



# A PLACE TO CALL HOME

Community Asset Ownership  
in the African Diaspora Community

Produced by Yvonne Field, Karl Murray  
and Dr. Diane Chilangwa Farmer

Executive summary  
**October 2015**



# A PLACE TO CALL HOME

## Community Asset Ownership in the African Diaspora Community



Source: Digital Asset Mapping 'Community  
Conversation', Bernie Grant Arts Centre,  
September 2014

**The Ubele initiative** is a national not-for-profit organisation which seeks to develop and implement local innovative action-learning interventions based upon leadership development, community enterprise development and social change for African and Caribbean communities within the UK. The process and approach is the modelling of methodologies for addressing highly complex and socially challenging problems within and across the worlds of social business, government and civil society.

**First published: October 2015**

Authors: Yvonne Field, Karl Murray and Dr. Diane Chilangwa Farmer

© The Ubele Initiative in association with Locality  
639 Tottenham High Road, London N17 8AA

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without permission in writing from the publishers.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research and final report would not have been possible without the support and seed funding provided by Locality, the national network of ambitious and enterprising community-led organisations, working together to help neighbourhoods thrive. Without their belief, support and commitment this first phase of Project Mali would not have happened.

Special thanks must also be extended to everyone who contributed to the project through sharing their stories, helping collect them and map them, as well as analysing the data. We are also indebted to those who assisted by facilitating community connections and providing feedback on the report. These people include:

Margaret Adjaye (Locality), Donna Alexander (The Ubele Initiative), Dr Kehinde Andrews (Organisation of Black Unity), Hilary Banks (Malcolm X Centre), Louisa Barker (University College London - UCL), Ezra Blondel (The Ubele Initiative), Andy Chapman & Michael Meaney ('Change the Conversation'), Michelle Charters, (Kuumba Imani Millenium Centre), Makeda Coaston (The Ubele Initiative), Saqib Deshmukh (Voice4Change) Hazel Ellis (Claudia Jones Project), Professor Gus John (Education Consultant), Vivienne Hayes (Women's Resource Centre), Sister Hiikmah (Africa Centre Rise), Barbara Gray (The Ubele Initiative), Meaghan Kelly (UCL), Richard Lee (Just Space) Iris Lightfoote (The Race Equality Centre, Leicester), Selina O'Dwyer (Independent Researcher), Deborah Owhin, (Made Equal), Isabel McCagg (UCL), Ketki Mudholkar (UCL), Elisa Roma Nesi Pio (Independent Researcher), Santa Pedone (Just Space), Aisha Sharif (The Ubele Initiative), Stephen Rolph (Locality), Grace Salmon (Positive Network Centre), Ade Sawyer (The Ubele Initiative), Dee Searle (Independent Journalist), Drew Sinclair (Odd Zebra), Priya Thamootheram (Highfields Centre), Chloe Tregar (UCL), Philip Udeh (Community Builders), Patrick Vernon (Every Generation), Louise Winterburn (Locality), Wenjun Xu (Independent Researcher).

A special mention to Steve Wyler, who realised that there was a story to tell, listened intently and supported our quest for it to be captured and shared.

# FOREWORD

**Tony Armstrong**, CEO, Locality

**This is a very timely and important report which Locality is pleased to support. It represents an important first step in revealing the scale of the issues facing many BAME communities and a set of recommendations for central and local government, Locality and African Diaspora community organisations.**

The report reveals a story of inspirational leaders and the determination of communities to establish and retain important places to meet, to support, to work, to learn, to celebrate and mourn. It also illustrates the scale of the challenge with hard struggles, losses and fears for the future raised by the contributors to the research.

As the network of ambitious and enterprising community-led organisations, we believe that a strong asset base can be fundamental in ensuring the long-term sustainability of community organisations and ensuring that communities can thrive. Locality already works with a number of leading BAME-led organisations, including the Highfields Centre in Leicester, who feature in this report. However, it is clear that examples such as the Highfields Centre are still unusual and there is an urgent need to find a way to address the 54% of respondents who stated that the future of their buildings were “insecure”.

It is clear that the difficulties and insecurities facing many BAME-led organisations trying to safeguard community assets is not due to lack of ambition, interest or demand for services. Indeed, there is evidence of increasing demand for services, especially in relation to meeting the needs of an ageing

population. There is capacity for some organisations to grow to meet this demand in their existing buildings, with two-thirds stating that they could offer alternative activities in their buildings and 50% of respondents saying they underused their space. There is also evidence that due to increasing up-scaling of contracts to deliver important services, such as supporting the elderly, or youth services, BAME-led organisations, like many other community-rooted organisations, are losing vital funding and finding the “replacement” services don’t meet people’s needs.

