**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-depth 20 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 nonindividualist

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; Rawsthrone 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 polices 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 experience ….Migrants 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, crosssectoral**

**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 then 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 cocoordinating

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 (Rawsthrone & 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 then 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 polices, 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 neoliberal

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**

1 Out of the seven participants interviewed, five were in management positions, one was the coordinator

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.

2 The 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.

3 Access: 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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