

Bridges of Hope

Celebrating the Social Action of British Muslims

Acknowledgements, disclaimer etc.

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Foreword

Executive Summary

This report aims to celebrate and outline the significant contributions Muslim organisations make to British society and to empower Muslim organisations by sharing the story of their work. It will also describe the hurdles they face. It began with desk research to create a list of charities and social action groups that are Muslim led, which ultimately identified approximately 450 organisations working in this field. This was followed by a survey of those organisations, to which we received 64 responses, a significant proportion of 14% of the total number. We finished with several case study interviews to paint a holistic picture of British Muslim social action projects. The project was kindly funded by the Barrow Cadbury Trust, with subject matter expertise provided by Dr Davide Pettinato and Lena Obermaier from the University of Exeter.

The following are some key findings from this research:

1. Muslim organisations in Britain engage in a wide range of social action projects. These include arts and literacy development, food banks, sports associations, youth and community centres, women's groups and community kitchens, to name just a few.
2. 45% of British Muslim social action organisations are women-led and have an average of 68 volunteers per organisation.
3. Muslim social action organisations actively collaborate with a variety of different institutions within the public and private sector to help their local communities.
4. They are generally very small with 42% having no paid staff.
5. Many of them have a significant over-reliance on donations from Muslim individuals and households: 30% received all of their income just from private donations alone, with no help at all from trusts, foundations or local authorities. Even though Muslim charities strive hard to serve and support their community they are not given outside financial support that is reflective of the quality and reach of their work.

The funding of core running costs will enable Muslim organisations to efficiently deliver their services rather than working project to project. Muslim social action organisations collaborate extensively with others but that does not have the effect of support in the form of more funding. Hence, effective two-way collaboration should be developed to ensure that collaboration involves financial remuneration.

Introduction

“The believer is not he who’s stomach is full whilst his neighbour is hungry next door”¹

~ The Prophet Muhammed (peace and blessings be upon him)

This report details some of the amazing work of Muslim charities and organisations around Britain who answer the call to help their neighbours in need. They are great examples of good citizenship and solidarity in action as they give countless hours and limitless efforts to provide a ray of hope to communities around the country. In this report, we tell their story, highlight their motivations and challenges, and celebrate their successes.

Background

The action of British Muslim charities abroad is well known and well documented (e.g., see *The First Dive: A Survey of the British Charitable Sector* from MCF’s *The Forum* issue 3, 2021). Also well known is the work of the thousands of mosques around the country which deliver both religious and social support to communities all around the UK (Muslim Council of Britain, 2022) and the networks of Muslim schools and advocacy organisations developing the social fabric of the society we live in. What is less known, and hardly documented, is the work of Muslim organisations who engage in social action domestically in the UK. In fact, our research shows there are approximately 450 Muslim organisations working in the UK to help those in need and vulnerable, with a combined income of around £150 million annually. These organisations are having a huge positive impact on those most in need in the UK.

However, until now, little has been said about these grassroots organisations. Contributions made by British Muslims to society are frequently negatively portrayed, misrepresented or sidelined in the media (Versi, Hamid, Hanif, & Morris, 2021) to fit a hostile, Islamophobic narrative. This extends to all facets of life, from education, media, sports, entertainment, and even charity. Muslims in the UK are stereotyped as being a negative influence on the neighbourhoods in which they reside, insular and uncaring about the environment and others around them. Stereotypes have persisted of Muslim charities only working abroad, looking after those ‘back home’ in Muslim majority countries. Little attention has been paid to the uncountable benefits Muslims bring to their communities around the UK. Therefore, this report aims to outline the significant contributions British Muslims make to British civil life through charity and social action. We aim also to empower Muslim organisations by sharing the stories of their work and recognising the positive and unique religious identity that motivates much of their charitable activities.

