

Meeting the Challenges of Multicultural Service Delivery under Neo-liberalism

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Abstract

A key aspect to the successful settlement of refugees and migrants in Australia is the delivery of services by multicultural and community organisations. The focus of this paper is on the impact that neo-liberalism, and in the Australian context, economic rationalism has on such service delivery in South East Queensland, Australia. It discusses how market-based ideologies, which advocate the provision of 'individual justice' through market efficiency, impact on delivery of 'social justice' objectives informed by the Queensland multicultural policy. The paper draws upon interview data gathered from workers in organisations that provide multicultural service delivery in the Brisbane and the Sunshine Coast in Queensland. Their reported experiences demonstrate that neo-liberal policy reforms such as government competitive tendering, contract agreements and government efficiency frameworks challenge worker efficacy through significantly increased reporting and accountability requirements via performance indicators. They also challenge organizational survival and undermine cross-sectoral collaboration as service agencies increasingly must compete with each other for limited funding. These reforms challenge the basic principles of community development which guide the objectives and service delivery of multicultural community workers and agencies. Nevertheless, workers report responding to these challenges through strategies that aim to ensure their organisations' service delivery remains socially just.

Introduction

Neo-liberalism, and in the Australian context, economic rationalism is impacting on the delivery of services by multicultural and community organisations in South East Queensland, Australia. In particular, there is a conflict between the first priority of 'efficiency', which guides the current government economic reforms policies, and the community and multicultural agencies that hold the priority of social 'equity' and access within service delivery, informed by the Queensland multicultural policy. Drawing upon interview data gathered from workers in organisations that provide multicultural service delivery in the Brisbane and the Sunshine Coast in Queensland this paper identifies a number of challenges affecting multicultural service delivery. Such policy reforms are creating a new manifestation of structural racism, presented through individualist market efficiency principles and practices. The challenges experienced by the respondents show that there are problematic aspects to applying a market

efficiency model to human and social structures and work on many different levels. Nevertheless, workers report responding to these challenges through strategies that aim to ensure their organisation's service delivery remains socially just.

The Study

The findings from this research project were based on the examination of scholarly literature and government policy, and the analysis of interview data collected from multicultural and community workers involved in organisations that provide multicultural service delivery. The methodology adopted for the study was informed by the theoretical perspective of critical interpretivism and underpinned by a constructivist epistemology (Bryman 2004:17; Crotty 1998:67-68). Following ethical approval for the research, seven workers employed in multicultural community agencies and services in Brisbane and the Sunshine Coast areas of Queensland, were selected using non-probability purposive sampling and interviewed. The multicultural agencies in which they worked were both non-government funded agencies, and a multicultural network and ethnic peak body, involved in the provision of different programs and services to both multicultural and disadvantaged communities.¹⁹ Each respondent was interviewed in-depth²⁰ enabling the collection of rich data about their perspectives and experiences working with the different levels of service delivery to the multicultural sector. Interpretation of this data enabled the researcher to understand and theorise the meanings and experiences of multicultural workers interviewed within the broader social and political context, which encompasses a critique of neo-liberalism (Wadsworth 2005: 267-284; Sugden & Tomlinson 2002: 10-12).

A snapshot of Neo-liberalism: the emergence within Australian public policy under economic rationalism

Neo-liberalism is derived from the 17th century theory of Liberalism, which holds a set of principles based upon the ideal that human good and social justice can be delivered most efficiently by the 'free market' to the individual (Cook 1999; Locke 1632-1704; Nozick 1974; Smith 1986; Stafford & Furze 1997; Raphael 2001). This liberal ideal has been reinforced by neo-liberalism, developed as international market ideology in the 1940's, as a political and social solution to the crisis of high inflation, unemployment, and economic recessions in liberal nations. This enabled the international neo-liberal Bretton Woods institutions, such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), to push for neo-liberal market reforms to revive capitalist economies (George 1999; Kelsey 1995; Pusey 2003; Bell 1997; Harris 2003; Mendes 2003). Furthermore, the

globalisation of financial structures promoted by dominant American and international financial players and policy makers, enhanced by the use of new technological and communication avenues, enable neo-liberal policies to gain wide acceptance (Bell 1997; Gopalkrishnan 2001; Everingham 2003).

