

Corporate

Toolkit for Linking Opportunities and Challenges

Supplementary leaflet to the set of core leaflets on linking

Background:

Corporate linking is the formation of long-term partnerships between private sector, commercial and business communities in different locations in the North and South. Corporate links aim to support and invest in local capacity building in ways that are not driven exclusively by profit. Initiatives will find ways to cooperate on knowledge transfer (and other forms of comparative advantage) based on the needs of each of the partner organisations. It can be a way of formalising and leveraging individual enthusiasm.

Opportunities:

 Linking can help you to:

- Enhance cross-cultural understanding
- Break down stereotypes, increase global awareness
- Enhance professional development
- Achieve experiential training and learning
- Expose staff to new perspectives and ideas
- Reach a new audience
- Provide mentoring opportunities
- Promote a sense of social justice
- Develop managerial and leadership opportunities, enhance resourcefulness
- Share learning on common issues

Checklist:

 questions to ask

- Are the broad values of the partners the same?
- Have the objectives for linking for each party been clarified and understood on both sides?
- Has the link been discussed and agreed at management level? (This includes detail of scope, responsibilities, cost, impact, get-out, reputation, PR, administration. Setting up a risk checklist would be useful)
- Who will manage the link?
- Will you have regular reviews?
- Have resources been allocated to enable the link?
- Have you agreed how you will capture the learning and share it as widely as possible?
- Will the relationship have a formal agreement? And what comes next?
- How relevant are each partners' core activity, values or beliefs to the relationship?

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

- Committed and varied group of staff members
- Open-minded approach
- Champions from within each organization, from grass-roots to senior management level
- Time
- Realistic objectives, ability to review and refocus each year
- Appropriate communications to maintain enthusiasm
- Allocated responsibility
- Community involvement
- Complement existing initiatives (*fit*)
- Continuity to deal with staff changes
- Agreed and distinct budget and or funding
- Recognition, awareness and formalized support

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

- Capacity-building takes time. Think in terms of years from perspective of both partners
- Start small – links often start with individuals. Have a succession plan.
- Think strategically
- Avoid burdensome bureaucracy so people can still get on with their normal work.
- Promote regular and honest communication
- Regular reflection, feedback and evaluation with partners
- Manage expectations both internal and externally, setting goals and reviews.
- Confront prejudice, racism and paternalism
- Problems include; lack of commitment, scale of commitment and – perhaps most of all – change.
- relying on particular individuals or their specific contacts

Resource rich communities: specific issues

- Establish a relationship of mutual respect and shared learning
- Aim for compatibility of goals in the link
- Ensure richer partner does not dominate decisions – or conversely, that 'needs' do not dominate pragmatism from both sides.
- Understand the economic power imbalance – if it exists
- Avoid representations of partners as 'poor'
- Recognize differences in value systems and perspectives
- Engage with global issues and interdependence
- Be open to alternative approaches to problem-solving and management styles
- Consider what part money plays in the link
- How do we value non-monetary gifts?
- Ensure appropriate communication methods
- Recognise when a solution may not be culturally appropriate, or the infrastructure/resources make it inappropriate

Resource poor communities: specific issues

- Avoid a dependency mentality
- Understand constraints, limits and sacrifices made by other partner
- Understand ones own value to the partner
- Manage expectations of who travels where etc
- Ensure decisions include both partners
- Take time to establish relationship of mutual respect
- Consider costs and benefits of long-term partnerships
- Be open to alternative problem-solving and management styles
- Ensure contributions to the link are acknowledged and valued
- Strategic use of scarce resources

In due course, consider cross links to other organizations/individuals and how they may be managed. This is almost inevitable, but can often prove to be the most rewarding and beneficial outcome from linking.

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 Isobel Byrne-Hill and Jo da Silva (ARUP)
and Howard Jones (Eden Project)*