

Toolkit for Linking

Opportunities and Challenges

Community Links

Supplementary leaflet to the set of core leaflets on linking.

What is community linking?

Community linking is the building and maintaining of partnerships and relationships between communities in two different localities in countries in the North and South. These links are formed for mutual development and well-being. Linking is also a tool for building up knowledge and understanding of each other's lives as well as wider global relationships with shared efforts to bring justice and peace to the world.

Background:

Origins of community linking

During the 1980s following the publication of the Brandt report, development issues became part of the wider political agenda. Involvement, inclusion and grassroots activism grew accordingly and became part of the wider political agenda and led Northern organisations and community groups to challenge the status quo. Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) were the 'experts' in aid, but some communities in the North wanted their own input into development, they were not satisfied with donations to charities and wanted their own direct involvement with communities in other countries. They wanted to challenge the issues related to aid. Formal twinning allowed for this; however, many preferred the concept of 'community linking' because it allowed for a more direct, informal, flexible and 'non-political' grassroots approach.

Opportunities: Linking can help your to:

- strengthen communities North and South as their common interests and concerns draw people together within and between the partner communities. The community focus enriches the range of experiences because of the cross-fertilisation of ideas and exchanges of personal experiences in quite different cultures.
- bring personal understanding of global issues to members of the wider community beyond and across specific communities of interest, ethnicity, culture and occupation. This can include young people at school and adults in various occupations.
- provide support to other links, cutting across society as well as enhancing sector specific links.
- bring communities, that is people from a variety of walks of life, together on both sides helping to bring cohesion and inclusion.
- share a range of learning across class, race, sector etc.
- provide a focus on common issues and challenges and bring a 'different set of eyes' or perspective, to an understanding of our own communities.
- enable people to gain experiences beyond life chances.
- put 'global' issues on an 'everyday' level and help people to see connections between the local and the global.
- increase understanding at a personal level through seeing the impact directly "on one's friends".
- enable people to engage in varying depths of linking activity: from general awareness to long-term personal relationships and friendships facilitated by its informal and flexible structures.

Checklist:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> global education and awareness | <input type="checkbox"/> public awareness events |
| <input type="checkbox"/> local community support | <input type="checkbox"/> cross section of the community |
| <input type="checkbox"/> local authority support | <input type="checkbox"/> focused and disciplined purpose, priorities and commitment |
| <input type="checkbox"/> community champions with influence | <input type="checkbox"/> ongoing publicity, persuasion & contact making |
| <input type="checkbox"/> pro-active – out of own group | |

Below is a list of things you will need to be able to maintain a link:

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|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Committed group of activists from different sectors of the community | <input type="checkbox"/> champions from amongst the 'shakers and movers' in the community |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Open-mindedness and pluralism | <input type="checkbox"/> time |
| <input type="checkbox"/> patience and commitment to own and others learning | <input type="checkbox"/> a partnership agreement or memorandum of understanding |

If you find that you can't tick all of these boxes then you should think again about linking.

Challenges: to maintaining a truly mutually beneficial and equal partnership

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|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> communication in terms of logistics | <input type="checkbox"/> not relying on particular individuals and their contacts is vital to sustainability |
| <input type="checkbox"/> communications in cultural terms | <input type="checkbox"/> regular and structured reflection, evaluation and planning on both sides |
| <input type="checkbox"/> managing different expectations on both sides | <input type="checkbox"/> using the link to challenge, strengthen and widen own notions of 'community' on both sides |
| <input type="checkbox"/> racism, paternalism and prejudice | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> continually challenging assumptions | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> commitment | |

Resource rich communities: specific issues

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 'Aid' mentality: with some individuals and their communications | <input type="checkbox"/> attitude towards own giving, that is, relevance and rubbish |
| <input type="checkbox"/> lack of understanding of constraints on, and sacrifices made by the other community | <input type="checkbox"/> culture of 'newness' and speed and time |
| <input type="checkbox"/> materialism leading to undervaluing of non-material resources | <input type="checkbox"/> expectations of travelling and reasons and motivations |

Resource poor communities: specific issues

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|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 'Aid' and dependency mentality | <input type="checkbox"/> expectations of travelling and personal benefit – who travels is political |
| <input type="checkbox"/> lack of understanding of constraints on, and sacrifices made by the other community | <input type="checkbox"/> materialism leading to undervaluing of non-material resources |
| <input type="checkbox"/> cultural attitudes to learning | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> lack of recognition and understanding of the value of one's own contribution to one's partner | |

The Toolkit can be obtained from UKOWLA
(United Kingdom One World Linking Association www.ukowla.org.uk) and
BUILD (Building Understanding through International Links for Development www.build-online.org.uk)

*Acknowledgement and thanks to
Jane Knight and Maria Franchi from the Bo, Sierra Leone-Warwick, UK link*