Such processes and events facilitated the ideology of neo-liberalism to reform Keynesian structures, and promote market discipline in social provision and resource allocation, which found favour with western governments (Dow 1994, 1999; George 1999; Pusey 2003 & Mendes 1997, 2003; Rapely 2004). In the last 20 years, the Australian Governments of Hawke, Keating and Howard have embraced neo-liberal structural adjustments more closely associated with the Anglo-American model of 'free market capitalism' (Campbell & Pedersen 2001; Dow 1994; George 1999; Hay 2001; Harris 2003; Pusey 2003: 8-9; Rees 1995; The Productivity Commission 1998). The adoption of 'free market capitalist' economic reforms has resulted in major reduction of social expenditures, economic and government deregulation, dominance of market principles, privatisation of public structures, and an emphasis on efficiency, competition and the 'individual' within policy formulation (Dow 1994; George 1999; Harris 2003: 87-90; Rees 1995; Robinson 1994; Stilwell 1996). These reforms have manifested under the policies and practices of economic rationalism (Pusey 1991, 2003: 7-11).

Fundamental to neo-liberalism are the principles of the 'individual right to freedom' and the right to pursue 'rational self-interest' (Kasper 2000; Marginson 1988; Smith 1986). Further, the principle of 'process orientation', states that 'efficiency' is achieved when individuals are left to freely choose whether or not they voluntarily enter a 'contractual agreement' with one another in the free market (Stafford & Furze 1997: 198; Kasper 1999:136-142; Marginson 1988; Mendes 2003: 33-34; Queensland Government 1994; The Productivity Commission 2001). Thus, following Smith (1776), faith in 'the invisible hand', the autonomous force of the market, is conceptualized as the most efficient and 'just' means to allocate goods and services to satisfy individual wants and needs (Kasper 2000; Marginson 1988: 110; Stafford & Furze 1997: 197-198). Accordingly, the 'efficiency-equity trade-off' principle states that any non-individualist ethics of social justice and equity will reduce the efficiency of free market (Kasper 1999:134-136; Stafford & Furze 1997:198; The Productivity Commission 2001). It is evident that these market based principles are strongly integrated and advocated by the current Queensland government economic rationalist policy reforms.

Under the requirements of the Australian National Competition Policy (1995), the Queensland Government has been exposed to private sector market practices to enable a 'level playing field' in a competition based environment, guided by 'competitive neutrality', which:

“does not require that all firms should compete on an equal footing; indeed, differences in size, assets, skills, experience and culture underpin each firm’s unique set of competitive advantages and disadvantages. Differences of these kind are a hallmark of a competitive market economy’ (1996: 10).

The Queensland government competition policy framework of Competitive Neutrality and Queensland Government Business Activities (July 1996), enforce that the practice of a competitive tender process is to ensure the right to funding for a service provider, either under a ‘contract’ as an external provider, or through a ‘service agreement’ as an in-house service delivery unit. The service provider is defined, measured and evaluated on the amount of ‘output’ characteristics such as location, community group, service quality and quantity and period and timing of services (Queensland Government 1999:1-2). Those organisations that prove to be the most efficient and accountable to government money will then be selected as the best tender. Competitive tendering has produced shorter funding contracts for these organisations, the community workers, programs and services, such as 1-3 years. Hence, organisations have to undertake ongoing competitive tendering process to procure recurrent funding (Queensland Government 1994; 1996; Quiggin 1996).

However, such government competition policies are argued as a justification of institutional and structural disadvantage, inequality, and discrimination to certain sectors of society (Australian Council of Social Services 2004; Mendes 2003; Marginson 1988; Rawsthorne 2005; Stilwell 1995; Webb 1996; Wong 2003; Valentine 1999). As Jones (1993) states, the economic rationalist language of ‘freedom’ and ‘choice’ for the individual refers to the ‘generic individual’, that is the economically strong individuals, and can exclude the individuals who are in disadvantaged socio-economic sectors or specific groups with complex needs (Hoatson, Dixon & Sloman 1996; Mendes 2003: 38-39; Williams 2005). The Australian Council of Social Services (2004) further argues that disadvantaged and specific groups may not have the knowledge, information or importantly the economic capacity to seek services as consumers. Therefore a market assessment of need, by people accessing services, is insufficient and unfair for disadvantaged and specialist groups (Jones 1993: 260-261). Thus ‘survival’ for certain disadvantaged groups of people and the organisations that provide services to them are in jeopardy in this individualised competitive market structure (Mendes 2001: 50-54; Wong 2003; Jones 1993). This message was expressed when one respondent stated:

