



Sisters Doing it for Themselves

Abigail Etim-Reid on three of Manchester's most promising women entrepreneurs.
Photography by Ray Chan

You only have to look around for yourself to take note of the fact that much of the world of enterprise is dominated by non-black ethnic groups and that observation is supported by the statistics: a report by the Office of National Statistics in 2001 found that around one-fifth of Pakistani/Bangladeshi people in employment were self-employed in Spring 2000 to Winter 2000-2001, compared with only one in ten white people and less than one in ten black people. The figure is even bleaker for black Women. According to a study by the TUC in 2006 only 1.3% of black women were self-employed, compared to 5% of white women and 7.6% of Chinese women.

An increase in the diversity of the population hasn't led to the same trends in entrepreneurship but things are looking up. The Government has put in place a number of initiatives to support minority ethnic individuals and communities. The Phoenix Fund is one such project which encourages entrepreneurship, helping create jobs and stimulate activities in communities where crime and unemployment are high. The Community Development Venture Fund, provides venture capital to enterprises located in the 25% most deprived areas of England.

Furthermore, the future is looking bright for women as a whole. There seems to be a new awakening around the country – policy makers, business support organisations and even banks are welcoming females to their doors. Women, it is now widely acknowledged, can bring a wealth of expertise to industry. Research undertaken by the British Chamber of Commerce highlights the fact that female entrepreneurs are more likely to develop a product or service that is unfamiliar to the market and will have fewer competitors. They are also more likely to be using technology in their products or services than their male counterparts, and to offer a product or service to the market that has been developed in the last year.

In particular, black women's flair for business can be traced to their roots in Africa or the Caribbean where buying and selling goods to eke out a living is often the norm. Whatever the reasons for encouraging more black women into self-employment it can only be a positive thing and we should be encouraged by the news that more and more sisters are choosing to do it for themselves. ➡➡