Muslim Charities Forum (MCF), which has in the past mostly worked with international NGOs, began to concentrate on UK-focused projects during the Covid-19 pandemic as awareness increased of the needs in the UK. Muslim organisations who were already active in the UK stepped up or adapted their work in response to the pandemic, other organisations were created in response to the new needs, and organisations who had previously only worked abroad were now turning their attention to their local communities for the first time. There was a huge need for collaboration across the Muslim charity sector for UK work during the pandemic, which MCF facilitated through creating groups of charity and community leaders to enable ease of communication between them, as well as

¹ Reported on the authority of Ibn Abbas, *Mustadrak of Hatim*

connecting high-capacity organisations with other organisations who were in need. In that time, MCF conducted research mapping the Muslim organisations engaging in Covid-19 response in the UK, which is reported in the report *Neighbours Next Door* (Uddin & Abu, 2020).

As the Covid-19 crisis drew everyone's attention towards local challenges, MCF increased its aid to local emergencies. For example, in December 2020 when lorry drivers were stranded on the M20 in Kent after the closing of the border to France, MCF coordinated a response to ensure food and water was provided throughout. With 20 Muslim charities responded to the call, the willingness of Muslim organisation to help in times of need is clearly demonstrated. Incidents such as these show how Muslim organisations are responding to UK crises and issues, but also the need to map and present the vital work that Muslim charities are carrying out throughout the UK.

This report aims to expand from the *Neighbours Next Door* report by mapping the British Muslim charity sector at large. This report does not focus on one specific crisis but rather shows the breadth of work of Muslim charities in Britain and how they have grown and developed in the last three years. We would like to open the narrative, to lay foundations for a discourse on this subject, given that so little has been said on it until now. The work of these organisations should be presented, celebrated and appreciated. Muslim Charities Forum aims to document and highlight some of the fantastic work that is being carried out across Britain by these organisations who are all too often under-appreciated, under-funded and under-supported. This report will draw attention to potential solutions and recommendations for the charities themselves, along with funders, local government and other stakeholders in this sector.

Methods

The project was launched in May 2021, starting with desk research to create a list of charities and social action groups that are Muslim led. We drew on databases from previous MCF projects and conducted online searches on local directories across the country. We also worked with the Muslim Councils of Wales and Scotland to connect with Muslim-led groups in these regions. Several of our calls to participate in the research were readily supported by Muslim umbrella organisations such as the Muslim Council of Britain and Muslim Community Projects who spread awareness in their own networks.

A survey open to all Muslim organisations working in Britain was conducted between October 2021 and January 2022, disseminated through MCF social media. Organisations were also contacted to participate by email and phone, for which we received and analysed 64 eligible responses, which at 14% of the total number of British Muslim social action organisations at around 450, is a sample size large enough to be representative. Four case study interviews were conducted afterwards to present the human, personal side of the British Muslim social action.

The research concentrated on five key areas of enquiry:

- Background of the organisations
- The types of projects they engage in
- Collaboration within the Muslim charity sector and outside of it
- Funding and income streams
- Challenges and opportunities

A limitation of the research is the limited number of respondents to the survey. While 64 responses are enough to draw some results and conclusions, the types of organisations who responded were

generally those who were connected enough within the sector to hear about the survey and also those who had enough resources and time to fill it in.

Respondents

There is a diversity in structure of Muslim organisations. 66% of the organisations who responded to the survey were registered charities, and the rest were a mix of Community Interest Companies, social enterprises and informal community groups. This shows how Muslim social action organisations are utilising varied legal structures to help based on the needs of their communities.

Not only were the types of organisations diverse, but also the leadership of those organisations. Although they were mostly founded by Muslims and are mainly led and run by Muslims, 16% are now run by leaders from outside the Muslim community. That shows that these organisations who are 'Muslim' do not always have Muslim leaders – their leaders are those who are best placed to manage the organisation regardless of their religious affiliation. It also emphasises that the work these charities engage in is not completely centred around the Muslim community but their work is for all, with universally applicable goals of uplifting others and helping those in need.

Even more encouraging in terms of diversity is the number of women leaders of these organisations. Almost half (45%) of the organisations who responded to the survey are led by women. This is in stark contrast to the commonly held belief of Muslim charities as being led exclusively by men. Muslim organisations working in Britain are very often led by women who are working on the ground, who are aware of the local community's challenges and who are stepping up to take action, pioneering change locally.