‘Economic reform processes is a tenet of a liberal way of thinking which believes it is ok to have inequality, winners and losers, but it is not a level playing field. The organisation, [on the other hand], is guided by different principles such as fairness and justice for chances and resources to people in the community.’ (Respondent 1)

Such market policies and principles are impacting on the very basis of social justice principles guiding service delivery provided within the multicultural sector, which is vital for migrant and refugee settlement.

Migrant and Refugee settlement: Specialist multicultural service delivery within the non-government sector informed by the principle of 'Equity'

Multicultural and community agencies within the non-government sector are responsible for socially just service provision for migrants and refugees. According to Butcher (2006), the non-government sector (NGOs) consists of 'non-state entities' which make up the 'third sector organisations' (TSOs) (p: 70-90). This evolving 'partnership' between government and the 'third sector organisations' is considered an efficient structure by governments, to best meet and address the social and welfare needs of disadvantaged sectors of society, rather than through traditional welfare means of the public sector (p: 70-75). Such organisations' objectives and services adhere to community development frameworks (Crimeen & Wilson 1997; Butcher 2006), and are responsible for the implementation of Australian social policies concepts and practices of social justice, which as Benn (1991) states is:

'...associated with the promotion of social equity by the reduction of barriers to access to goods and services, the expansion of public participation in government decision-making, and the extension of equal legal, industrial and political rights (cited in Crimeen and Wilson 1997: 47).

Furthermore, these agencies create and maintain the 'social capital' structures, namely: voluntary action; community-building; shared values; and building of trusting networks, all of which create the civic culture within Australian society (Butcher 2006: 70-80).

The Queensland government funded multicultural community agencies and workers, who make up the non-government multicultural sector, are informed by the social justice and equity principles within the Queensland Multicultural Policy (2004) -*Multicultural Queensland- making a world of difference*. These principles include access, participation and cohesion, which guide the development of multicultural strategies to ensure migrants and refugees quality of life²¹ (Multicultural Affairs Queensland 2004). Agencies and workers are also required to adhere to the Federal and State government policy framework of the *Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society* (1998). This policy framework outlines principles to ensure equity through access and participation of more ethnic persons in government, social, economic and political society.

Furthermore, it also seeks to ensure efficiency and effectiveness, responsiveness, communication and accountability in the implementation of public policy and service delivery to culturally diverse people in society (Australian Government 1998: 1-8). However, the multicultural and community agencies within the sector do not play a homogenous role within service provision.

The successful settlement of refugees and migrants in Australia depends upon the access and equity of services provided by multicultural and community agencies. The multicultural sector consists of refugees and migrants, referred to as Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) and Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) persons, and is one of the most disadvantaged sectors of Australian society (Babacan 2003; Missingham, Dibden & Cocklin 2006; Jayasuriya 1998; Jupp 1992; Vasta & Castles 1996). This disadvantage results from low socio-economic situations exacerbated by barriers arising from differences of culture, language and gender within an Anglo-Saxon dominant population and country. Such barriers can include structural and personal racism, discrimination and isolation, which in turn results in a situation of CALD and NESB persons experiencing 'double disadvantage' (Francis 2007; Lupish 1993: 81-83; Australian Bureau of Statistics 2000: 16-20). Furthermore, meeting the complex needs CALD and NESB persons to enable a successful settlement process, require specialist services that may not necessarily be provided through mainstream organisations and service delivery (Babacan 2003; Gopalkrishnan, Babacan & Khakbaz 2004; Jupp 1992; Waxman 1998), as explained by one respondent:

'Migrants and refugees are not the same as other people applying for jobs, they need specialist service for assistance. [As a CALD worker in multicultural specialist service] I have been working in the area for 20 years and have personally experienced what people come to get help for and share the experience [Therefore] I can understand the issues of language, cultural difference and educational experienceMigrants and refugees have a complexity of need and service delivery is not straight forward. It's not one size fits all.' (Respondent 6)