The report recommends additional targeted support which builds on the existing expertise in communities. We know that there are a number of external agencies and organisations working to address race inequalities; our aim is to share the findings from this report with as many of these as we can – and with funding agencies. Through our engagement activities, we will encourage them to play a more prominent role in campaigns such as Keep it Local, which highlights the increased cost, financial and personal, of replacing local service delivery by community-led organisations with services delivered by national organisations removed from local communities they serve.

The research also provides an important opportunity to gain some understanding of levels of awareness of the new powers under the Localism Act, which potentially enable communities to take more control of the issues that matter to them. Seventy-five percent of respondents said they were aware of the rights, with 19% saying they had used them. An important start in ensuring that all communities are able to take advantage of the new powers but, as this report powerfully states, there is a real need for Locality and our partners to “lead by example and from the front” to ensure that the My Community support programme, as well as other national programmes, reach BAME communities.

We want to see a real difference to BAME community assets and will work with the Ubele Initiative, and our members such as the Highfields Centre to give them a voice, to inspire community action and bring change into their communities.

# FOREWORD

**Patrick Vernon**, OBE, Founder, Every Generation and Project Mali Champion

**I welcome this report as part of an evidence-based journey, capturing the impact of the legacy of the Windrush Generation in acquiring community assets for cultural, social and political empowerment.**

The report highlights some examples of best practice and community leaders who are making a difference, particularly women. However, the report generally paints a bleak picture of the failure to build on the struggle for social justice and race inequality in post-war modern Britain. On a positive front, the picture might be different if the report included faith-based buildings like Black Majority churches, which have been an important backbone in the community.

The report's analysis also highlights the vulnerability of the community in the buildings we have lost over the years and the ones that we may potentially lose in the future. What has evolved is a complex picture of the impact of gentrification, changing agendas in how central government and local authorities treat or perceive the black community and 'race' issues in general. This has to be set against how we ourselves have failed to be strategic and work collegiately to create a future in this society even though we have at least four different generations of African diaspora communities reflecting different social, aspirational, political and religious perspectives.

Without community buildings and assets (including night clubs, record shops, restaurants, bookshops, general retail outlets and social housing) we will have limited foundations or basis to build and support a strong network of self-sustaining, independent and financially viable organisations.

Although issues of internal leadership, management, political and financial struggles have surfaced and at times undermined our community, this is no different to other communities or even mainstream institutions such as banks or government departments. The difference is that we started from a lower base, which reflects the wider issue of the impact of enslavement and colonial history. When things go wrong in the community we play this out in the public domain which gives the impression that black people cannot run or manage buildings.

Looking ahead over the next 20 years we need to build strong community organisations that own buildings and tap in to a growing pool of graduates and young professionals to establish a network of future leaders who can navigate the potential opportunities under the Localism agenda.

We also need to effectively build a support base within the community where individuals will volunteer their time or make regular donations to the up-keep and development of community assets and where organisations are more transparent and accountable for their actions.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Ubele Initiative, which seeks to promote intergenerational leadership, community enterprise and social action, secured seed funding from Locality<sup>1</sup>, to undertake research into the capacity and presence of African Dispaora community assets. Locality is the national network of ambitious and enterprising community-led organisations, working together to help neighbourhoods thrive.

This report is a result of the research undertaken under the title of Project Mali<sup>2</sup> and provides an important overview of community asset ownership within the African Diaspora community in England. The report's significance not only stems from being a first major attempt to capture this story from some of the major cities in England, but also because it addresses a highly topical community conversation. This conversation, which has been surfacing over the past few years, centers on the current and future ownership of community assets, primarily secured during the 1980s, and often after periods of social unrest.

Five key themes were explored through a range of quantitative and qualitative processes, which captured data from a total of 150 organisations. Research processes used included desk research, two online questionnaires and one-to-one structured interviews with a range of people, from on-the-ground practitioners to nationally known social and community commentators. The evidence collected suggests that targeted, intensive and sustained support has not been offered to declining BAME organisations, many of which still remain under the radar of programmes, even those with a local reach. As a result, organisations such as The Ubele Initiative and Voice4Change<sup>3</sup> have had to step in, often at very short notice and usually at times of near crisis.

