

THINK:

There is a high failure rate in linking and a high price to pay for failure. Goodwill and good intentions are not enough, particularly when dependent on one or two.

REFLECT:

On the disappointment on both sides if one of you pulls out after a couple of years having raised expectations at the other end.

QUESTION:

Why do you want to link?

Checklist:

- ✓ Why are you thinking of developing an international link?
- ✓ Is linking the most effective way to achieve your aims?
- ✓ Could your aims be achieved more effectively by other means?
- ✓ Do you want to stand side by side with your partner in fighting injustice?
- ✓ Have you considered other ways of expressing solidarity?
- ✓ Do you have the time, energy and support to sustain a link?
- ✓ Do you have commitment from a partner?
- ✓ Does your partner have the time, energy and support to sustain a link?
- ✓ If you were approached by a community wanting to link with you, would you agree?
- ✓ What is the priority, in both communities, compared to other pressures and work?
- ✓ Do you know about existing links in your area?

Next steps:

- consider alternatives to linking in your area.
- carry out a review of local solidarity initiatives.
- consider expanding or developing such activities.
- make contact with local community organisations and see what opportunities there are for collaboration.
- carry out a survey of activities, other than fundraising, within your group.
- consider the implications involved in setting up a link: the commitments and obligations to people at both ends of the link.
- try to contact the relevant diaspora and expatriate groups.
- outline how the link might be sustained in terms of expertise, time and resources.

4a: Making a difference: Is linking the answer?

Concept of development

Development is a controversial concept. It is linked both to decolonisation processes and to the end of World War 2, when countries were divided according to their political/ideological alliances: First World (capitalist), Second World (communist) and Third World (unaligned nations). Therefore, the notion of development always implies a relationship with other countries and ideas about what ideal societies should look like.

The idea of a more developed country evokes the image of industrialised, affluent nations, material wealth, technology, modernity, democracy, scientific knowledge, civilisation and education. However, this image is constructed in relation to other nations which are thought to be 'backwards', lacking in these attributes and in need of assistance to catch up. But who defines these parameters, in whose name and for whose benefit?

The concept of development has been questioned in recent years from different perspectives. Some critics see development as the imperialism of knowledge, a continuation of colonialism, which imposes on the world a 'modernity' that it does not necessarily want. Others see development efforts as political moves that will benefit mainly the economies of 'developed' countries and create even more inequalities as the flow of knowledge and power is often one way in the 'development industry'. Some groups have tried to re-deploy the notion of development taking into account the environmental costs of industrialisation and have advocated for 'sustainable development'. Others say that a capitalist economic model is never going to be sustainable...and the discussion goes on.

*Vanessa Andreotti,
Nottingham University*

Toolkit for Linking Opportunities and Challenges

There are many different reasons why individuals and groups want to link. Mainly they are for good motives with the aim of making the world a better place. For many, linking offers opportunities for advocacy on behalf of others less fortunate than themselves. This may make people feel good about themselves, but does establishing a link really help others or is it introducing another pressure? A link may take away necessary resources and energy from the everyday struggles and commitments within partner communities.

However noble the intentions of a group are, the perceptions of potential partners must be carefully considered. Many of those approached for links may have a very different perspective. Communities in some countries see linking as a new form of colonialism or exploitation; questioning 'why 'they' should be interested in us?' 'What is in it for 'them?'

