



## DISC scicomm workshop Sunderland

A DISC workshop was held at the annual conference of BGEN (Botanic Gardens Education Network) in Sunderland on 12 November 2004. There were nine participants who had a range of experiences working with people from ethnic minority backgrounds and provided slightly different perspectives than the science communicators that have participated in the other three DISC workshops.

The participants spoke of the obvious connections that exist between people from ethnic minority backgrounds and plant collections, many of which have international specimens. There are currently a number of highly innovative initiatives that seek to increase inclusion.

### Identifying key barriers

The group was asked to identify and discuss key barriers that are faced when trying to engage with people from ethnic minority backgrounds. The following barriers were raised:

1. organisational culture
  - one organisation did not have an official policy to address inclusiveness therefore the education department felt it had little internal support
  - another organisation did not provide adequate internal communication to inform staff of inclusive programmes
2. relevance
  - not sure what people would be interested in
  - how to make it relevant without making assumptions
3. linking up the family unit with formal and informal education activities
4. not really sure where to start
5. lack of continuity of projects as funding is usually for one off projects
6. the diversity of ethnic minorities
  - knowing how to identify different groups and needs within one ethnic category (and then knowing how to tailor programmes – relevance)
7. science is usually portrayed with a European-centric view and therefore education materials and resources do not recognise non-Western contributions to science
8. perception of outdoor activities and 'crops'
  - there is a lack of interest in doing outdoor activities
  - students studying prestigious courses, such as pharmacy, do not always connect the relevance of actual gardens and plants to the principles of pharmacology
  - taking an interest in crops is seen as a regression to the 'old ways'

The workshop participants were asked to prioritise the barriers, as it was not possible to discuss all barriers in the allocated time. The two barriers discussed were: relevance and the complexity of ethnic minority groups.

## **Overcoming barriers**

### **relevance**

The group discussed whether an event could be made relevant to all ethnic minorities or whether it was easier to make contact with specific groups. It was suggested that particular groups be targeted when first addressing inclusion, perhaps by using a seasonal link such as festivals. Another way of making a start is to partner with another organisation that has links with difference community groups, e.g. a drama or music companies. It was suggested that LIFT (London International Festival of Theatre) might be interested in such a collaboration.

Another link would be through women, or women's community groups, and their use of native plants. Women tend to have a natural connection with gardens and the properties of plants, and may be interested in passing on their knowledge to their daughters.

Different community groups could be asked to grow traditional gardens (within a larger garden) and take ownership of the project. This was an initiative of Christine Wildhabor at the Chumleigh Multicultural Gardens. Not only did the gardeners benefit but communities from the local areas were encouraged to participate in interpreting plantings from their own cultural perspectives. For more information visit: [http://www.ben-network.org.uk/participation/green\\_spaces/gs\\_intros/oct02.htm](http://www.ben-network.org.uk/participation/green_spaces/gs_intros/oct02.htm)

If crops are grown in the gardens the produce would be used by local schools. School students from ethnic minority backgrounds can be encouraged to tell botanists what the 'traditional' use of the plants are. This could provide opportunities to build their self-confidence.

Other initiatives discussed included Victims of Torture Allotments and Peace Gardens, where gardening is seen as a way to resolve conflict.

### **complexity of ethnic minorities**

An easy way of identifying the many aspects of diversity is the Diversity Wheel developed by Marilyn Loden. It clearly indicates the internal, external and organisational dimensions of diversity. The wheel can be seen at: <http://www.lifequest2000.com/BOD.pdf>

It was suggested that we should celebrate diversity and not think about it as us and them. Furthermore it is important to reach a wide range of ages and bring together family groups. One way to do this would be to use artwork.

The labelling of exhibits and plant collections was discussed and the need to provide labels in different languages. The Birmingham Botanic Garden Base would be a good point of contact to share good practice.

Other organisations leading in this field are BEN (Black Environment Network) and BTCV (British Trust for Conservation Volunteers).

## Participant list

Julia Welchman	<a href="mailto:julia.welchman@virgin.net">julia.welchman@virgin.net</a>
Alex Laird	<a href="mailto:alsl@btinternet.com">alsl@btinternet.com</a>
Emma Williams	<a href="mailto:emma.williams@botanic-garden.ox.ac.uk">emma.williams@botanic-garden.ox.ac.uk</a>
Sarah Lloyd	<a href="mailto:sarah.lloyd@botanic-garden.ox.ac.uk">sarah.lloyd@botanic-garden.ox.ac.uk</a>
Kim Pierpoint	<a href="mailto:kim.pierpoint@thrive.org.uk">kim.pierpoint@thrive.org.uk</a>
Penny Hammond	<a href="mailto:penny.hammond@nationaltrust.org.uk">penny.hammond@nationaltrust.org.uk</a>
Jacqui Pestell	<a href="mailto:jpestell@rbge.org.uk">jpestell@rbge.org.uk</a>
Sue Minter	<a href="mailto:sminter@edenproject.com">sminter@edenproject.com</a>
Ian Edwards	<a href="mailto:i.edwards@rbge.org.uk">i.edwards@rbge.org.uk</a>