

Your Voice, Your Say: Let's Talk Inequality

Springburn

August 2020

The UWS-Oxfam Partnership and Saheliya

UNIVERSITY OF THE
WEST OF SCOTLAND

UWS

UWS-OXFAM
PARTNERSHIP



Oxfam



Project partners

The UWS-Oxfam Partnership

The Partnership brings together the academic expertise from the University of the West of Scotland, the social justice and anti-poverty campaigning strengths of Oxfam Scotland, and the local knowledge and capacities of a wide range of civil society organisations to conduct research and inform policy debates with the overarching objective to work together for a more equitable and sustainable Scotland. Find out more about the work of the partnership here: <http://uwsoxfampartnership.org.uk/>

Saheliya

Saheliya supports and promotes the positive mental health and well-being of black, minority ethnic, asylum seeker, refugee and migrant women and girls (12+) in the Edinburgh and Glasgow area. We aim to develop our clients' self-esteem and confidence and reduce barriers such as isolation and depression, by using a holistic range of services including counselling, practical support, befriending, complementary therapies, outreach, group work and Young Saheliya. For more information about our work, visit our website: <http://www.saheliya.co.uk/saheliya/#.X0fCk8hKjIU>

About the project

Prior to the 2016 Scottish Parliament election, Oxfam Scotland produced policy priorities for the Scottish Parliament.¹ Ahead of the next Holyrood election in May 2021, Oxfam was keen to talk with people across Scotland to discover the issues they believe the next Parliament needs to address to help create “a just and equal Scotland, in a just and equal world.”

To achieve this, we went to communities around the country to find out what mattered most to them. The project sought to build upon the Policy Forum model run by The UWS-Oxfam Partnership; this brings together decision-makers, policy professionals, community organisations and individuals to discuss key policy agendas. Critically, the workshops – ‘*Your Voice, Your Say: Let’s Talk Inequality*’ – were delivered in partnership with local organisations, and could not have happened without them. The focus was on the depth and quality of discussion, rather than the scale.

The conversations explored the meaning of inequality in Scotland today – including the gap between rich and poor; geographical inequalities; and inequalities between groups based on gender, race and ability – and what levers can be used at a devolved level to tackle inequality in its various forms. There is welcome political attention on tackling poverty in Scotland, but these conversations took a deeper look at the gap between the haves and the have-nots, and what can be done about it.

The aims of the workshops were:

- To engage with people who don’t always feel heard and gain an understanding of their perceptions and priorities around tackling inequality in Scotland;
- To use these valuable contributions to help shape what we ask Scottish political parties to commit to in the lead up to the 2021 Scottish elections;
- To support participants to explore practical actions that could be taken locally to tackle inequalities or injustices in the local community.

“To listen when we speak, our words to be heard”
- workshop participant

¹ Oxfam Scotland (2016) *Even It Up: Scotland's role in tackling poverty by reducing inequality at home and abroad - Oxfam's policy priorities for the Scottish Parliament*. Available here: https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/even-it-up-scotlands-role-in-tackling-poverty-by-reducing-inequality-at-home-an-579309?utm_source=oxf.am&utm_medium=ZmmX&utm_content=redirect

What we did

Workshops across Scotland

The workshop which was held in partnership with Saheliya in Springburn on 24 January 2020 was the very first workshop delivered as part of a much bigger project.

This project aimed to deliver eight workshops between January and April 2020 in the eight electoral regions of Scotland. Two of these workshops were cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic, and an additional workshop was carried out with refugee and migrant women in Glasgow. The locations of the workshops were:

- **Central Scotland** – Cumbernauld, in partnership with Cumbernauld Poverty Action
- **Glasgow** – Paisley, in partnership with STAR Project; and Springburn in partnership with Saheliya
- **Highlands and Islands** – Inverness, in partnership with Inverness Foodstuff
- **Mid Scotland and Fife** – Kirkcaldy, in partnership with Fife Centre for Equalities
- **North East Scotland** – Dundee, in partnership with Dundee fighting for Fairness Commission
- **West Scotland** – Greenock, in partnership with Your Voice, Inverclyde
- **South Scotland** – Dumfries, in partnership with Citizens Advice and Dumfries and Galloway Tackling Poverty Group [cancelled due to lockdown]
- **Lothian** – Edinburgh, in partnership with The Grassmarket Community Centre, Cyrenians and Edinburgh and Lothians Regional Equality Council [cancelled due to lockdown]



Participants

The workshops were open to the public, however, through our project partners we particularly sought to engage with low income groups, marginalised communities, and those with lived experience of poverty in recognition that they are too often under-represented within policy-making. The workshop participants tended to be a mix of people with direct experience of poverty and

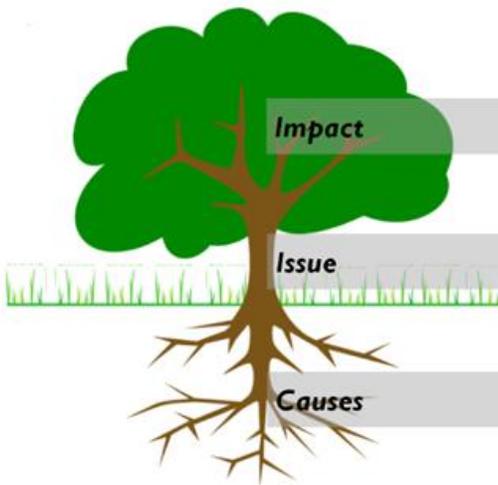
professionals or service providers with an interest in the topic (for example Citizens Advice staff, NHS workers, grassroots/community organisations and policy professionals).

The workshop had 20 women in attendance, the majority of whom were aged between 30 and 50 years old. Nine participants were Black, African, Caribbean, or Black British, five participants were Middle Eastern, Asian or Asian British, and the remaining five participants had mixed heritage or preferred not to say. For many, English was an additional language, so some of the workshop content was translated by other members of the group and we used visual aids to make the content as accessible as possible.

Format of the workshop

The workshop was split into four stages.

- 1) **Exploring what is meant by ‘inequality’** – Inequality is a complicated topic and means something different to everyone. The first ice breaker exercise aimed to help people to get to know one another and begin to explore this topic. The workshop began with a brainstorm around the question “what does inequality mean to you?”
- 2) **Exploring the causes and the impacts** – When groups had decided on a topic to discuss, they were asked to map the causes of that kind of inequality, and the impacts resulting from it, using a ‘problem tree’ visual aid.
- 3) **Exploring the solutions** – Following the mapping exercise, groups were asked to think about any changes, big or small, that could make a positive difference to the causes or impacts that they had mapped.
- 4) **Local action** – Choosing one of the solutions they had identified, groups then spent the final part of the workshop brainstorming actions that could be taken at a local or national level to achieve change.



“Improve education opportunities for asylum seekers/refugees - I want to be a nurse!” – workshop participant

What we heard

Initial thoughts on inequality

Inequality is a complex concept, which may refer to inequality of wealth or income, inequality of opportunity, health inequalities or educational inequalities. It may be driven by inequalities between groups based on gender, race, education, or generational cohort, or it may be driven by inequalities within these groups. It is important to ask ourselves: “inequality of what, and amongst whom?”.

To unpack some of this complexity, the workshop began with a brainstorm based around the question: what does inequality mean to you?”

The themes that the groups chose to explore in more detail were:

- **Education**
- **General issues for newly arrived people**
- **Housing, hospitals, racism, education, no status**
- **Racism, discrimination and injustice**
- **Money and racism**
- **Language barriers**
- **Housing**

The groups used a “problem tree” visual aid to map the causes, impacts of the themes they had chosen.