Our research covered Muslim social action organisations in England, Wales and Scotland. 50% of them operate in London with 12% specifically in East London. Given the large concentration of Muslims residing in that area (Ali, 2020), it makes sense that many Muslim organisations would emerge from there. The organisations outside London were still generally in cities, representing the urban distribution of the British Muslim community. 7% of respondents said they operate nationally. This small amount shows how most Muslim organisations are very localised and embedded in their localities. When those organisations did expand and spread out of the area where they first started, it tended to be to another city or around their region of origin, for example across the South West, to new London boroughs or to another major city, for example Birmingham and London. The below map shows the geographical spread – despite the large numbers in London, Muslim organisations are helping people throughout the regions.



Additionally, almost half of the organisations have a beneficiary base who are not necessarily Muslim. There are some organisations who are specifically there to help Muslims or a certain subsection of the Muslim community, such as convert care or female Muslim development organisations, while many others help people from a wide variety of backgrounds. While some types of organisations such as food banks and community centres help all, irrespective of their backgrounds, many other organisations have a specific target demographic such as women, youth, those with disabilities, or people from specific ethnic backgrounds such as Bangladeshis, Somalis, Arabs or Pakistanis. The BAME² focus of many organisations rather than a ‘Muslim’ focus shows the inclusivity of Muslim organisations at the same time as their niche. Muslim organisations are particularly well placed to provide culturally sensitive services, be that to women or to BAME individuals. For example, Muslim-led counselling services have the necessary cultural expertise when supporting individuals from the BAME community.



Organisations which identify by a religious or ethnic group by its name or its area of focus do so usually to create a service for a need that they have not seen adequately serviced. As we will see, some of these organisations may be set up without the necessary resources or capacity to fulfil their mandate and yet have no choice but to continue serving their communities because of a lack of support and understanding from the mainstream charity sector and local government.

² BAME is the acronym respondents commonly used to refer to their beneficiaries.

Key Findings

Reasons behind their work

The respondents were asked which reasons caused them to begin their work, and overall there are three key overarching reasons which push Muslims to start organisations engaging in British social action.

1. The first and largest reason is seeing problems in society and wanting to take action to resolve these problems. Those problems include the cycle of poverty, islamophobia, loneliness, homelessness, drugs, domestic violence, mental health troubles, harsh immigration policies, a gap in culturally sensitive opportunities and many more.
2. The second is that often, founders have been helped themselves in the past, and being in a better situation, they wish to pay it forward and help others in the way they were helped. For example, some founders had experiences of being refugees, having disabilities or having had good volunteering opportunities that were lacking in other areas.
3. The third reason is that they are inspired by the teachings of Islam and that encourages them to do good in their community. An example here is the founder of Salma Food Bank who was inspired by a Friday sermon on *sadaqah jariyah*³ to help those in need.

Case Study: Bearded Broz - Salma Food Bank

Salma Food Bank (Founded in 2016) is named after the mother of Imran, founder of Bearded Broz, who passed away when he was 16. Salma Food Bank commits itself to help all who are facing emergency – they have an open-door policy for everyone in need. Their donors and volunteers come from all walks of life, united under the Islamic banner of “A Believer isn't a Believer that sleeps satisfied whilst his neighbour sleeps hungry”. The message of Bearded Broz is that British and Islamic values go hand in hand, and this is demonstrated every day by the work of Bearded Broz and their team. Their work is done by their team of 750 volunteers, including 150 volunteer drivers who deliver food parcels to those who are not capable of making their way to the food bank, enabling them to help those in need across the West Midlands and London. They have so far served over 450,000 beneficiaries. They have seen the recent change – expansion – in their profile of beneficiaries as the country grapples with the cost of living crisis – more people with full time jobs are using their services. They want people to understand that poverty, especially food poverty, is something which occurs in the UK and much more awareness of this crisis is needed.

