasing ethnic diversity matters to the organisation?

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27. What collective action should the NI environment sector take to increase ethnic diversity?

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28. What resources are needed to support the NI environment sector to move forward on ethnic diversity?

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29. If you have a positive story about your organisation's actions on increasing ethnic diversity amongst staff, supporters, volunteers, members, leaders or trustees please indicate if you are willing to share more detail. Provide a phone number or email address for follow up contact by an interviewer:

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Appendix 2
Case studies

Case Study 1

Organisation Description: A large organisation with a NI base

The catalyst for this organisation developing or changing practice to include or attract those from diverse ethnic backgrounds:
Improving equality and diversity was always an ambition of this organisation but was given renewed impetus and energy by the George Floyd protests and the consciousness raised by the series of global events at that time. There was a wider realisation within the organisation that change was necessary. This groundswell of opinion came from the top as well as from some staff, members and volunteers. The process for doing this was instigated by the organisation's leadership.

Steps taken towards greater ethnic diversity:
One of the first stages was to hire an external consultancy organisation to review internal processes and organisational culture. A considerable amount of time was devoted to this by leadership and staff. Their findings were well-received, challenging and widely disseminated within the organisation.

Internal organisational change in knowledge, behaviour or ways of working:
An EDI programme was developed out of the recommendations and an EDI team put in place. The recruitment for that small team was centrally organised and a Head of EDI was hired. The team have developed an action plan, based on report recommendations, and worked with partners both within the conservation sector and beyond. The team are also working with HR to improve recruitment processes, underlying staff data and have successfully engaged with the government's Jobstart/Kickstarter scheme for young people. Work has also gone into developing and agreeing a narrative as to why EDI matters. In the context of an environmental crisis it was considered crucial to have a shared understanding of why EDI matters and the importance also of considering the impact of social justice.

Unconscious bias training was given to managers and to staff. This has had high levels of engagement and is important, as a start, to allow personal reflection on assumptions and encourage people to become more aware of how their biases relate to work environments and practices.

Affinity groups have also been going for a longer timeframe within the organisation. The affinity groups are usually created by staff who identify a need and they operate largely as support groups. The organisation also has a network of EDI champions.

Details of external new initiatives or practice:
There has been progress on a local level, with some country teams building links with minority community groups, particularly those already involved and interested in nature, as well as seeing greater diversity and representation within the wider governance structures.

Outcomes or impact:
With regard to impact, the process is ongoing and requires continued time and focus, and there is realism about the pace of change. It is also difficult to measure impact in the short-term and important to monitor and evaluate in the longer-term, particularly key is ensuring we are gathering the right data. However, increasing ethnic diversity and EDI more generally are really on peoples' radars and they remain a top level organisational priority.

Areas of further development that would benefit the sector and/or the organisation:
There are challenges at a NI-level due to a different demographic setting with relatively limited ethnic diversity, although this is changing quickly. There have been considerable discussions as a local organisation and the development of some actions. However, it still feels quite fragmented and we would be keen to work with other organisations.

It would be particularly useful to have a more co-ordinated approach from the environment sector in NI with actions and links which can be taken forward in a collaborative, meaningful and sustainable way. We would be keen to devote time and energy to this if active groups are identified and engaged and a potential steering group is established with a clear focus.

Case Study 2

The catalyst for the organisation developing or changing practice to include or attract those from diverse ethnic backgrounds:

There had been a realisation around 2016 that there was a significant gap in NI with regard to engaging those from diverse ethnic backgrounds. This related particularly to volunteer work as the organisation engages largely with groups who work directly with volunteers. UK staff in conjunction with City of Sanctuary delivered Gardens of Sanctuary training in NI to staff and local community gardens. This provided good practice approaches to adapting community gardening practices to make refugees and asylum seekers feel safe and welcome. Some actions emerged in terms of community gardens deciding to host more intercultural events. A Gardens of Sanctuary manual was provided to enable practical steps to be planned and progressed. However, the project that emerged was not completed due to a lack of capacity and support because those involved were volunteering and had limits to the time they could devote.

In the summer of 2020, a renewed awareness was catalysed through Black Lives Matter's focus and staff UK-wide raised the issue that the organisation as a whole lacked up to date policies and procedures in relation to equality and diversity.

Steps taken towards increasing ethnic diversity:

The team in NI paid for online equality, diversity and inclusion training sessions provided by Craic NI for the small local team. This helped with the process of talking about these issues as a team. A series of other initiatives emerged from that session.