All participants in the study told of the specialized and complex needs of CALD and NESB people who access the services of their particular organisations, and described the implications this has for service delivery. For example, an agency addressing CALD and NESB mental health services is one specialist area:

'In the multicultural agency area, people from CALD backgrounds were not accessing mental health services because of the culture and language in services and the stigma [associated with mental health]. Our service has come into being as a link between the multicultural sector and mental health for CALD and NESB persons to be able to access services and understand services.' (Respondent 3)

However, services differ to cater for the complexity of issues and needs faced by another section of the multicultural sector, namely, NESB women who face domestic violence:

'[NESB women have] a complexity of issues. [Within the organisation service] delivery workers don't just look at sexual/domestic violence but [take into consideration that clients] are women who are refugees [who have been] displaced and isolated in Australia, [who have] literacy issues, [who may have been in] detention centres, or on temporary bridging visas. There are many other layers. While sexual and domestic violence is the main issue, we cannot ignore the other layers.' (Respondent 5)

Thus, specialist service delivery provided and enabled through the multicultural sector is crucial in the provision for access and equity of the disadvantaged multicultural sectors in Queensland. However, there is a challenge for multicultural agencies, whom are simultaneously guided by the market efficiency and social justice principles within the Charter (1998), as well as implementing Queensland Multicultural policy equity principles and government compulsory competitive tender requirements.

Efficiency-Equity Trade-off: Compulsory competitive tendering, organisational survival and 'one size fits all' funding model

This study found that the efficiency-equity trade-off principle is a challenge experienced by for community and multicultural agencies and workers in the provision of socially just policy objectives and services. The first challenge associated with maintaining equity within the sector and service delivery, relates to organisational survival under the compulsory competitive tendering framework. Two managers (Respondents 1 and 2), one from a neighbourhood centre and one from a peak-body, were of the view that compulsory competitive tendering processes favour large generic NGOs in ways that threaten the multicultural service delivery provided by smaller NGOs:

'[There is a] threat of take over from the big NGOs....bigger NGOs have larger infrastructure and income...Government wants to minimise [providers], government talks to and wants to consult only a few providers [because it wants] less numbers of organisations providing service... [Government] wants to just see efficiency and cost effectiveness.' (Respondent 1)

Thus competitive tendering funding cycles render organizational and worker 'survival' (Respondent 2) dependent upon the government process of selection of successful firms in a market system (Alchain 1950: 213-214; Wong 2003).

Respondents explained that it is the 'fittest', that is the larger better resourced organisations with more economic lobbying power, that survive in this framework. This experience was apparent in the views of Respondent 2, who was employed by a larger organisation that represents the smaller multicultural agencies who struggle to meet such reporting and efficiency requirements, due to minimal financial and worker resources:

'[The] smaller NGOs cannot compete against such big organisations that pick up all the funding, [this situation is] easier for government, [it] sees bigger organisations as cheaper, [with] no core costs...[Government favours] dealing with one agency, such as the Red Cross, not 14 little agencies [because there is] only one report to evaluate.... [These bigger NGOs] are closer to government and have more lobbying power.' (Respondent 2)

Thus, a 'hierarchy' develops within the multicultural sector, creating 'mainstreaming' implications of specialist service delivery provided by smaller agencies. As one respondent expressed:

'Competitive tendering is a threat to multicultural service delivery because private companies and businesses are trying to mainstream services but do not appropriately address [specialist] needs. [Within] competitive tendering [it] is who does the better submissions.' (Respondent 6)

These hierarchies within the sector are dominated by males and pay 'lip service' to the advocacy and community development needs of the more specialised and disadvantaged needs of the multicultural sector. For example, one respondent argued that there is a challenge from a feminist perspective and agency providing specialised services to NESB, as women's issues within the needs identification process of policy making can be de-valued and not recognised given that men are predominately the decision-makers within the economic policy reform agenda (Cox 1993; Eisenstein 1996). Respondent 5 took the following view:

'The economic policy reform agenda [is] driven by men. My question is how does that impact on issues for NESB women? Men continue to be leaders in community in Australia ... Women's rights and issues are not brought forward with same amount of interest.' (Respondent 5)