<sup>1</sup> <http://locality.org.uk/about/>

<sup>2</sup> 'Mali', a Swahili word meaning 'an asset or wealth' ([www.africanlanguages.com/swahili](http://www.africanlanguages.com/swahili)) and which we have for the purposes of this mapping exercise used to describe, 'someone or something of value to our community'. Project Mali is part of 'The Ubele Initiative' ([www.ubele.org](http://www.ubele.org)) a new organisation which aims to create sustainable African Diaspora communities through intergenerational leadership, community enterprise and social action.

<sup>3</sup> [www.voice4change.org.uk](http://www.voice4change.org.uk)



## The outcome of this exercise, in summary, has resulted in:

- **The production of this report**, which provides insight into the African Diaspora community asset story across some of the major cities in England including in depth data from 27 organisations
- **Eight community leadership stories** and the 'voices' of a number of other professionals who have extensive experience of this particular issue
- **Three case studies** which explore some of the challenges BAME communities have faced in their quest to secure community assets
- **An interactive Google map**<sup>4</sup> which captures 150 African Diaspora community assets across England which are either currently in existence, have been lost or are currently under threat. As this is a changing picture, the map can be added to and /or refined further, over the coming years
- **An interactive 'audio' map**<sup>5</sup>, "London BAME community assets" which captures the stories of 13 BAME led community assets located in London, four of which have now closed.

## Some of the details behind the headlines indicate:

- A number of organisations have 'owned' community buildings for more than 20 years. However many now remain with short leases or with 20-25 year leases which have actually expired. Landlords, often in the form of local authorities, appear not to be keen to extend or renew leases to organisations, even if they have a track record of providing services to the community for more than two decades. Increasing pressure on

local council budgets, local 'development plans' in partnership with private developers, alongside changing demographics, has led to struggling African Diaspora community centres either being closed, transferred to other organisations, sold off or razed to the ground. Once lost, it is almost impossible to secure comparable alternative spaces for the tenants (who hire the space) and/or actual centre users.

- Important lessons learnt from organisations which have survived despite the odds. We found examples of existing community asset dilapidation and /or available spaces not being fully utilised due to lack of financial investment for refurbishment or redevelopment. This appears to be the case where buildings have been secured on a permanent basis or for a long period of time. During the research we only found one example of a lease being renewed for a period of 25 years and this was after having been given several annual leases.
- A growing number of African Diaspora organisations are facing an uphill struggle to identify and develop new organisational leadership from within the 23-40 year old age group. They need younger people with the pre-requisite skills, attitude and values to breathe new life into struggling organisations. The current leadership was on average in their late 50s to early 60s. Though nearing or post retirement, they are also a rich source of experience and repository of knowledge which could be utilised to help build a new cadre of community leaders.

<sup>4</sup>To access map go to link: <https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=zup46mBv1M1c.kowQ4ZxRSCvs>

<sup>5</sup>To access the audio map go to link: <http://spsmaps.github.io/Ubele-map/>

- The type of social business acumen now required of board members and senior staff to firstly understand and then successfully navigate the brave new world of commissioning arrangements and social investment rather than grant aid, was found to be in seriously short supply. The need for these skills and experience sits alongside a necessity to diversify services and programmes in order to respond to local demographic changes and newly emerging needs.
- Only a few centres had paid staff and the vast majority employed them on a part time basis. Centres were more often than not run by either small or quite large teams of dedicated volunteers; many of whom are in semi or full retirement. It is clear that a strategy is needed to recruit, develop and retain significantly younger volunteers to support any sustainability plans.
- Most of the current social business models and development opportunities tend to support individuals or small groups, often of young people, to set up local enterprises. Some might take over previously empty or even derelict property and transform these spaces as part of their business plan. However, this approach is wittingly or unwittingly missing out the long established community-based organisations which could be given support to develop and run a number of community enterprises from within their own centres, as well as in the wider community. They were often 'space rich', but lacked many of the other ingredients necessary to bring new life to these community assets for a new and often younger generation.

The report analyses a rapidly changing situation which has up until now been primarily anecdotal. The findings should increase the awareness of national policy makers, planners and programme designers to some of the major community asset challenges being faced by groups with the least power and / or influential voices in society. A range of recommendations have, therefore, been put forward as a result of the findings directed at four change levels: government, Locality, local authorities and organisational level. In broad terms:

## Central government

- 1) That African Diaspora and other BAME communities are made aware of the refreshed Community Rights programmes** being implemented in 2015-16 from the outset, and are supported to access and utilise them for their community asset development journey.
- 2) There is the need for a shift from the 'first come, first served' policy** for Community Rights support and African Diaspora and other BAME communities are proactively identified, targetted and supported to apply.
- 3) An 'SOS urban communities' programme** could be supported bringing together lead national organisations involved in the promotion of leadership development, community enterprise, social investment and social action to target specific culturally diverse neighbourhoods, communities and struggling BAME community centres, which reaches and engages with 'unusual suspects'. Such a programme could usefully link with some of the recommendations below for community organisations.