Details of new initiatives or practice:

During the Covid pandemic, in a desire to involve a diverse range of people in the work, the team in NI thought it would be beneficial to focus on effective gardening techniques from different parts of the world. The NI staff decided this should be asset-based with everyone contributing something from their own background, knowledge, and experience. In the context of climate change, it was thought beneficial to hear from a range of people about a wide variety of techniques, species and problem-solving which had emerged in different parts of the world. Three people living in NI from New Delhi, Nepal and the Basque Country in Spain were filmed sharing details of the knowledge and experience they had brought with them. This inspired a webinar which was well-attended across the UK. Interesting connections were made with people sharing original ideas and finding similarities in approaches adopted in different parts of the globe. For example, it emerged that in terms of polyculture, the 3 Sisters Technique (thought by many attending to have been developed originally by Native Americans) involving planting maize, squash, and beans together, was also traditionally common to all three areas.

In an attempt to increase ethnic diversity the team in NI has worked in partnership with the Chinese Welfare Association (CWA) and local ethnic minority community groups and have also successfully supported the establishment of a group to plan garden visits for women from international backgrounds, in partnership with CWA and GROW NI. Particularly keen to engage people from diverse ethnic backgrounds, this collaboration in NI also supported some international residents who had approached them although they were not involved in a community garden. The NI team provided free fruit bushes and invited them to visit some community gardens with the hope that they might be inspired to formalise and set up a new community garden. The NI team find it beneficial to work via a model which collaborates with successful organisations that work at a community level with locally based people from diverse ethnic backgrounds. The organisation have adopted this approach to recognise that others have developed expertise and to attempt to be careful to avoid taking time from local groups that are already initiative heavy or competing with already successful initiatives.

Good use is made of an organisational resource called 'Chillies and Roses: Inspiring multi-ethnic involvement at community gardens and farms' about ways in which gardens can be made welcoming for people from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

Internal organisational change in knowledge, behaviour, or ways of working:
The team in NI and other colleagues in other countries and regions of the UK have developed programmes to focus on the issue of increasing participation of people from diverse ethnic backgrounds. When NIEL forwarded the NI-specific online survey staff in NI forwarded it to other staff in the UK and drew attention to the content and the possibility of revisiting these issues. The Executive team gave the go ahead for self-selecting staff, to come together and begin to look at current policies, procedures, gaps etc. They are beginning by delivering some in-house training which a London colleague has written on gardening and colonisation.

Areas of further development that would benefit the sector and/or the organisation:
NIEL or NICVA, as umbrella organisations, would be best placed to provide support that could help the range of organisations in the sector. Training for staff would be beneficial to aid the normalising of the concepts. An interactive conference might also be helpful to highlight the basics of good practice such as the best approach to writing an EDI policy.

Better infrastructure and funding are necessary, with core rather than short-term funding so that long-term programmes are sustainable. It takes time to build relationships and embed best practice.

Also, support for organisations to:

• Review recruitment and consider where advertising is placed for best reach.

• Monitoring who organisations work with in terms of diversity and equality.

• Provision of unconscious bias training at a local level to consider the unique circumstances in NI.

Appendix 3
Focus Group template

Focus Group Semi-Structured Interview Template (with prompts)

Accessing environmental spaces

1. Do you choose to visit the natural environment (incl. countryside/seaside/country parks/forests etc.) during your free time?

2. If yes, what things do you think about when deciding to visit the natural environment (incl. countryside/seaside/country parks/forests etc.)?

Probes:

• Distance from home

• Transport

• Facilities available (including toilets, café etc)

• Car parking

• Activities available

• Appropriate access

• Previous experience

• Safety

• Cost

3. How often would you visit the natural environment (incl. countryside/seaside/country parks/forests etc.)?

Probes:

• More than once a week

• Once a week

• Once a fortnight

• Once a month

• Infrequently (once or twice a year)

4. What stops you using the natural environment during your free time?

Probes:

• I don't want to

• I'm not interested

• I don't have the time

• I already do enough physical activity/sport in other ways

• I don't know where to go

• I don't know what there is to do

• I don't know where to find information

• I have no one to go with

• I live too far out of the way

• I can't get there – don't have transport

• I'm afraid I might get lost

• I'm afraid I might injure myself

• I'm afraid for my safety

• I can't afford to buy special clothes or equipment

• I prefer to stay close to home

• I don't feel welcome/comfortable

5. What would encourage you to use the natural environment during your free time?

Probes:

• Someone to go with

• Someone to show me what to do and where to go – a leader

• If I could do it from my front door

• If there was a group of people I could join

• Organised activities

• Organised transport – from my front door

• Better information

• Better signposting in the natural environment

• Better facilities

• Family focused activities/facilities

• Information and signage in my mother tongue

• Nothing – I'm not interested

6. Where/what is the most convenient place/outlet for you to find out about activities in the natural environment?

Probes:

• Health centre

• Academic institution

• Community centre

• Specialist journal

• Libraries

• Local newspaper

• Place of worship

• Radio/TV

• Internet/Social Media

Volunteering (including campaigning)