³ *Sadaqah jariyah* is a type of charity in Islam, the divine reward of which is believed to be continuous given the nature of the charity (e.g., building a water well). *Sadaqah jariyah* is often dedicated to deceased loved ones with the intention that the reward of the charity will reach them in the hereafter.

What prompted you to engage in social action?

'Our founder saw that many women and children were in need of safety and security. With little or no support to find a job or learn new skills, they remain trapped in a cycle of poverty. Our founder decided to change this'

'We set up just after the arena attack in order to tackle Islamophobia and divisions in the community. We wanted to bring the Muslim and non-Muslim communities together by celebrating the Muslim diasporas here in the UK'

'I was a refugee and homeless when arrived in UK. After going through struggles, I wanted to give back to society in the country that helped me'

'We wanted to provide an environment where Muslim women could comfortably play sports, without compromising their religious beliefs'

'There was a lack of organisations with the religious and cultural knowledge to best support women out of violent domestic situations'

'We aspired to serve the needs and requirements of our wonderful community. We have conducted programmes and initiatives up and down the country, and have worked with partners to facilitate the creation of safe and inclusive environments for culturally and religiously sensitive active engagement'

'To encourage businesses to support charitable causes'

'The gap amongst mainstream health services for young Muslims with mental health issues. We wanted a service whereby young Muslims can receive religious and culturally competent support'

'She [our founder] wanted to help empower other women in her community achieve their ambitions and integrate into wider society'

'A desire to shift the dominant narrative on Muslims in the UK from one that is negative, monolithic and stereotyping to one that is confident, diverse and just'

'We wanted to help people, but also to make a bridge between Muslims and the wider community'

'We aim to nurture individuals, revive communities and build bridges in society'

'To bring communities of different cultures together through creative engagement'

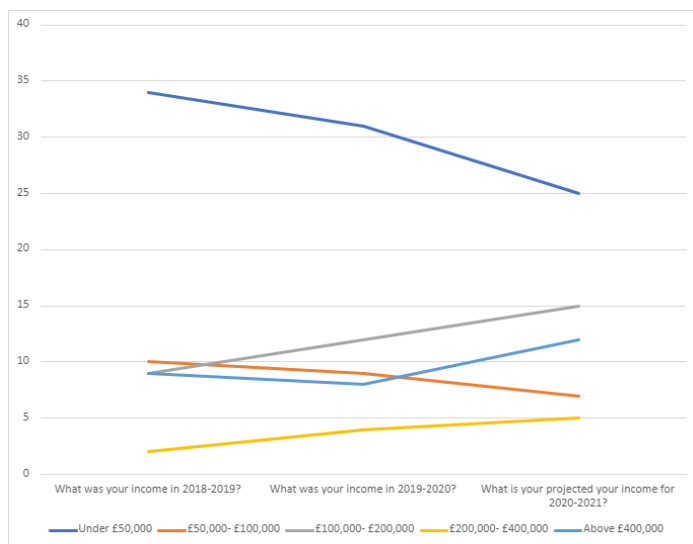
Different kinds of work

Muslims in Britain are engaging in a wide range of social action projects. These include arts and literacy development, food banks, sports associations, youth and community centres, women's groups and community kitchens, to list just some examples. Many organisations work in multiple areas as they meet the needs of their community. A large number of organisations noted that they do a moderate amount of work in a lot of areas, including community work, education, professional support etc. This suggests they are sometimes spreading themselves thin, especially given their frequently very small budgets. Muslims are already known to be the most generous group in the UK (Field, 2013), and it is natural that when they see a need they want to respond to it. But the attempt to respond to so many different issues can undermine and weaken the work in all areas. Muslims in Britain are doing their best to plug the gaps and fulfil the needs of their local communities wherever they see them with wide ranges of initiatives.

Starting Small, Going Big

While there are a handful of large Muslim organisations operating in the social action space, the vast majority are small, local community organisations with an average of less than six paid staff per organisation, and frequently zero: 42% have no paid staff. But most of them have desires to expand, sometimes expand to new areas and sometimes to new projects or challenges faced by the community.

