

Supplementary leaflet to the set of core leaflets on linking

This leaflet covers additional information relating specifically to women's groups and organisations linking with other women's groups and organisations locally, nationally and internationally.

Background:

Linking for women's organisations and women's groups has always been a vital element of creating a critical mass of voices that cannot be ignored either by the general public or by policy and decision-makers. It is also a tool that if employed consciously can help organisations enhance their learning and understanding about the work they are doing by comparing it with like-minded organisations working on similar issues in different contexts.

It can also be a concrete and practical way of expressing solidarity, which is important when working on issues that can make women's groups feel rather marginalised within their surroundings and within civil society overall. Women, through their very womanhood, share a certain commonality of positive and negative experience which can often foster solidarity naturally between individuals and between organisations, across national and cultural boundaries. The sharing of this common experience can be a productive impetus for change.

Linking can take many different forms, all of which will have slightly different implications and outcomes. Experience shows that combining different elements, such as regular email contact, more formal written updates as well as exchange visits or joint events provides a solid base for learning and creating solidarity. The concept of empowerment is particularly important when it comes to linking women's organisations. Exchange visits particularly, enabling women to meet across national, regional and international borders, is an empowering process in itself; it opens up horizons and changes women's lives. Women who are exposed to such linking and exchanging become agents for change within their communities and the benefits have a ripple effect much further than it is possible to monitor.

Opportunities: Linking can help your organisation and/or group to:

- Compare strategies and approaches to tackling women's issues
- Create a (women's) movement for change that cannot be ignored
- Expose staff and members to new perspectives and ideas – fostering learning
- Create solidarity
- Review the values of your group/organisation and include linking as a key to achieving your strategic plan
- Expose your own organisation/agenda to a new audience
- Provide mentoring opportunities – woman to woman and organisation to organisation, through the use of the internet and/or face to face

Checklist:

- Are the broad values of the partners the same?
- Is there a clear understanding of the aims and objectives of the organisations/groups you are linking with?
- Has it been discussed at management level? Have you agreed regular review times?
- Have resources been allocated to enable the linking?
- Have you discussed the setting up of an agreement which would form the basis for the linking relationship?
- Have the objectives for the linking for each party been clarified and understood on both sides?
- Have you agreed how you will capture the learning and share it as widely as possible?

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

- It is important to have identified one person responsible for managing the link
- Commitment in terms of time and resources, particularly from the senior management of the organisation
- Integrated in annual work plan, which should also highlight whether you are intending to organise a joint event, have an exchange visit etc
- Means and routes of communication between linking partners need to be established

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 the link requires acknowledgement and awareness of:

- a clearly defined basis for a linking relationship and a joint understanding of the commitment, benefits and roles and responsibilities
- the need to regularly review the linking relationship
- the need to keep focused on the content of the learning as well as the process that enables the learning, i.e. the nature of the relationship
- the difficulties inherent in long-distance linking across linguistic divides must be addressed from the beginning

**Resource rich communities:
specific issues**

- power imbalance needs to be understood and addressed from the beginning
- means for achieving greater learning
- joint defining of the relationship is very important to reduce potential inequality
- enhancing knowledge base
- provide support to smaller women's groups and organisations enabling them to exchange and learn
- time needs to be spent on thinking how any learning will get shared and disseminated
- maximizing impact should lead to changes in usual ways of working
- support can strengthen resource-poor communities.

**Resource poor communities:
specific issues**

- linking and exchange is seen as a luxury
- need to be clear and specific about the benefits of linking
- need to be clear about costs involved in maintaining the relationship
- link may require extra funding
- opportunity to formalise arrangements
- helpful to take stock of usefulness of existing and new alliances
- need to be strategic about use of little resources available

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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