7. Have you ever thought about volunteering for an environmental organisation?

8. If yes, what things do you think about when deciding which organisation/activity to volunteer for?

- Volunteering activities available

    - Previous experience

    - Focus of the environmental organisation

    - Distance from home

- Transport

- Support for volunteers in the organisation

- Spare time to give

- Relevance to my study/qualifications

9. What would you hope to gain from the volunteer experience?

- Learning a new skill

- Valuable work experience for a CV/future job

- Making new connections/friends

- Making a valuable contribution to society

- Doing something that connects with my values

- Good use of some spare time

10. What would stop you from volunteering in the environment sector?

- Financial cost to travel to the organisation

- No time to commit

- Volunteering experience not relevant to future work

- Not relevant to my skills/knowledge

- Unclear volunteering role

- Unsure if I will be made welcome

- No volunteering culture in my community

- Unsure what environment organisation does/stands for

- Volunteering activity may be boring

- Lack of diverse people in the environment organisation

11. What would encourage you to volunteer in the environment sector?

- Travel expenses

- Transport provided

- Training provided

- A reference for future job applications

- A dedicated volunteer co-ordinator

- A variety of volunteering options

- The environment organisation reaching out to my community

- An orientation period to learn about the organisation

- Supervision/management

- Chance to make good connections/contacts

12. Where/what is the most convenient place/outlet for you to find out about environment focused volunteer opportunities?

Probes:

- Health centre

- Academic institution

- Community centre

- Specialist journal

- Libraries

- Local newspaper

- Place of worship

- Radio/TV

- Internet/Social Media

13. Write down three words to describe your perceptions of working in the environment sector

14. Which, if any, of the following reasons describes why you _would_ consider working in the environment sector?

- The type of work matches my personal values

- I know other people who work in the sector

- Other people like me work in this sector

- The organisations that work in this sector are relevant to people like me

- The salaries offered compare well with other sectors

- It's relevant to my course/subject

- The pay is rewarding

- There are good opportunities for progression

- There are lots of opportunities available

- It's a well-respected area to work in

- I can use the skills I've developed

- To help improve things for the local community

- I'm interested in the issues

- To be part of tackling global problems like climate change

- I want a job where I have to work outside

- I want to live in the countryside

- None of these, I would not consider working in the environment sector at all

- Other

15. Please tell us which, if any, of the following reasons describes why you _would not_ consider working in the environment sector?

- It's not relevant to my course/qualifications

- It's not a well-respected area to work in

- I'm not motivated by helping improve things for local communities

- The organisations that work in this sector aren't relevant to people like me

- I'm not interested in the issues

- I'm not motivated by being part of tackling global problems like climate change

- People like me don't work in this sector

- The type of work doesn't match my personal values

- There aren't good opportunities for progression

- I don't want a job where I have to work outside

- There aren't enough opportunities available

- The pay isn't rewarding enough for what's expected from these types of jobs

- No one I know works in the sector

- The salaries offered don't compare well with other sectors

- I don't want to live in the countryside

- I don't think I can use the skills I've developed

- It's not relevant to my course/subject

16. To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Whether an organisation prioritises a diverse workforce and inclusive culture is important to me

- Agree

- Neither agree nor disagree

- Disagree

- Don't know

Working in the environment sector would be a good career for anyone, no matter what their race or ethnicity

- Agree

- Neither agree nor disagree

- Disagree

- Don't know

I'm discouraged by the lack of diversity of Black, Asian and other racial or ethnic groups in organisations working in the environment sector

- Agree

- Neither agree nor disagree

- Disagree

- Don't know

Appendix 4
Focus Group Feedback

Focus Group 1 Semi-Structured Interview (13.9.22)

12 participants from a range of countries:

Somalia, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Syria, Palestine, Yemen, Sudan and Namibia.

All asylum seekers except two who have refugee status. Refugees are permitted to work but those in the asylum process are not given a work permit. However, they can volunteer and will be able to work once they receive refugee status.

Accessing environmental spaces

1   Do you choose to visit the natural environment (incl. countryside/seaside/country parks/forests etc.) during your free time?

Yes – no dissenters.

2   If yes, what things do you think about when deciding to visit the natural environment (incl. countryside/seaside/country parks/forests etc.)?

- Cleanliness of the environment

- Relaxing – to get rid of stress

- Facilities – need water clean water to fill own bottles

- Parks and forests as well as waterfalls or water

- Consider the beauty of the scenery

- Bird sound and other creatures in the woods – makes me feel connected to nature. Mentally totally different than when you are in a crowded area. Gives more thoughts, energy, and time for reflection

- Prefer the sea or beach as it helps with relaxation

3   How often would you visit the natural environment (incl. countryside/seaside/ country parks/forests etc.)?

Visit local parks nearby rather than other green spaces further afield.

4   What stops you using the natural environment during your free time?

Getting the train or bus – only accessible for those who are not asylum seekers.

Only £8 a week if seeking asylum because of living in a hotel with all meals provided. So can't afford public transport with only £8 per week.

A question was asked directly to the females in the group and the response was that everywhere is safe.

Asylum seekers living in hotels are restricted to meal times provided by the hotel so they can't go too far afield for too long because they will miss meals.