Thus the specialized and disadvantaged groups that consist of the new communities, women, mental health and refugees can be undervalued within government policy and funding attention or relevance (Wong 2003: 47-54). This was voiced from a number of respondents involved within smaller, specialized service provision agencies:

'[Government needs to be] recognising the specialist nature of work in delivering to the needs of [a multicultural] target group because of the complexity of needs.' (Respondent 5)

Multicultural organisations are finding it harder to operate and survive and smaller organisations are getting 'pushed out' (Respondent 1) and minimized under the government competitive tendering. This was referred to by a number of respondents as a 'one size fits all' (Respondent 5 and Respondent 6) funding model, which was not inclusive of the specialist nature of multicultural sector needs:

'[There is] rhetoric about access and equity [in government policy]. [Because] how policies are implemented does not reflect the service delivery for specialist work done by services in this agency [and specialist work] does not reflect funding. [The government funding model is] one size fits all [because the government] policy in place does not reflect demand for services in community.' (Respondent 5)

Respondents expressed the concern that the 'one size fits all' re-current government funding model focus on 'targets', is problematic when dealing with service delivery to the multicultural sector:

'[The government] Department funding expectation is "what we want you to spend money on" targets, but then you have a complex situation. [The reality is] one family of nine is not the same as another family of nine. Government guidelines say everyone will need 2 hrs and that's it but this is not the case [because it is] not one size fits all.' (Respondent 6).

The specialist agency is disadvantaged because the competitive market funding framework lacks recognition of the complexity of work, specialist skills and services within multicultural organisations and again shows government's limited value of the social justice and multicultural service that they deliver:

'In the competitive tendering world, the money went somewhere else to another service agency that had nothing in place to work in this service [specialist multicultural service]. [With] in competitive tendering, the agency is disadvantaged [because it] puts services against each other without recognition of appropriate skills or history of service working with specific area.' (Respondent 5)

The hierarchical nature and 'mainstreaming' within the sector, has adverse effects on the provision of social justice, access and equity to certain CALD or NESB groups (Wong 2003). Hence, this does not adequately reflecting the Queensland Multicultural policy objectives, creating business frameworks in which social and human objectives must be provided (Mendes 2003).

Efficiency-Equity Trade-off: the impact of compulsory competitive tendering on community development, cross-sectoral collaboration, and social justice output indicators

The second challenge associated with maintaining equity within the sector and service delivery, is that the government competitive tendering framework favours an individualist contract service framework at the expense of community development structures and social justice outputs (Hoatson, Sloman and Dixon 1996; Palmer 2001; Williams 2005). Organisations are narrowed to being service providers to the individual consumer, focused on competitive business efficiency guidelines, economic out-put indicators and individual 'target' service delivery, rather than active community development agents and community builders (Wong 2003). The respondents' experiences and views indicate that there is a major concern for the diminishing priority and value for and fostering of community development structures and principles, which are paramount in nurturing and implementing social justice objectives within an agency, achieving equity and building the social capital within society (Hoatson, Sloman and Dixon 1996; Butcher 2005; Williams 2003). One Respondent stated:

'[The] impact on the future of resources for the community sector as competitive tendering creates animosity between groups. [Governments] are not investing in social capital, which is damaging the economic productivity for future.' (Respondent 6)

This is because community and multicultural agencies and workers' are increasingly required to meet government efficiency and accountability objectives, through reports and output based funding contracts, leaving limited time and resources for service delivery and networking:

'There is an increasing number of government departments requiring this [efficiency process], but reporting and accountability can put too much pressure on the organisation which is often under funded ... A disproportionate work load goes into accountability and reporting.' (Respondent 2)

'There's more reporting reviews ...checking of statistics [through] interviews to check financial accountability.... [Within this government funding process] we are]doing applications all the time... it's exhausting doing all the paper work... spending time [doing reporting and accountability work] rather than spending time with the people [through service delivery].' (Respondent 6)

The respondents' experiences express how a competitive tender funding framework places equity issues as a second priority, as greater emphasis is placed on efficiency reporting requirements (ACOSS 2005; Crimeen & Wilson 1997; Rosemann 2000:193; Webb 1996). Respondents expressed concern

about how increased reporting and accountability can trade-off the first priority for the service delivery in an organisation:

'In the past there was more time for service delivery...now there are more reports for accountability...less time for service delivery, whether there's increased productivity... I don't know if this accountability has increased productivity.' (Respondent 3)

'The money put into [the community] sector is directed to manage reporting and accountability and service delivery is second.' (Respondent 4)

However, this is problematic within the multicultural sector, as the main purpose is provision of services to disadvantaged groups, which is measured according to access, equity and community development outcomes:

'[This] Government efficiency framework does not measure the human and social aspects.... such as connections [between people], caring, [the] relationships built, feelings and happiness. This is an unintended consequence of efficiency framework.... It creates more sterile [environments] and less human resources to go into providing services. [Governments] don't increase the resources to easily do both...it's hard to focus on the social and human services.' (Respondent 2)

The second priority of community development and equity structures is circumscribed further by government, as funding accountability requirements restrict multicultural workers community development practices. According to the experience of one respondent:

'the incredible business demands of economic reform policies and government guidelines restrict participation to engage in networks and community engagement. We have to select what is a priority because of all of the other pressing demands. Multicultural networks and mainstream networks are critical of our agency because it does not work in isolation.' (Respondent 5)

Furthermore, compulsory competitive tendering is undermining cross- sectoral collaboration as service agencies increasingly must compete with each other for limited funding (Wong 2003). All respondents acknowledged that their organisations are currently engaging in competition instead of collaboration. Respondent 2 and 6 both explained the impact of competitive tendering has:

'[The multicultural] sector is resourced by funding. The way government puts out funding creates more competition between organisations.' (Respondent 2)

'Created a competitive environment, where there is less funding and less resources because every organisation trying to get the same thing. [This] stops collaboration and causes organisations to keep information from each other.' (Respondent 6)

Interviewees expressed their concerns about the impact and challenge this presents to collaboration, networking, community engagement and the importance of building social capital between the workers, organisations and the sector at present and in the future.

Respondent 5 and 6 were particularly vocal on this issue:

'I miss out on networking because of lack of time. Networking is important to [be able to] pass on information and [provide] updated information to clients [as well as to] liaise with most agencies. I prefer to do this [because this] helps in my job and the job seekers, [which is a] priority for service delivery.' (Respondent 6)

'The relationship between the organisation and community [is important to] maintain an ongoing dialogue to ensure improvement in service delivery instead of the dominant cultural view [from government] being imposed all the time.' (Respondent 5)

Another interviewee (Respondent 7) explained the difficulty of being in the co-ordinating position for a collaborative multicultural network in Queensland in the context of a competitive tendering environment:

*'Organisations are talking about competing when they should be together. This is one thing that this government has been destroying. Competitive tendering is creating competitiveness between organisations, [therefore] have to clarify that [the multicultural] network is not competing with any Multicultural agency. Some agencies have become worried that * network is another competitive arm for funding. The challenge is, to make them more sure [about the network] and not against us.'* (Respondent 7)

The respondents wanted their work in community development and service to be valued more by government. In particular, the relationship between government and the community sector to be more inclusive and partnership-like to redress the dominance of economic output over social input and reinstate the importance of social capital (Rawsthorne & Christian 2004: 1-20):

'[There should be] collaboration between funding bodies and the community sector. [It should be] a more genuine relationship, not just power relationship.' (Respondent 5)

All respondents commented that collaboration and networking needed to be adopted as strategies and practices by multicultural and community organisations and workers to deal with the current short term funding cycles and competitive tendering environment and achieve social justice goals in multicultural service delivery. Respondent 6 described this issue in depth:

'Service delivery has to be collaborative with other organisations because of the competitive environment, whether you like it or not [because you might be] on the other side of table with the organisation. [However I am] more into collaboration than competition.' (Respondent 6)

Respondent 6 later added:

'The collaboration between organisations is very important to identify certain issues and work collaboratively rather than individually because if [organisations] don't work together they will lose what they have now. People pass the buck on to other departments [this is] the cycle [but we need to] break the cycle and everybody should work together, departments, community organisations, state [government], federal [government], [should be] putting resources together.' (Respondent 6)

However, despite advocating the practice of collaboration and networking, respondents found that workers have to juggle their priorities of due to the impact of two differing cultures and the dominance of the economic policy requirements (Crimeen & Wilson 1997: 47-52).