## Locality

- 1) A Board-level commitment** be made to ensure that the key lessons learnt and recommendations made are incorporated into Locality's Equality Strategy and Action Plan and shared with its members and national partners.
- 2) A communications campaign** is developed and appropriate materials produced about Localism and opportunities available to change the character of local neighbourhoods through Community Rights, which targets African Diaspora and other BAME communities.
- 3) Follow up the African Diaspora community organisations** identified during the mapping as having secured assets (buildings owned outright or with long leases), with a view to exploring some of their support and development needs and to consider creating individual plans to assist them.
- 4) Monitoring and evaluating service delivery to BAME communities since 2011.** This should include the geographical spread and level of engagement of African Diaspora and other BAME communities including which types of services are accessed and the outcomes of engagement. This information should be used to set targets and monitor performance for the new 2015-16 programme.

## Local authorities

- 1) Local authorities should be encouraged to publicise their corporate asset management strategic plans** and lists of assets available for transfer to local community organisations including BAME organisations.

- 2) BAME organisations should be skilled up, and facilitated to access the 'Right to Bid' scheme,** as well as the other key features of the Community Rights agenda, in order to create a more level playing field. Local authorities should seek to ensure local BAME organisations and communities are in a position to 'bid' for assets and to engage fully in the Community Rights agenda and that any perceived or real inequalities in current local systems are identified and proactively responded to by local authorities in partnership with local voluntary sector infrastructure organisations.

## African Diaspora community organisations

- 1) More intentional intergenerational programmes and relationships** need to be developed so that the 'baton can be passed' with confidence, thereby leading to the creation of stronger, younger and more sustainable leaders and organisational management boards.
- 2) The creation of a new generation of African Diaspora community leaders** as the next generation of skilled, creative, entrepreneurial and brave individuals join existing and /or create new organisations so that they access emerging opportunities and make a lasting difference in their communities.
- 3) Capacity building opportunities** to be offered in management, governance, social entrepreneurship and social change skills to ensure that boards, staff and volunteers are equipped to create and lead community assets fit for the 21st century (e.g. ensure that volunteers are given adequate on-going professional development and support; skills to develop fund-raising capacity of

organisations to include applying to funding opportunities available through social investment, the Big Lottery 'Reaching Communities' buildings programme or charitable trusts that grant or loan funding for capital projects).

**4) Update current models of entrepreneurship** which have been used for decades to run African Diaspora community-based assets to incorporate new thinking about community enterprise development (e.g could include exploring other types of assets such as purchasing of pubs, libraries, post offices etc. which could be supported by new forms of community finance such as community share offers, amongst others).

**5) Develop regional and local strategic hubs** and action plans to secure and redesign community centres and other community assets for the African Diaspora living in areas alongside newly arrived communities.

The African Diaspora is a highly diverse community, and in many instances is now in its third and fourth generation in Britain. Counter to some beliefs, they came to England from the Caribbean and Africa with a strong entrepreneurial spirit and flair. Small businesses established included hairdressers and barbers, clothes, record and book shops, restaurants, nightclubs, market stalls, alongside more 'community based' ventures such as church buildings and housing stock, social clubs, sports fields, shop fronts used for advice centres and community and youth centres. All of these 'enterprises' have contributed to creating a vibrant asset base, significant community wealth and a system of self reliance, culturally sensitive services and local support. The total net value of these different types of assets has never been assessed. Therefore without even a basic analysis of their fiscal and social value, their true worth and contribution to the social and economic well-being of British society over decades will continue to be undervalued. This needs to be the subject of further research.



## About Locality

Locality is the national network of ambitious and enterprising community-led organisations, working together to help neighbourhoods thrive.

### Locality

33 Corsham Street, London N1 6DR

**Tel:** 0345 458 8336

**Email:** [info@locality.org.uk](mailto:info@locality.org.uk)

**[locality.org.uk](http://locality.org.uk)**

©Locality, October 2015

Locality is the trading name of Locality (UK) a company limited by guarantee, registered in England no. 2787912 and a registered charity no. 1036460.