Geographically difficult due to the restrictions as people are not aware of even close places to visit as they are based in urban areas (mostly in Belfast) and not encouraged to go beyond the immediate vicinity. So, people become institutionalised. It feels like a hostile environment in the hotel accommodation provided.

Many people are traumatised due to the journey they have taken being deeply traumatising. Green spaces would be healing, holistic – good for people's wellbeing rather than being trapped in a city centre hotel.

5   What would encourage you to use the natural environment during your free time?

Someone taking people by providing transport for an organised activity. An example was provided of a residential for young people where they were taken to a beach area for two days. They had an organised programme, were able to have fun and cook for themselves. This experience was very popular but there of course it is all about resources being made available.

Need organisations to provide transport. Financial constraints. Would like to go but can't due to lack of finances.

If food was provided – as it is likely that mealtimes would be missed.

The weather is off-putting so wet weather clothing may be useful as well as, for example, climbing clothes if specialist equipment is needed.

Signs in different mother tongue languages are not needed but would be very welcoming. Also, literature and material about places of interest, in different languages. Useful information would describe how safe it is. When you come from outside there is a fear of leaving your comfort zone.

Limited resources, If people could work they would have funds to explore. That would feed money into the economy.

6   Where / what is the most convenient place / outlet for you to find out about activities in the natural environment?

- Websites and libraries.

- Word of mouth.

- Places of study would be useful for information to be posted.

- Football clubs/other sports clubs.

- Need to do more advertising as I don't know what your organisation does.

Volunteering (including campaigning)

7.   Have you ever thought about volunteering for an environmental organisation?

Yes – many volunteer and have previously volunteered in their countries of origin in activities such as education, beach clean-up days, litter pick up in towns, tree planting.

8.   If yes, what things do you think about when deciding which organisation/activity to volunteer for?

- Government policy in home countries involves tree planting as part of the awareness raising around climate change.

- Awareness brought of issues in home countries due to government campaigns. Somalia/Namibia/Sudan.

- Displaced people's camp – improving the environment around the camps with tree planting etc.

- Encouraging people to use sustainable ways of cooking.

- Engaged in awareness raising as an educated person.

- In NI, proximity, personal values and experience considered when choosing an appropriate charity to work with.

- Green volunteering – pollution, plastic pollution in home country.

- Advocacy and education for young people.

9. What would you hope to gain from the volunteer experience?

- To integrate into society.

- Gain work experience because how you do things at home might be different.

- Helps with loneliness and isolation.

- Aids with work experience.

- Feel you have something to offer to society.

- Can be restrictions in terms of context and a lack of knowledge of policies etc.

- Get to know new organisations.

- Make new friends.

10. What would stop you from volunteering in the environment sector?

- Often feel we need to develop more skills.

- Lack of recognition of qualifications that have been gained in other countries.

- Have to gain new qualifications as it is expensive to get qualification equivalency recognition.

- One person gave the example of how they had lived in NI for 5 years and during that time studied English and science as well as volunteering. He has now received refugee status and works in the field of supporting people who have autism. He said he felt he had gained great life experience through volunteering, but the process had not been easy.

- Some of the young people volunteer. But it should not only be volunteering but also paid work.

11. What would encourage you to volunteer in the environment sector?

- A welcome.

- Awareness raising. Getting the right information via the internet.

- Via an engagement officer.

- Need to be educated more about the environment and how we all interact with it e.g. recycling, water pollution, plastics, consumption, and its impact etc. Every human being has a responsibility to leave a positive legacy. Environmental education needs to be free and given to all.

- Some people lack information, and it is very important. Need to find out where to start. Refugee status will be confirmed and having work experience as a volunteer is a great opportunity. Volunteering is valued by many organisations and useful in the interim. It is also the same with education.

- It is very important that it provides a pathway to work.

- It is important to Invest in your asylum seekers through sponsorship. Recruit 10 places every year for asylum seekers. Link to universities to get qualifications. Give them an advantage and incentivise. Invest in the individuals through training and there will be a long-lasting impact in terms of the individuals and the environment.

- An example was given by a woman with a 20-year-old son who has gained the first scholarship for young asylum seekers to be agreed between a minority support organisation and Ulster University. Both QUB and UU had agreed to provide sponsorship for one young asylum seeker per year, fully funded by the university.

12. Where/what is the most convenient place/outlet for you to find out about environment focused volunteer opportunities?

As before.

Employment in the environment sector

13. Write down three words to describe your perceptions of working in the environment sector (post-its)

- Climate change (x3)

- Global

- Oceans

- Sustainability

- Air pollution

- Forests

- Preserve the rights of new generations

- Protect climate

- Plants

- Natural

- Protecting community

- Knowledge

- Awareness

- Society

- Integration

- Gaining new skills

- Connecting people

- Atmosphere

- Communication

- Encouraging

- Benefit to society

- Big industries

14. Which, if any, of the following reasons describes why you _would_ consider working in the environment sector?

- New arrivals can struggle in work in terms of the new environment as they don't have contacts and links in this country. People will face additional challenges and obstacles. People need that to be taken into consideration and need good understanding and support because there is a lot to learn about a new work environment.