A further challenge in the achievement of equity and community development practices are the negative impacts from the application of performance indicators and outputs to human and community development work. In particular respondents found that measuring efficiency of the organisation, workers and service delivery via quantitative indicators of 'economic capital', rather than qualitative equity-based indicators of 'social capital', made it a harder environment for them and their organisations to provide socially just service delivery (ACOSS 2005: 5-6; Wong 2006;). Two examples typical of this concern were:

'In community development work, the results are not fast... It takes a long time to do well and get the product of work because real work is about building relationships and capacity building [which can be] a slow process.' (Respondent 1)

'In the [community and multicultural] sector we are working with people whose performance outcomes are not commercially based and not measured on profitability.... [Therefore the] outputs of the human services is not easily measured and accessed.' (Respondent 2)

Again respondents emphasized that the community development principles and processes, that guide multicultural service delivery, conflict with the government business efficiency guidelines that require regular reporting, measurement and evaluation of profit 'outputs' and accountability of the organisation to the community and government to receive continued funding (McGuire 1997; 106-118; Rosemann 2000: 192-193): Respondents 2 and 7 described this in depth:

'[Government is] transferring the business model and language and performance indicators [into the community and multicultural sector]. How do you put a measure on output measures on human services?.... It is a different performance indicator model. The business terminology [being] put into the human services is this government's practice.... every time you have to set goals, strategies, performance indicators... [You] need to do a course just to get around the terminology.' (Respondent 7)

'Efficiency is measured by government legislation and policy in terms of the hand rails in nursing home [that have] to be this high or fire alarms in every room and [they] have to pass verification every six months. [This is] instead of measuring efficiency in terms of the worker providing the service to an elderly person by holding their hand each day and giving them time to be listened too... which means much more to the client.' (Respondent 2)

As Wong (2006) argues, there is limited recognition or models for measuring community development principles and outputs in terms of qualitative indicators of 'social capital' such as community building, collaboration, social relationships, empowerment, support and networking and advocacy, under neo-liberal policies.

Community development: responses to the Efficiency- Equity trade-off principle of government policy

The finding also show the awareness and practice of counteractive thought and action present within the multicultural community sector, against the dominance of neo-liberal and economic rationalist market principles guiding the human and community services. Multicultural and community workers report responding to these challenges through strategies that aim to ensure their organisations' service delivery remains socially just. It was a common belief amongst respondents that the 'frame that sector works in is economic rationalism, it is part of the sector' (Respondent 2). However, the strategies emphasized by all workers to 'deal with issues and to achieve community centre role and objectives under these processes' (Respondent 1) involve basic community development principles of advocacy, community building, education and engagement, collaboration and partnerships and networking to support organisations and workers in service delivery and that leads to building social capital (Frank & Smith 2006; Ife 2001; Williams 2003). Again Respondent 1 voiced what this involved:

'We are applying community development principles to self as organisations and band together. [Also] strategically planning to be aware of what's going on and know what's going on [this involves] networking.' (Respondent 1)

Respondent 7 also expressed this view stating that a multicultural network is a strategy that involved:

'the building of a sense of network to feel connected and not isolated in one's work, looking at the broader vision and sharing in the network. People talk about quality, and the best quality of service needs to have a vision of networks, strong systems, strong community, building the capacity of the community, social capital and advocacy. [This involves applying] community development principles and supporting people.' (Respondent 7)

Another particular strategy adopted by respondents and their organisations to achieve these principles involved regional organisations banding together and smaller organisations supporting larger organisations and peak-bodies (Black 2006). For example, Respondent 1 described the importance of making horizontal and vertical connections:

'Horizontal means connecting with similar organisations [who are] doing similar work and vertical means connecting with peak-bodies and other organisations and council, because they are more powerful and have more bargaining power. [This allows smaller organisations to] use the strength of council resources and power to achieve work in order to still achieve social justice objectives and community development principles.' (Respondent 1)

Thus, multicultural community workers within the non-government sector increasingly see the importance of a community development framework and the application of such principles to the sector as a way of surviving this model of competition to keep the multicultural sector strong and productive. These findings concur with what Rees (1993), states in regards to challenging the impacts of economic rationalism, that is such practices and partnerships of collaboration and networking 'implies that interdependence has priority over individual entitlement' (1993: 301) and is one step of the process of 'transforming the discourse' from economic rationalism to social justice (294-297) (see Appendix 1).

