



BUSINESS FIGHTS POVERTY ONLINE 2020: REBUILD BETTER

# FIVE INSIGHTS: HOW CAN COMPANIES ACCELERATE THE OPPORTUNITIES AND INCLUSION OF BLACK, ASIAN AND MINORITY ETHNIC PEOPLE?

DATE: THURSDAY 16/07

THEME: EQUITY

FORMAT: WEBINAR

## SPEAKERS

■ **Dazon Dixon Diallo**, Founder & CEO, *SisterLove*

■ **Romeo Effs**, Board Advisor, Non-Executive Director, and Founder and CEO, *Lumorus*

■ **Antony Karanja**, Information Technology Student, *Zetech University-Kenya*, and member of *The Youth Cafe*

■ **Sandra Kerr**, CBE, Race Equality Director, *Business in the Community*

■ **Landiwe Mahlangu**, Chief Economic Advisor to the *National African Chamber of Commerce and Industry*

■ **Moderator:** Sue Adkins, Founder, *The Collaborative Action Network*

IN THIS SESSION, OUR PANELLISTS DISCUSSED THE THEME OF THE DAY, EQUITY, IN RELATION TO THE IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON BLACK, ASIAN AND MINORITY ETHNIC (BAME) COMMUNITIES AND WIDER FIGHT TO TACKLE RACISM. OUR SPEAKERS TOUCHED ON TOPICS RELATED TO THE PANDEMIC'S DISPROPORTIONATE SHOCK TO MINORITY GROUPS, THE ROLE OF BUSINESSES IN SUPPORTING INCLUSIVE INITIATIVES, AND WHY EQUITY MUST BE AT THE HEART OF BUILDING UP A MORE RESILIENT SOCIETY.

## KEY INSIGHTS

### COVID-19 HAS EXPOSED AND EXACERBATED EXISTING INEQUALITIES

The pandemic has exacerbated some critical problems - like racial inequality - that have been with us for a long time, and it has exposed some vulnerabilities that have not been taken seriously enough. Sandra Kerr pointed to data in the United Kingdom showing that COVID-19 has had a disproportionate impact in terms of contagion and deaths among BAME communities. As the pandemic developed and the murder of George Floyd in the United States highlighted the systemic nature of racism, this has shone a spotlight on what businesses should do. Landiwe Mahlangu argued that "we need to ensure that businesses do more than just statements and commitments... Many can tick boxes nicely, but cannot show where they have involved black businesses in a meaningful way."

### BUSINESSES NEED TO TACKLE THE LACK OF RACIAL DIVERSITY AT THE LEVEL OF THE BOARD AND SENIOR POSITIONS ACROSS THEIR OPERATIONS

A basic characteristic of inclusive societies is that anyone can pursue any professional career they want. On the other hand, in unequal countries it is common that some social groups are overrepresented in top-level positions or in high-skilled jobs. This situation propagates inequality into the future and makes structural change harder

**COMPANIES HAVE TO CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT OF INCLUSION AND BELONGING TO ATTRACT AND RETAIN ETHNICALLY MINORITY TALENT.**

to achieve. For instance, Romeo Effs told us that it is much harder for black people to reach senior positions or become Board members compared to white people, even in developed countries. Companies are still slow in improving the representation of ethnic minority groups inside their operations. As more members of the BAME community reach top positions in their organisations, they not only become a positive example for youth, but they also offer alternative points of view and make known their unique personal stories.

### **BUSINESSES MUST TACKLE THE ETHNICITY PAY GAP WITHIN THEIR WORKFORCE**

Many companies have been taking steps to tackle the gender pay gap. The same action should be taken to reduce the ethnicity pay gap. As poverty and inequality are disproportionately higher among black and ethnic minorities, companies can make a significant contribution by advancing equal pay. Likewise, acting against economic inequality must also involve inclusive recruitment processes and supporting small businesses that are owned by BAME members. “Companies have to create an environment of inclusion and belonging to attract and retain ethnically minority talent”, argues Romeo.

### **BUSINESSES NEED TO LISTEN TO THE CONCERNS OF BLACK, ASIAN AND OTHER ETHNIC MINORITY GROUPS IN THEIR WORKFORCE, CUSTOMER BASE AND BEYOND**

Any type of business organisation has employees, consumers, and is part of a community. In this sense, large enterprises should pay more attention to their community, especially to minority groups, beyond market research and consider their stakeholders as drivers of innovative ideas. For Dazon Dixon Diallo, businesses must always remember their activities will be linked to either a positive or a negative effect on liberation and social justice. They just need to work towards inclusivity to ensure they have a positive impact.

### **BUSINESS SHOULD TAKE A STAND TO ACCELERATE WIDER OPPORTUNITIES AND INCLUSION FOR BAME COMMUNITIES**

By acknowledging that opportunities are not equal for everyone, companies take the first step in the direction of improving the representation of BAME members among their employees, executives, and board members. They also need to tackle wider industry- and society-level obstacles

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facing BAME communities. Antony Karanja added a stark example: “90% of the total venture capital fund that came from abroad (into the African continent) went to white-run startups. We become a minority in our own setting because we do not have that access to funding.”

### **RESOURCES**

- **Race Equality in the UK, Business in the Community (BITC):** <https://www.bitc.org.uk/race>
- **The National African Federated Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NAFCOC):** <https://nafcoc.org.za>
- **Sister Love:** <https://www.sisterlove.org>
- **The Youth Cafe:** <https://www.theyouthcafe.com>