- We need the focus to be on equity rather than equality.

- Organisations need to develop new ideas, interventions, support. They must ask 'How can we change ways of doing things to attract diversity?'

- Ensure that opportunities make sense and this needs to be at the heart of their organisations. Invest in young asylum seekers. People want to be part of this society and need to be invested in.

- Any new initiatives must be long-term, sustainable and genuine.

- Change and decisions should be taken at a strategic level.

15. Please tell us which, if any, of the following reasons describes why you _would not_ consider working in the environment sector?

- Often it is a tick box exercise around diversity. People will disengage. Concerned, after a decade of this minority ethnic support organisation existing, that there is a lot of tokenism and that needs to change.

- Lack of money provided for working in the environment sector is discouraging.

- All the probe statements make sense.

- Everyone is an individual and has different likes/dislikes/motivations.

- Not as relevant to my studies i.e. social science. More interested in working with young people around sport.

- Not enough opportunities to work – there seem to be only volunteer jobs.

- Could be boring – people might think it is just something you do on a Saturday and Sunday rather than thinking working in the environment is more meaningful work.

- Gross neglect of a human right. Perhaps this will be considered by decision makers. Asylum seekers should be given a temporary work permit. People have families and professions and are used to working and contributing. For example, a participant from Zimbabwe from a business and finance background finds herself attending courses to update skills constantly over the 5 years she has been in NI, such as Sage accounting but she still has not received refugee status to enable those skills to be used. Stressful as have nothing to occupy them. If people could access the work market it would be positive for the environment. Better for mental health too.

- Discouraged by lack of information and not knowing what the expectations would be of me (coming from an accountancy background).

16. To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (tick the one that represents your thoughts)

Whether an organisation prioritises a diverse workforce and inclusive culture is important to me

- Agree

- Neither agree nor disagree

- Disagree

- Don't know

11 answered "Agree" and 1 answered "Don't know"

Working in the environment sector would be a good career for anyone, no matter what their race or ethnicity

- Agree

- Neither agree nor disagree

- Disagree

- Don't know

12 answered "Agree"

I'm discouraged by the lack of diversity of Black, Asian and other racial or ethnic groups in organisations working in the environment sector

- Agree

- Neither agree nor disagree

- Disagree

- Don't know

7 answered "Agree"
3 answered "Neither agree nor disagree"
1 answered "Disagree"
1 answered "Don't know"

Focus Group 2 Semi-Structured Interview (14.10.22)

The focus group was comprised of seven participants of an older demographic than focus group 1. A reasonably even gender split of 3 men and 4 women. All participants were of Chinese ethnicity.

Accessing environmental spaces

1. Do you choose to visit the natural environment (incl. countryside/seaside/country parks/forests etc.) during your free time?

Apart from one participant (with hay fever) there was a consensus that people enjoy visiting the natural environment, particularly forests and parks.

2. If yes, what things do you think about when deciding to visit the natural environment (incl. countryside/seaside/country parks/forests etc.)?

Access issues were mentioned as everyone lived in an urban environment and those without cars felt some popular green spaces were difficult to reach via public transport which they considered to be poor in NI and expensive in many instances. There was concern expressed that with the cost of living increases late 2022 onwards this would have a negative impact on this type of recreation.

3. How often would you visit the natural environment (incl. countryside/seaside/ country parks/forests etc.)?

This varied with half the group paying frequent planned visits and the other half having less time and impetus to go further afield, beyond their local park or garden. One participant refrained from such visits altogether.

4. What stops you using the natural environment during your free time?

- Extreme weather.

- Lack of time – a lot of Chinese people own small businesses and work hard doing unsociable hours. So, they can be time poor. It was also mentioned that when time is available it can be disappointing to arrive at a site to find that it is closed. It was felt that NI can fail to keep sites open at all times of the year / week to enable a range of people to access the site. Having longer / better opening hours would be beneficial.

- A few expressed how they currently (for over 20 years) or have previously been members of the National Trust. This prompted a discussion about middle class exclusiveness that can be felt or perceived around visiting properties such as those managed by the National Trust. It was thought very pricey, but that membership was beneficial if you planned to visit regularly. All thought it to be quite exclusive and not an option for people on lower incomes.

5.   What would encourage you to use the natural environment during your free time?

•   Free parking is an incentive. Otherwise, it needs to be within walking distance so that there is no extra cost.

•   If it is clear that there is something new or different to be learnt or experienced so that it is worth going beyond the backyard garden.

•   Heritage.

6.   Where / what is the most convenient place / outlet for you to find out about activities in the natural environment?

•   Internet – Facebook and YouTube.