Conclusion:

The orthodoxy of neo-liberalism and the market efficiency principles it promotes has manifested within Australia, under the economic reform policies and practices of economic rationalism. This study has confirmed that such economic

policy reforms implemented by the Queensland government present a number of significant challenges experienced by multicultural community agencies and workers in the achievement of multicultural service delivery. In particular, such market-based policies, which advocate the provision of 'individual justice' through market efficiency, impact on delivery of 'social justice' objectives informed by the Queensland multicultural policy. The interview data consistently shows that the 'equity' priority, within the Queensland government social justice policy frameworks, is challenged and de-valued by the market 'efficiency' principle dominant in government policies of competitive tendering and recurrent funding.

Compulsory competitive tendering has created a funding framework, guided by the efficiency and accountability requirements of reporting and 'outputs' This process if referred to as a 'one size fits all' funding model, which favours larger agencies, challenging organizational survival within the multicultural sector. The actual result of competition policy reforms is namely, the lack of funding for, and mainstreaming of, the service provision to the specialist needs of CALD and NESB groups. Community development structures based on social justice and social capital outputs are also being challenged and disregarded under government competitive tendering policies. The emphasis put on 'competitive business efficiency', based around individual target service delivery, within multicultural agencies and services, rather than encouraging and rewarding community development, community building, networking and collaboration within the sector. This challenges equity in regards to cross-sectoral collaboration, social capital building and thus equitable service delivery within the sector. However, multicultural and community workers and agencies are still determined to prioritize, practice and achieve principles of social justice and a framework of community development within multicultural service delivery. This response was expressed by applying social justice structures and practices as first priority and in conjunction with economic efficiency and accountability requirements of policy, rather than just merely achieving market efficiency and output guidelines.

It is evident that the competitive tendering policy framework reflects the neo-liberal principle of efficiency-equity trade-off, and this guides the current partnership between government and non-government multicultural and community agencies. Such policies are presenting a new manifestation of structural and institutional racism, and further disadvantages for migrants and refugees' access and equity to appropriate services for successful settlement in Australian society. This is presented through government economic rationalist policy rhetoric and principles that justify individual self interest and justice, inequality and competition in society. Thus, problems with providing effective and equitable multicultural policy and service delivery arise when often means to more 'effective' policy ends in replacing 'equity' values and practices.

Notes

¹Out of the seven participants interviewed, five were in management positions, one was the co-ordinator of an established multicultural network program and one was a volunteer at a community –based organisation, where the majority of workers are volunteers. Some of the larger and more established organisations in which the interviewees work provide a range of functions, programmes and services. These include peak-body and network roles, advocacy and information provision, settlement and refugee services to migrants and refugees such as aged care, children services, health services referral and general access and equity provision to settlement needs. The other smaller organisations deliver programs and services to specific areas of the multicultural sector for temporary refugee visa holders, migrant and refugees experiencing mental health issues, and services to NESB women and children who experience domestic violence and sexual assault. One organisation was a centre that worked with all sectors of the community and provided a multicultural program.

²The sample was interviewed by the researcher in a semi-structured hour long interviews guided by a list of indicative questions. The questions were informed by national and state government policies identified and interpreted by the researcher as relevant to multicultural service delivery in Queensland. The indicative questions addressed three themes, namely the specific objectives of agency's service delivery; economic policy reform processes and changes to multicultural service delivery. They aimed the gather the subjective meanings and interpretations of these specific themes and issues, as experienced by multicultural community workers within the practice of multicultural service delivery.

³Access: All Queenslanders enjoy equitable access to services and programs;

Participation: All Queenslanders enjoy equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities to participate in, contribute to and benefit from all aspects of life in Queensland; and

Cohesion: All Queenslanders share responsibility for the continuing development of Queensland as a cohesive and harmonious society' (Multicultural Affairs Queensland 2004: 1-2)

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