The problem which most often stops these organisations from being able to expand or meet the needs of the community is lack of funding. Without stable funding, organisations find it hard to grow, provide training, hire staff, and most importantly to achieve their charitable objectives of helping their local communities. This is why it is concerning that 39% of the organisations surveyed had incomes of less than £50,000 in the year 2020-2021.



Positively, however, Muslim organisations are generally growing over time. As seen in the graph, the number of organisations with incomes in the smallest income bracket of under £50,000 decreased by 26% over the three years measured. There is also a reduction in the number of organisations in the next smallest income bracket of £50,000 - £100,000. But the three larger income brackets all saw an increase in the number of organisations within them over the years. Muslim organisations are growing in income as time goes on, but there is still much work to do to get the smallest organisations to stable intermediate levels of income.

These organisations are also expanding as the needs in the areas in which they work increase. 66% of organisations surveyed expanded to meet other needs in response to new issues such as the Covid-19 Pandemic, the cost of living crisis, and other major problems facing the UK population. Hence, not only are they growing in income but also in their areas of work. This shows how the Muslim organisations are flexible and responsive to the needs of the communities around them, engaging in the national effort to support those in need during difficult times.

There are income differences based on the kind of work that the charities do. For example, representative network organisations fell into the lower income brackets. This could have been because of the nature of their work: a lot of money, staff etc. is not necessarily needed as their work is usually conducted around their day jobs. Additionally, they often take membership fees, limiting their income base to Muslims within the sector that they represent. On the other hand, this explanation cannot be extended to the other group of organisations who had lower than average incomes: those focusing on food aid. But, a reason for their low income could be a preference for accepting in kind donations rather than financial donations, so the financial income is not representative of their size. However, in general, money is necessary for financing the good running of an organisation, so the lack of income of food aid and representative network organisations is of concern. On the other hand, organisations working on poverty and community projects generally have a larger income than other kinds of charities, perhaps representing the need of salaries and other costs in those types of organisations, along with the aspect of donor appeal of those kinds of organisations. Overall, British Muslim social action organisations are growing, but the rates of growth are not the same throughout the sector.

Funding Sources

As previously mentioned, the sources of funding have an impact on the growth and sustainability of Muslim organisations. Muslim charities have a significant over-reliance on donations from Muslim individuals and households. 30% of all the organisations surveyed received all of their income just from private donations alone. 42% received no money at all from trusts or foundations, with another 39% getting less than 40% of their income from that source. Meanwhile, 53% received no money from local authorities, with less than 5% of organisations receiving more than 60% of their income from local authorities such as councils. This shows a real lack of support from mainstream funders for Muslim charities, and an urgent financial gap that needs to be filled.

The size of the gap depends on the type of work of the organisation. Disability, education and representative network organisations were the most financed by public donations alone. Food aid, poverty and women's empowerment organisations generally had a more balanced income from multiple sources including trusts and foundations and local councils. Organisations specialising in mental health were particularly well supported by trusts and foundations.

With the increasing cost of living crisis, those charities who only receive money from donations could face income problems given donors will have less money to give to charity compared to before. Not only that, but the needs of the communities they serve will increase as well as more people turn to charities for help with the unaffordability of day-to-day living. Some people may be inspired to donate by the increased need in the country, but overall those charities are at risk and should work to diversify their income through grants or other means.

Capacity Building

Capacity building training strengthens skills, develops competencies and prepares teams to take on challenges and solve problems in their area of work. It is an important part of the development of all organisations, big and small, to ensure their effective management. The smallest organisations were found to be the most lacking in capacity building training. Many of them are fairly new and going through a period of growth, so capacity building training is really critical for them. However, this is of course dependent on their means, given that smaller organisations can find themselves struggling to find their footing financially, so they may establish themselves as effective and financially viable entities. Larger organisations did not have strong levels of capacity building training either, however. So while very small organisations certainly need to be focused on, training needs to be developed and delivered to Muslim organisations at all levels of size and experience. Women's development organisations are the only type of organisation who had generally good levels of capacity building training across the board. This is noteworthy because these particular organisations are run by women and so we can assume that the higher level of capacity building within them relates to a desire for self-development. Important to note is that in general these organisations are keen to develop female Muslim leaders at all levels, and so training is seen as highly important. Yet, their good access to capacity building training does not mean that they should not be targeted for more training either. When asked to describe the types of training received, responses consistently pointed to leadership training and strategic planning. Several organisations had developed long-term strategies for the coming years.