•   Local radio stations.

•   Library.

•   The Chinese Welfare Association but that may not be so beneficial to people who live outside Belfast. If it is timed correctly, when there is a large event happening, then it would be picked up by lots of people. It would be possible to request that something to be placed in a newsletter going out to the community. However, it was mentioned that CWA is particularly focused on fundraising at the moment as funds are increasingly difficult to access and there is less other activity/connections being prioritised.

<div style="background-color:gray; color:white; padding:4px; font-weight:bold;">Volunteering (including campaigning)</div>

7.   Have you ever thought about volunteering for an environmental organisation?

A few had already volunteered. One had volunteered for Conservation Volunteers as part of a Saturday Group during the Covid Pandemic and found it to be a positive experience.

One participant who had recently moved from England to NI to live had conducted a google search for volunteering opportunities in NI and would have been interested in environmental options but no environment linked roles were in the search results. The web search brought up information about membership, requesting funds or detail that was not NI specific. She felt it would be beneficial to have some simple, straightforward details about what you could do as a volunteer and how to apply rather than very general information which you have to trawl through with no obvious opportunities.

8. If yes. What things do you think about when deciding which organisation / activity to volunteer for?

•   Having an interest in the focus of the organisation.

•   Wanting to connect with like-minded people.

•   An organisation with a good reputation.

•   The social aspect.

9. What would you hope to gain from the volunteer experience?

- Developing knowledge, for example learning how to look after the environment, plants, avoid using pesticides.

- The opportunity to share ideas.

- Knowledge and the social aspect is very important.

- Making new friends.

10. What would stop you from volunteering in the environment sector?

Extreme activism can put people off. Extinction Rebellion – this is a turn off as their activities are too extreme.

Things can be very disjointed and fragmented in NI partly due to a lack of proper government strategy. The NI Assembly needs to commit to a strong environmental strategy / policy and communicate it to the public. Projects should emerge from that with people given the incentive to behave in environmentally responsible ways. For example, the council in Newtownabbey offers free compost to householders but it has to be picked up which is not possible if you don't have transport or can't physically lift it. They are not fully thinking it through. There tends to be a lack of imagination in NI compared to other European countries where waste land is handed over to the public to grow vegetables or flowers to improve the environment.

Everything is short-term in NI – need long-term viable solutions which have government strategy behind them. We need fully implemented government policy for ethnic minority inclusion.

11. What would encourage you to volunteer in the environment sector?

- A structure to the volunteering experience with useful training for volunteers which goes beyond health and safety.

- Gaining or working towards a qualification would be beneficial.

- If the volunteer project has an end product and a legacy to it. For example, a community garden that has produce and can be maintained.

- It would benefit young people who are asylum seekers to keep them busy and to help their mental health.

- The mental health benefits of the environment are not highlighted enough and should be pushed more. Good for the soul. Also, physically good. Boosting social health. A story was shared about a man in poor health who was encouraged to engage in a volunteer programme about growing vegetables and this aided his mental and physical health as well as helping him financially because he was growing his own food.

- A sense of making a contribution is very important and brings more awareness to people. If everyone gave a few hours of their time to volunteer each week it would change a lot of things in society.

- We need a NI Eden Project.

- Community gardens where people work together, and share produce are very encouraging.

12. Where/what is the most convenient place/outlet for you to find out about environment focused volunteer opportunities?

As before, plus community newspapers were mentioned.

13. Write down three words to describe your perceptions of working in the environment sector (post-its)

- Healthy
- Lifestyle
- Fresh air
- Clean Air (x4)
- Water
- Middle class
- Landscape
- Policies
- Global warming
- Nature Green (x2)
- Outdoor
- Plants
- Water (x2)
- Space
- Flowers

14. Which, if any, of the following reasons describes why you _would_ consider working in the environment sector?

- I'm interested in the issues.
- To be involved in tackling global issues like climate change.
- This type of work matches my values.

15. Please tell us which, if any, of the following reasons describes why you _would not_ consider working in the environment sector?

- I have thought about it previously but haven't actually applied as I'm not sure my skills would be needed or recognised.

- I'm not certain how many opportunities there would be for someone with a finance background.

- Are there enough opportunities?

- The application forms are designed for someone whose first language is English and it seems like I would be at a disadvantage at application stage compared to someone who has English as their first language.

16. To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (tick the one that represents your thoughts)

Whether an organisation prioritises a diverse workforce and inclusive culture is important to me

- Agree

- Neither agree nor disagree

- Disagree

- Don't know

7 answered "Agree"

Working in the environment sector would be a good career for anyone, no matter what their race or ethnicity

- Agree

- Neither agree nor disagree

- Disagree

- Don't know

6 answered "Agree"
1 answered "Neither agree nor disagree" (with comment - ideal world - working in the environment would be a good career but issues exist such as racism, sexism)

I'm discouraged by the lack of diversity of Black, Asian and other racial or ethnic groups in organisations working in the environment sector

- Agree

- Neither agree nor disagree

- Disagree

- Don't know

3 answered "Agree".
4 answered "Neither agree nor disagree" (1 with comment - disappointed)

Additional thoughts were shared on racism. There was some reluctance to be too vocal about it but concerns were expressed about how people might be received due to racist attitudes. It was discussed how a former elected representative from the Chinese community, who had worked a lot on environmental issues, had experienced a lot of racism but the group felt it was important, in the future, for other members of the Chinese community to put themselves forward as potential candidates at a government level.