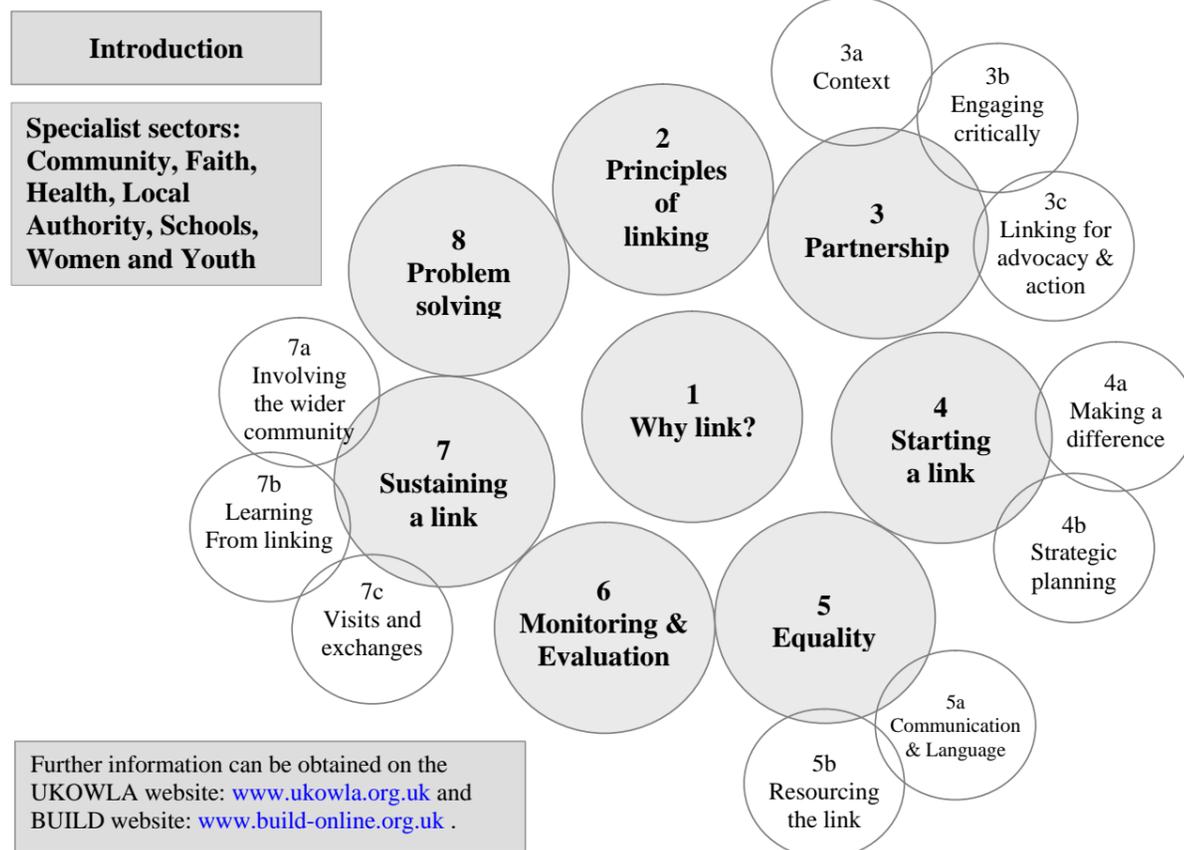
Several commentators have said that linking should involve a 'Sense of sacrifice' or that there should be 'Equality of sacrifice' within the link. The expression acknowledges the demands which linking makes on communities, something which needs to be more widely recognised. Less well resourced communities are often viewed only as passive recipients as in this comment from a school in the UK: 'We could organise campaigns to send them old books and computers so that students feel they can make a difference to these people'. In discussions about the need for change in the world 'but they are all so happy' can still be heard.

Although a different perspective on some global issues can be obtained through linking, links do not, of themselves, lead to greater understanding of global issues. Linking for 'charitable' reasons is unlikely to lead to a real partnership even though you may feel that you are doing something good and you may be to some extent. Linking is one way of working with partners to achieve a goal; but linking could be at the expense of campaigning and lobbying activities which might benefit the partner community more. Links can be used for an initial engagement, and increasing understanding, with issues within our own communities.

The enthusiasm with which links are started can turn to disillusionment as the realities of maintaining a link arise. Trying to maintain communications, understand perceptions from a completely different world view and work together is difficult. The energy exerted on the mechanics of linking can often be used more constructively.

What do you want to achieve? Do you need a link to be able to do that?

Think before you link.

Toolkit for Linking Leaflets

Further information can be obtained on the UKOWLA website: www.ukowla.org.uk and BUILD website: www.build-online.org.uk.

What others say

We are trying to make our lives better. The North needs to think about how it is contributing to our problems, with its governments, its systems, its authority. The imbalances make our lives a bit too hard for us in the South. People in the North must understand how they are contributing to the suffering. The silence of Northern people towards the people in the South makes it difficult for us to improve our lives. *Peter Kisopia, Kenya*

If you are doing it to increase your self-worth and privilege, don't do it. *Clarissa Jordão, Brazil*

If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time... but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together. *Lilla Watson, Australia*

This is the problem of the South which has the North sitting heavily on it, trying to decide its destiny. As much as we appreciate the aid given to us by the North, we still wonder how much it is worth beside the injustices inflicted on us by a market system dictated by the North. *Cecilia Obuya, Kenya*

When a municipality in the UK where coffee is roasted, co-operates with a place in the Third World where coffee is grown, you can have an open discussion about the question of who ends up with the profits in the coffee trade. *Oxford/Leon (UK/Nicaragua) link*

It is wonderful to go barefoot when you have shoes... *Joaquin Alonso, Argentina*

