

The Green and Black Programme

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During 2015, the city of Bristol delivered an extensive programme of activity around its role as the European Green Capital. Despite numerous activities aimed at diverse communities, the year was perceived as failing to crack through the long-standing black and minority ethnic inclusion issues that affect much of the global 'green' movement. Given these concerns, our organisations jointly established the Green and Black Programme of activity; we convened a variety of workshops with BME leaders in Bristol, foregrounding their experiences, perceptions and knowledge. These leaders argued that despite 'well-meaning' efforts, many implicit assumptions and behaviours of the environmental 'in-crowd', including choosing venues that were perceived as 'off-limits' and last-minute planning, effectively disenfranchised members of marginalised communities. One contributor stated: 'We were invited but typically too late to shape the agenda.'

Such critiques are also applicable to University engagement ambitions, given the recognised lack of black and minority ethnic diversity in many academic institutions and especially in the Earth and environmental sciences. This marginalisation makes it difficult to entrain the alternative voices needed to develop an ongoing dialogue about environmental and climate change research that appeals to, connects to and learns from the experiences of Britain's BME communities. To address this, we created the Green and Black Ambassadors Programme. This programme had several goals: 1) Initiating a dialogue with BME communities to identify research directions inspired by their concerns, experience and knowledge; 2) exploring the ways in which environmental research resonates with BME communities; 3) creating balance in the conversation by recognising and providing a platform for the initiatives arising in marginalised communities; and 4) providing training and mentoring to the next generation of leaders in these communities.