Along with developing the capacity of current staff, Muslim charities actively seek to develop the next generation of Muslim leaders in the sector. Many of them already provide internships or training courses, have mentoring schemes or offer career advice to young people. Other organisations who do not have such strategies in place already are working to develop it through the hiring of new staff or appointing of new trustees for this purpose, or at least profess it as a stated long-term aim of their organisation if they currently do not have the capacity to do so.

Case Study: Muslimah Sports Association

Muslimah Sports Association was set up in 2014 in Redbridge with the objective to create safe spaces to enable women to take part in sport. The sports include basketball, badminton, yoga, pilates, biking, football and other team sports. Women come for both the social and physical benefits of participating in sports. With a user base of primarily stay at home mums, these activities give women the confidence to come out of their comfort zone, be vocal and become leaders.

Many go on to compete in charity competitions, sports leagues, even internationally, and MSA trains them to become sports coaches for other Muslim women. MSA also does consultancy to provide actors in the sports sphere with the information and support to engage Muslim girls in sports. The biggest issue faced by MSA is the short-term nature of funding, which only covers specific projects and does not support the sustainability of their services. In the future, MSA would like to increase their capacity to organise activities across London. They would like to see a change in mindset towards female sports and the better mapping and connection of female Muslim sports organisations and coaches, to facilitate more Muslim women getting into sports.

Working Together

Muslim organisations work together with each other within the Muslim charity sector and also extensively with a wide variety of other types of organisations outside the sector, such as mainstream charities, public sector organisations and private companies. Despite this, they usually do not receive funding from their partnerships, representing a one sided relationship between Muslim charities and other kinds of organisations where Muslim charities are expected to conduct essential work without financial help.

Of the charities surveyed, 80% of them have collaborated recently with other Muslim charities. 50% of them worked with organisations from other faith groups, 50% of them with local government and 64% with mainstream charities. Additionally, 32% work with healthcare bodies and 43% with schools. These statistics show how Muslim organisations are engaging widely with many different aspects of British society. They actively work with others for the benefit of their local communities.

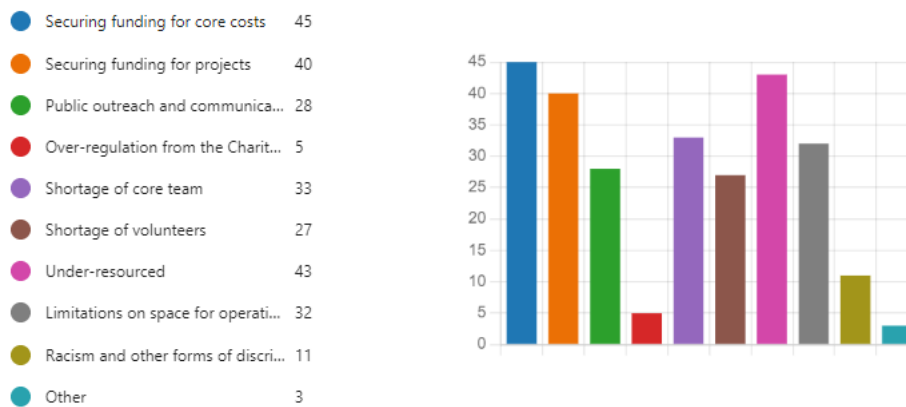
However, these partnerships do not bring the fruits of funding or financial support for the Muslim organisations who collaborate with others. As can be seen from the data above with almost all organisations engaging in partnerships, Muslim organisations are not isolationist. They work with everyone to benefit the whole community. Yet despite their work, they are not given the trust and the financial support to lead a sustainable organisation. Some respondents raised the issue that funders are wanting to see projects happen without paying the staff to carry them out. To support the beneficiaries, an improvement in the funding of the British Muslim charity sector is urgently needed.