There was also a discussion about ethnic monitoring and how the Racial Equality Strategy (2015) had not been implemented. A template for ethnic monitoring had been part of the outcomes of that strategy but had not been used in any departments other than the Department of Health which uses it consistently. It was reiterated that strong NI government would be required to properly and fully implement the Racial Equality Strategy and any future strategy regarding the environment.

Appendix 5
Workshop Report

Notes from Group Discussions

Discussions focused around two specific questions:

What new opportunities can be created to increase ethnic diversity in the environment sector?

What challenges or barriers might need to be overcome to increase ethnic diversity in the environment sector?

Blue Group

Over-arching theme: future work in this area needs a cohesive top-down, bottom-up approach.

Top-down, organisational strategy level

Clear policy on increasing ethnic diversity that is integrated into the organisation's strategy. Integrating EDI language into bid writing – support for organisations to do this.

The group very much felt that this work could be encouraged throughout the environment sector membership organisations. If NIEL developed an EDI role (ideally it would be permanent) involving:

- Development and facilitation of an EDI network for the sector.

- An ambassador/champion project which resourced those involved.

- Identifying political champions at Council, Stormont & Parliamentary levels.

Systemic change needed including … continued monitoring of ethnic data specifically in relation to Board representation, senior management, employees and volunteers.

Increasing diverse representation in organisational leadership.

- Faster Board turnover ie. with fixed terms to 'refresh' views on the Board.

- Active recruitment of more diverse people onto the Board.

- EDI champion on Boards to push EDI strategy to other Board members and to be vocal about increasing the organisation's commitment to increasing ethnic diversity(externally and internally).

Positive discrimination in relation to recruitment and funding packages.

Access to unconscious bias training for staff and boards.

Review of policies and procedures in relation to ethnic diversity.

Bottom Up, reaching out to communities for project involvement

Deliver on the strategy by implementing on the ground projects. Focus on outreach to minority ethnic communities includes:

- Reaching out rather than inviting in groups, working around their regular meetings and acknowledging their competing priorities

- Consultation as to their needs and co-design of potential projects:

    - Don't assume things in terms of project planning but ask about the best time and place to meet

    - Do community groups have a regular meeting time and place that members are comfortable and familiar with?

    - Ask what resources are needed for events eg. interpereters

- Education and awareness raising as a two-way street. Explaining why environmental issues are significant and learning from those with pre-existing skills and knowledge of the environment

- Valuing the contribution of those ethnic minorities already involved

- Incentivise volunteering as some volunteering positions put people out of pocket – very exclusionary.

NIEL specific EDI role:

- Facilitate networking between organisations – regular meetings to share ideas and best practice.

- Provide resources (monetary and informational) for organisations to use to maximise the inclusivity of their project work and strategy development.

- Publicising jobs in the environment sector as a viable career.

- Environment sector jobs are very often not pushed – increase awareness, including the personal benefits they can bring.

- Create a resource hub with information on training opportunities, internships, volunteering and jobs.

Other thoughts

Campaign to increase awareness of ethnic diversity within conservation and the efforts being made to increase it.

The environment sector itself is marginalised but growing.

- Can we use this recent growth to make strides and set an example for other sectors?

- Can we use this common ground of being marginalised to foster a safe space in which to engage with marginalised groups, inspiring confidence and collective understanding?

- Work sectorally to tap into the public and private sector experience of environmental issues, including universities.

- Work intersectionally to highlight the obvious global dimension and universality of environmental issues, therefore tapping in to the ethnically diverse local population to further inform local activity.

Red Group

One of the group members, from Sudan, had a PhD in a discipline related to soil structure and agriculture and considerable experience working in this field. He had been in NI for 10 months, seeking asylum, and was not permitted to enter work and earn a wage until his status was confirmed as a refugee, legally able to settle in NI. During that waiting period he expressed concern that his skills would go to waste or potentially he could become deskilled. There was a discussion about how there are a lot of people in the same situation as him, with skills and qualifications but without permission to work. There are currently approximately 2,000 asylum seekers in NI who are not permitted to earn a wage but can engage in volunteering.

Opportunities

- The development of a service to connect qualified and skilled asylum seekers or refugees to skilled volunteering roles in the environment sector or academia opportunities.

- **Potential barrier** – people are operating in a second language. **Possible solution** – a database could be generated of local proof readers willing to support people with reviewing written work (including application forms for volunteering opportunities in the environment sector or future job applications).