1. Education inequalities	
Causes	Impacts
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Technology<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Children are dependant for their education○ Pressure to have to buy up-to-date technology• Education from ‘foreign’ countries not believed or accepted here• Neglect family• Barriers to volunteering (to get an education) e.g. disability• ESOL is not enough for education – why am I not enough to get a job?• GcSA for Scottish Education• Money	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mental health• Lack of credibility• Can’t get experience• Ability• Racism (others lack education)• Lower income• To listen when we speak, our words to be heard and consider more power for Scotland. Scotland to keep fighting for independence

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language • Teaching area: area is 'no good' so the schools aren't good as no one cares about them • Method of study • Lack of curriculum 	
---	--

2. General issues for newly arrived people

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media opinions • Social media (Facebook) • How media talks about refugees in a negative way • Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Don't accept our certificates and qualifications for previous countries – why? • Improve education opportunities for asylum seekers/refugees - I want to be a nurse! • Do more to remove barriers for asylum seekers in education • Government to allow refugees and asylum seeker to access to further education – full time courses and university, not just ESOL • Education system should be improved • ESOL should be compulsory for new immigrants • 2nd week of Feb – 0 tolerance of FGM 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discrimination in job opportunities • Good services in Scotland: Transport, schools, hospitals • Sometimes bus drivers don't give respect (lack of their education on cultures) • Big issues with home office: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Takes a long time ○ Very little money ○ Not allowed to work ○ Those coming from EU countries have more opportunities • Applying for jobs after university <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ All companies require experience which students don't always have • Jobs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Have experience in my home country but it doesn't count ○ System issue • We were colonised by the British and so were educated on your systems – my experience is valid • Into my future I want to be trust in myself, be confident, learning more and if I have me good plan to my future I will have me bright and good future.
---	---

3. Housing, hospitals, racism, education, no status

Causes	Impacts
<p>Housing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce council tax and stop raising rent • New system for housing <p>Hospitals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health issues should be taken seriously 	<p>Housing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overcrowded housing • Not enough space for children • Homelessness <p>Hospital</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health system should be more accessible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No jobs • Don't take people seriously • Health issues should be taken seriously
---	---

4. Racism, discrimination and injustice	
Causes	Impacts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Racism • Discrimination • Poor leadership • Corruption • Ignorance yet educated • Scottish Government should take back the power of immigration in order to help all citizens equally • Solutions for injustice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Equal rights ○ Freedom of expression ○ Embrace our differences ○ Inclusion in decision-making (councils/ Parliament) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trauma • Depression • Suicidal thoughts • Despair • Can be separated from your family • Secluded • Considered as criminal • Low self esteem • Lack of confidence • Being blacklisted <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ No housing ○ No job • You are not liable to get help and can be deported • Risk of deportation

5. Money and Racism	
Causes	Impacts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bus service <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Need a free bus service for asylum seekers • Refugees and asylum seekers have no access to jobs • White people have more opportunities over immigrants, so they invest and earn more money • Men <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ego ○ Controlling ○ Judging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Poverty ○ No job ○ Isolated ○ Depression ○ Feeling less of a woman/female • Lack social amenities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ No good food / shelter / education etc

6. Language barriers	
Causes	Impacts

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of resources • Mental impact • Lack of confidence • Misbehave • Anxiety • Lack of education • Lack of guidance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxiety • Misunderstandings • Economic problems • Social cut off/ back • Family issues (disturbances) • Isolation • Stay back • Can't get the jobs
---	---

7. Housing	
Causes	Impacts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historical • Money <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Rent ○ Rent controls ○ Jobs – zero-hour contracts ○ Banks and mortgages • New to country • Change in circumstances • Right to buy • Access to housing and adaptation for disabled people • Discretionary housing payments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homelessness • No home = no job and no bank • Constant relocation • Education – changing schools • Illness • Integration issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mental health • Debt

“Solutions for injustice: equal rights, freedom of expression, embrace our differences, inclusion in decision making” – workshop participant

How can my voice be heard?