Case Study: Hand on Heart

Hand on Heart is a charity which helps rough sleepers and asylum seekers with packs of essential items. These vary depending on the time of year but can include PPE, toiletries, sleeping bags, hoodies, hats, sunscreen and more. Hand on Heart have expanded from when they started in 2018 giving 200 packs a year to now distributing 7000 across 25 UK locations, and also have begun to create back-to-school packs for children from low income families which include stationary, activity books, folders, scientific calculators, maths sets etc. Their packs have been delivered to Afghan and Ukranian refugees and they have been able to help asylum seekers with phones, bikes, laptops, footballs and other equipment. Hand on Heart are building a community through giving people the opportunity to help with their hands – families get their children involved, schools help make back-to-school packs, and even care homes are starting to make the packs now too. Hand on Heart have found this to be a fantastic way to bring all parts of the community together to help those in need. Some of the challenges that Hand on Heart have include storage space, transport, and grants training for securing finances to have paid staff leading operations around the country. Their future goals are to partner more with other kinds of organisations, to help better signpost those in need to other organisations, for example to medical assistance, shelter, and job help. Right now, Hand on Heart's focus is on emergency relief to rough sleepers, and they have provided aid to tens of thousands of individuals in the most need. With the right partnerships, they plan to help to give people a permanent step up out of destitution.

Challenges

By far, the largest challenge for Muslim organisations working in Britain is the increasing demand for their support while the funding is not matching the need. For example, all of the youth organisations who responded to the survey experienced difficulty securing funding for core costs. Aside from securing funding for core costs which affected 70% of all organisations surveyed, securing funding for projects was a problem for 63%, and 67% were under-resourced.



Recruiting volunteers is not so much of a problem for Muslim organisations, with an average of 68 volunteers per charity. British Muslims are very often keen to support British Muslim charities with their money but also with their time. However, educational charities had a particular problem with recruiting volunteers, with 75% of them having a shortage of volunteers compared to 41% of other charities.

Also, 17% of respondents found racism and other forms of discrimination a problem for their charity. While the other problems are often a natural part of being a charity and issues that all charities have to overcome, this particular problem is more specific to Muslim charities given their unique cultural, ethnic and religious identities and also that of the majority of their beneficiaries. Discrimination against them is not a problem which can be tackled by only the Muslim charities themselves, but it needs all stakeholders and all of society to come together to eliminate this issue.

Case Study: Muslim Hands

Muslim Hands was set up in 1993 in response to the Bosnian war. They are primarily an international education and emergency response charity, but six years ago they decided to start engaging in UK programmes as well, seeing the need within their local community. They started with the Young Muslim Writers Awards, given their educational focus. This is often the first time that young Muslim writers get recognition for their work, and their awardees have gone on to publish books and win international awards. They also organise holiday writing programmes, which they are expanding and now offer screenwriting courses as well for young people. Muslim Hands is also tackling food security and homelessness through their Open Kitchens in Nottingham and Hounslow. They serve around 250 people a day in each kitchen in a restaurant style setup. Muslim Hands sees the importance of building up UK based Muslim civil society

organisations and so supports several local Nottingham and Cambridge based Muslim organisations in addition to the work they conduct themselves. Muslim Hands would like to conduct more advocacy in the future. They see that poverty in the UK is increasing, but Muslim donors fail to see this as a 'Muslim' issue so hesitate to put their money towards it. Muslim Hand's message to mainstream civil society is that Muslim organisations have understanding, knowledge and access to community members, so Muslim civil society should be grown and worked with for the benefit of all. British Muslim civil society is British civil society, so building the former helps build and improve the latter as well.

Recommendations

The organisations discussed in this report are undertaking fantastic work and making positive impacts throughout Britain. For them to continue their lifechanging work, and expand it, there are a variety of actions that they and other stakeholders can take. Listed below are some of the recommendations drawn from this research.

Working Together Better

Muslim organisations are already working extensively within the Muslim charity sector and outside of it with other private, public and third sector institutions. Having said that, the method of collaboration could be more focused to best benefit these organisations.