- Increasing awareness of environmental issues, including global interconnectedness as well as local issues/impacts, with minority ethnic communities via a designated environment sector outreach person/organisation.

- **Potential challenge** – making this purely a one way education briefing which may not be attractive to underrepresented communities. **Possible solution** – ensure it is a two-way dialogue with people sharing experiences from their diverse range of of backgrounds and experiences.

- Ensuring that environment focused organisations give thought to providing volunteering opportunities that are meaningful and relevant to future career opportunities. Developing roles that are beneficial to the individuals who devote their time voluntarily as well as helpful to the environment organisation. This should aid with people retention.

- **Potential barrier** – currently asylum seekers are housed in hotels in urban areas and have all meals provided (only receiving an additional £8 per week). Organisations seeking volunteers must take this into consideration when planning volunteering programmes and placements. **Possible solution** – provision of transport/travel expenses, lunch and other reasonable expenses will make volunteering feasible. It would also make volunteering in other parts of NI possible for those confined to urban centres.

- Develop new environment sector apprenticeship programmes for older, skilled people. Programmes such as New to Nature were acknowledged as important and relevant to bringing young people from underrepresented groups into the environment sector. However, it was felt that apprenticeship type programmes should also be developed for older, skilled people who haven't previously felt there were prospects for them in the environment sector. **Potential barrier** – a tendency for environmental organisations to specify the need for a university degree for roles which don't always require a degree. **Possible solution** – encouragement for a sector wide review of recruitment practice in the light of this initiative to attract a more diverse range of people into the environment sector.

- Approach NI-based academic institutions i.e. UU and QUB about a scholarship programme between the environment sector and the universities (involving their relevant undergraduate degree courses) to provide place(s) for students from minority ethnic backgrounds.

- Because many NI-based environment organisations have gaps in their knowledge and experience of working with people from diverse ethnic backgrounds it would be important to run training sessions / events to increase knowledge levels and share good practice. It was thought particularly useful with regard for those who manage volunteers.

- Developing training opportunities to help overcome barriers to accessing parks and green spaces, helping alleviate safety concerns, for example. It was acknowledged that people can benefit greatly from access to the environment, e.g. designing gardens in such a way that people feel safe is at the heart of the handbook/ training for 'Gardens of Sanctuary'. 'Chillies & Roses' is an initiative that recognises how different cultures consider the relative merits and demerits of vegetable growing versus flower growing.

Overarching barrier

In NI, as with other parts of the UK, the majority of people from ethnic minority backgrounds are concentrated in urban environments which can mean a lack of connection to nature and a barrier to people considering the environment sector as a potential source of employment.

Opportunities:

Education & Awareness Raising Programmes

Opportunities to be developed to dialogue about environmental problems which present in different counties where people from diverse backgrounds (or their families) have been born. Eg. over- fishing and charcoal use were mentioned in relation to one African nation. By hearing from each other – environmental pressures in NI in relation to those presenting in other parts of the world – connections could be made and awareness raised as a two way process. Some issues are universal and some are specific.

Collaborations & partnerships

Community based organisations often run programmes for minority ethnic communities which involve volunteering or education. One example was given of a horticulture course being delivered in North Belfast through Girdwood Community Hub. This was seen as a beneficial programme because participants can improve their English while also learning horticulture skills. It was thought that a number of environment organisations could run eco programmes for minority ethnic groups. It was also recognised that it could be beneficial to link with relevant community organisations to deliver them and attract participants.

Volunteering and Environment Organisations

Some environment NGOs have volunteer co-ordinators or staff responsible for volunteers. These individuals should be encouraged / primed to make engaging with minority ethnic communities a priority for them (as well as other relevant staff in organisations). They should concentrate on reaching out and developing relevant opportunities and share ideas across the sector. A barrier was considered in terms of reaching these volunteer opportunities and it was thought necessary that environment NGOs cover transport costs.
Work on addressing multiple issues to bring multiple benefits to marginalised communities, for example an eco programme for people whose first language is not English.

Accessing and benefiting from Green Space

Health benefits were discussed. It was mentioned that parks and green spaces are used in different ways in different cultures. Environment organisations wishing to increase the ethnic diversity of their users should think about linking in with relevant diversity organisations to offer their space for celebrations such as Eid, Diwali, Chinese New Year etc. This would raise public awareness and help build relationships hopefully leading, in the longer term, to more knowledge about the environment organisations and more interest, shown by people from diverse ethnic backgrounds, in working for or volunteering with them.

Challenges or barriers

- Lack of education routes to environmental jobs – looking at ways to change this.

- Effort needed to make engagement meaningful.

- Funding and people resources. Time must be devoted if this is to succeed.

- Reaching out and anticipating responses to concerns people may have (about volunteering particularly) in relation to transport, language needs and coping with the weather, if outdoor activities are involved.