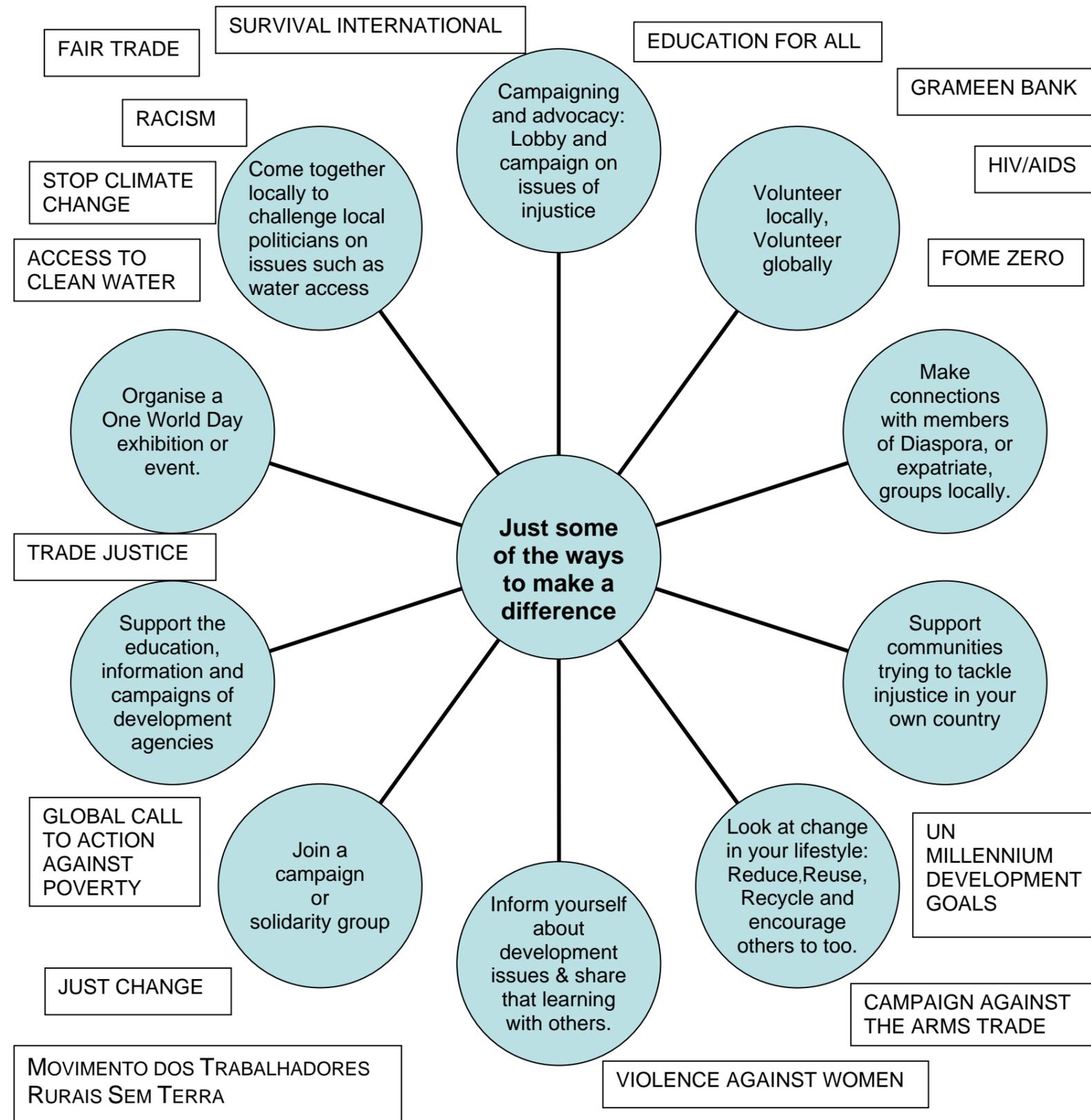
The greatest single challenge facing our globalised world is to combat and eradicate its disparities. *Nelson Mandela, South Africa*

I am a citizen, not of Athens or Greece, but of the world. *Socrates, Greece*

In all life one should comfort the afflicted, but verily, also, one should afflict the comfortable, and especially when they are comfortably, contentedly, even happily wrong. *John Kenneth Galbraith, USA*

Alternatives and complements to linking

Linking is not the only way to make a difference. Here are some other things you can do to help make changes in the world whether or not you have a link



Find out all you can about a campaign before joining. Always keep questioning.

Stop Climate Change: Climate change is a reality. Today, our world is hotter than it has been in two thousand years. By the end of the century, if current trends continue, the global temperature will likely climb higher than at any time in the past two million years. There is a broad scientific consensus that humanity is in large part responsible for this change, and that choices we make today will decide the climate of the future. www.greenpeace.org

Stop Violence Against Women: Violence against women is the greatest human rights scandal of our times. From birth to death, in times of peace as well as war, women face discrimination and violence at the hands of the state, the community and the family. It is time to recognize that violence against women is a global human rights scandal that affects us all. www.amnesty.org

Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International (FLO): worldwide Fairtrade Standard setting and Certification organisation. It permits more than one million producers, workers and their dependants in 50 countries to benefit from products labelled Fairtrade. FLO guarantees that products sold anywhere in the world with a Fairtrade label marketed by a National Initiative conforms to Fairtrade Standards and contributes to the development of disadvantaged producers and workers. www.fairtrade.net

Global Call to Action against Poverty: is made up of national campaigns around the world, building on existing networks, and their strategies and activities. GCAP:

- campaigns on public accountability;
- just governance and the fulfilment of human rights;
- trade justice;
- a major increase in the quantity and quality of aid and financing for development;
- debt cancellation.

www.whiteband.org