One method of this could be a 'twinning' of small and large sized organisations. This could enable them to learn from each other. More than a mentorship, it would give the possibility to mutually benefit. For example, large organisations can provide examples of strategies and policies, while small organisations may be more connected to the needs of local communities on the ground.

Other ways of working together thoughtfully within the Muslim charity sector include working on grant applications together or even applying together, and also advocating and lobbying together as a cohesive unit of the British Muslim charity sector.

Partnerships

Partnerships outside of the British Muslim charity sector could further be developed through the utilisation of the niches which the British Muslim charities have access to, such as women and BAME groups. Collaborating with mainstream or governmental bodies could be a way of helping beneficiaries more holistically as they become better connected to the support that they need.

Funding

Funding provides the resources for Muslim charities to sustainably carry out their work. The funding of core running costs is especially important to enable Muslim organisations to more reliably deliver their services rather than working project to project. Particular areas of the Muslim charity sector which are underfunded are disability charities, educational charities and representative network organisations, so specific opportunities in those areas could be opened for their development.

Capacity Building

Capacity building training is a task which should be carried out at all stages of an organisation's growth. Some organisations may think that it is not necessary – if they simply distribute food, it may seem like there is little need for organisational development. But in fact, training is needed for all organisations to enable good governance. Specific training required includes training for trustees, grant writing, governance, communications, strategy and more. For maximum impact, those trainings should not just be a one-off webinar but a tailored support to the charity. As one organisation mentioned, a two-hour media strategy training is not useful if it does not come with the long-term support of the implementation of the strategy, especially for small organisations with limited finances for anything other than their main projects.

Finding a Niche

Seeing the ever-increasing need in the UK for community support, many organisations wish to help everybody in every way, and dabble in numerous, wide-ranging projects, unfortunately resulting sometimes in them being spread too thin to have a deep impact. They would do well to find a speciality and concentrate on it. These organisations are leading the way on community development, and improving themselves within their speciality would make them experts in their field, turned to by all manner of organisations and institutions. The British public will not necessarily need more help if they receive better help.

Communication

One of the aims of this report has been to communicate and represent the amazing work done by Muslim organisations here in Britain. Too often overlooked, their fantastic work should feature in local newspapers, radio and other media. Collaboration is necessary between media organisations and these charities to present them in the positive light they deserve. Good communications will not only help those in need be better signposted to where they can get help, but will also develop greater levels of community harmony as the whole community becomes aware of the efforts of Muslims for the common good.

Conclusion

This research provides a snapshot of British Muslim social action. Into the future, this sector will further develop, and more research will be needed to map the changes and new challenges. Additionally, to ensure future research is even more representative of the work being carried out, researchers should be more proactive in offering more assistance to help leaders of small organisations share their thoughts and experiences.

Overall, the British Muslim charity sector is a dynamic, young and growing sector which has many opportunities for development. It is also like any other sector in that it has requirements of organisational structure, accountability and strategic operation. It needs to be a place where beneficiaries are not simply aided but also where staff and volunteers can grow and develop; where organisations can scale up and operate efficiently and have sustainable business plans to support their growth.

Until now, we have seen well equipped and resourced mainstream institutions and organisations failing to provide opportunities for leadership and changemakers from diverse backgrounds, and failing to include and celebrate cultural, religious and other differences. Muslim organisations in particular are stereotyped as only looking after their own or as being a risk of evangelising in their interactions with others outside their faith. Many have recognised the falseness of these claims even before this report, and this report underlines this point further. So, it is time for mainstream institutions to take heed and support these hardworking, grassroots changemakers. This is now beginning to happen, but we are at the start of this journey, and much more needs to be done for the flourishing of Muslim social action in Britain.

MCF is placing itself to help local Muslim social action organisations. Already we have distributed Comic Relief funding to 22 community organisations and organised networking and capacity building opportunities for Muslim organisations working in the UK. Our next step is to create an online directory of such organisations so that potential volunteers, collaborators or other stakeholders can more easily be aware of their presence and work with them.

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