

Toolkit for Linking

Opportunities and Challenges

Faith Links

Supplementary leaflet to the set of core leaflets on linking.

Background:

Many faith communities have historic links with parallel groups in other parts of the world. These links have been maintained and built not despite, but rather as a consequence of, the movement of various Diaspora communities. As newcomer communities become more established, so links with communities overseas tied by faith have become strengthened. The commonality of experience has proven to be key in bringing communities together. Many faith communities have strong values in the way they engage with others, embrace family, friends, duty to each other, charitable giving and other commitments. These universal values often result in those from diverse faith communities also having common ground with one another.

Some faith communities have taken a proactive approach to formalising links, both through relief and development work and establishment of overseas representation. Many partnerships exist on a formal basis, but far more on an informal basis often family or geographically based. It is important that philanthropy and charitable intervention, is not seen as the sole basis for a strong sustainable link, as this can often be one-sided.

Opportunities: Linking can help your to:

- Promote understanding of different situations, challenges and possibilities.
- Offer opportunities for living 'in someone else's shoes' for a period of time through visits, particularly cross-faith visits.
- Offer one another expertise and resources that can bring enrichment to the partner's situation, for example exchanges of faith leaders.
- Enable mutual learning to occur and the exchange of good practice.
- Create a "safe space" for partners to challenge one another with respect.
- Offer insights into faith and life that the partner is unable to acquire without the help of 'the other'.

Checklist: The following should be considered in order to ensure optimum sustainability of the link.

- Build capacity within the communities engaged
- Help communities learn from each other cross-faith
- Build dialogue, tolerance, understanding and reduce tension
- Encourage understanding of the diversity of faith communities and their contribution to society in UK and overseas

Some questions to ask:

- How will the link operate when underpinned by the values of a particular faith community? What is unique in this?
- Will the whole community be involved?
- How will those of a different or no faith feel included?
- What is the link for?
- How will the link be sustained?
- How will information and views be shared?
- What role will money play in the link?

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

- A mutually agreed basis for the link
- Appropriate communication systems
- Appropriate organisational structure
- A willingness to see the link as a long term relationship not a short-term project.
- Involvement from grass roots to the senior levels of the community

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

- Check out regularly what each partner is receiving from the link
- Spend as much time on the maintenance issues as you do on developing the link
- Ensure that communication is regular, open and honest covering both the positive and challenging aspects of the link
- Take time to review regularly with your partner.

Resource rich communities: specific issues

- Is there an appropriate place for money in the link? If so, what is it and do your partners agree with your position?
- How do we find a language that can describe 'no monetary' gifts that partners offer in such a way that they are clear what we are valuing?
- Visits can deepen any link but how can you ensure they are not driven and controlled by the rich communities?
- How can rich communities modify their preferred communication modes (often mainly through instant, electronic, written means) with communities for whom the oral, story-telling tradition is more familiar?
- How do we ensure rich does not equate to control?
- What can be done to ensure relief and development are not seen purely as charity, regardless of the value in them?

Resource poor communities: specific issues

- How can money be a part of a link while ensuring that decisions continue to be made in an appropriate way?
- How do we 'put value' on and affirm the variety of 'non monetary' gifts that are available to both parties in a link?
- How do we ensure that the way decisions are made does not exclude all insights and opinions?

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)

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