We ended the workshop with a discussion about voice, power and participation. Some of the ideas shared by participants included:

- Visiting Parliament/politicians ‘surgeries’ e.g. at housing association
- Through Saheliya – e.g. protection order in Parliament about Female Genital Mutilation
- Digital storytelling
- Campaigning groups

-
- Writing a letter to politicians (it can be anonymous)
 - Voting (although not everybody has the right)
 - Social security experience panels: ensuring ethnic minorities had a say
 - Influencing the public – integration activities
 - Protest/demonstrations

Summary

The workshop at Saheliya on 24th January 2020 involved a lively discussion amongst participants, facilitators and local service providers about the causes and impacts of inequality in Scotland today, and what can be done about it. Although conversations touched on many policy areas, covering both reserved and devolved powers, there were some threads that ran through the discussions and some clear priorities emerged:

- 1) Racism and discrimination** – Racism came up in every group discussion and participants spoke about experiences of discrimination in employment, education, transport and access to services in Scotland. One example given was when “bus drivers don’t give respect”. They felt people are often ignorant of other cultures due to a lack of education, and also spoke about the role of the media and social media in perpetuating racism. Participants talked about the impacts of racist discrimination and injustice including trauma, depression, suicidal thoughts and despair. The solutions for injustice that they wanted to see included: equal rights; freedom of expression; embracing our differences; and inclusion of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities and New Scots in decision-making (at both council and Parliament level) and influencing the public through integration activities.
- 2) Employment, education and opportunities** – Education and employment opportunities came up in many of the group discussions. Discussing school education, participants spoke about school catchment areas affecting the quality of education children receive: “area is ‘no good’ so the schools aren’t good as no one cares about them” and the difficulties of keeping up with the technology schools require children to have when on a low income. In relation to further education, participants wanted to see more action to remove the barriers for asylum seekers in education, including full time courses and university, not just ESOL courses. One participant said: “Improve education opportunities for asylum seekers/refugees - I want to be a nurse!”. A big topic spoken about was how qualifications, experience and training gained in home countries was not recognised in education or employment in Scotland. One participant said “education from ‘foreign’ countries is not believed or accepted here” and another said “we were colonised by the British and so were educated on your systems – my experience is valid.” They talked about how refugees and asylum seekers have no access to jobs, and that the impact of this is poor mental health, lack of credibility, lack of experience, lower income

and inability to support their families. They wanted to see education opportunities improved for asylum seekers/refugees and Government allowing refugees and asylum seekers to access further education.

- 3) Issues for newly arrived people** – In addition to the issues already mentioned, participants spoke about issues associated with the immigration system and the Home Office, including the length of the process, being separated from your family, the very little money asylum seekers are entitled to, being unable to work in the meantime, being unable to get help and the risk of deportation. One participant spoke about being “considered as a criminal”. One group spoke about how language barriers could cause anxiety, misunderstandings, economic problems and feeling socially cut-off. They wanted to see the “Scottish Government take back the power of immigration in order to help all citizens equally.”
- 4) Housing** – participants spoke about access, quality and affordability of housing. Some of their concerns included: overcrowding of housing and not enough space for children; ability to afford rent and Council Tax; access to housing and adaptation for disabled people; constant relocation and the impact on children of having to change schools; integration issues; and the risk of homelessness. They wanted to see a “new system for housing”, with reduced council tax and measures to stop rents from rising.

Since this workshop was held, the country and the world has been shaken by a global pandemic which has had – and will continue to have – far reaching health and economic consequences. The COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated and laid bare existing inequalities in our communities, making it all the more vital that we take steps now to mitigate a widening gap between rich and poor. Next year’s Scottish Parliament election presents an opportunity for political parties to renew their commitments to tackling poverty and inequality by making bold commitments which prioritise the health, wellbeing and financial security of all of Scotland’s people. In doing so, the findings of this workshop – and those held across Scotland as part of this project – provide valuable ideas to support the creation of a more just and equal Scotland.

“To listen when we speak, our words to be heard” – workshop participant