

THINK:

Review the current situation with partners.

REFLECT:

On the views of all participants, even those not closely involved at present.

QUESTION:

Explore why people may not be committing to the initiative as expected, there may be sound reasons that need to be addressed.

Checklist:

- ✓ Who is setting the agenda?
- ✓ Do you, and your partner, know where you are going?
- ✓ Have you reviewed the aims recently?
- ✓ Are as many people at both ends as involved as they might be?
- ✓ Does the current situation reflect a joint agenda?
- ✓ Have you discussed the pressures of the link on your partners recently?
- ✓ Have you looked carefully at the issues that have emerged during the link?
- ✓ Have you established opportunities for issues to be raised that might threaten or enhance the link?

Next steps:

- Remember that a constant high level of involvement and engagement cannot be maintained all of the time.
- Ensure co-ordinators are keeping in touch.
- Think about whether you might be able to engage the expatriate or diaspora community.
- Make sure everyone is aware of the pressures and demands which can affect the rate of progress.
- Plan for activities to cover the changes in pace.
- Make effective use of your Partnership Agreement to keep link on track.
- Ensure partner involvement in decision making and ownership of the link.
- Look at your regular evaluation and review as part of your linking cycle.

Linking: active partnerships

Successful linking in any field requires clear aims and objectives. Remember that linking should be a dynamic process covering:

- community involvement;
- awareness raising and education;
- principles of linking;
- policy and agenda setting;
- fund raising;
- co-ordination;
- accountability and
- evaluation.

The roots to a successful link can be seen in its inclusiveness in each of the partnered communities. The opportunities will have been taken to maximise the link's use of each community's human resources. Successful links are reciprocal with both parties benefiting.

All communities have a wide range of groups and institutions such as schools, health centres, university, fire service, library, as well as business and community groups, including associations for the marginalised, which can help to enhance and sustain the link.

Links should welcome new ideas which enhance the potential benefits. Exchanging ideas will help reduce the sense of isolation that can arise. Inclusion is more likely to ensure sustainability.

Linking is a challenging process and as in any relationship a partnership needs nurturing, but there is documentation to help you. There are established procedures and actions for you to consider and some general factors that can help links survive. Links are sustainable only when participants in the linked communities share common aims and objectives, understand the circumstances of their partner community and are realistic about the problems you are likely to face. Key elements for success are ensuring that your partners feel valued, that you share a joint agenda, consult widely and are inclusive within your communities. Do involve the diaspora or expatriate group in your partnership. They know their home country and can help maintain the link's momentum.

Evidence suggests that more links have failed than have been sustained, leaving disappointed parties at the other end. This is largely because the links did not value equity, mutuality, reciprocity and wider community participation. While longevity should be the aim within linking there is often a natural cycle in which, as long as the agreement is mutual, a limited term link may be appropriate.

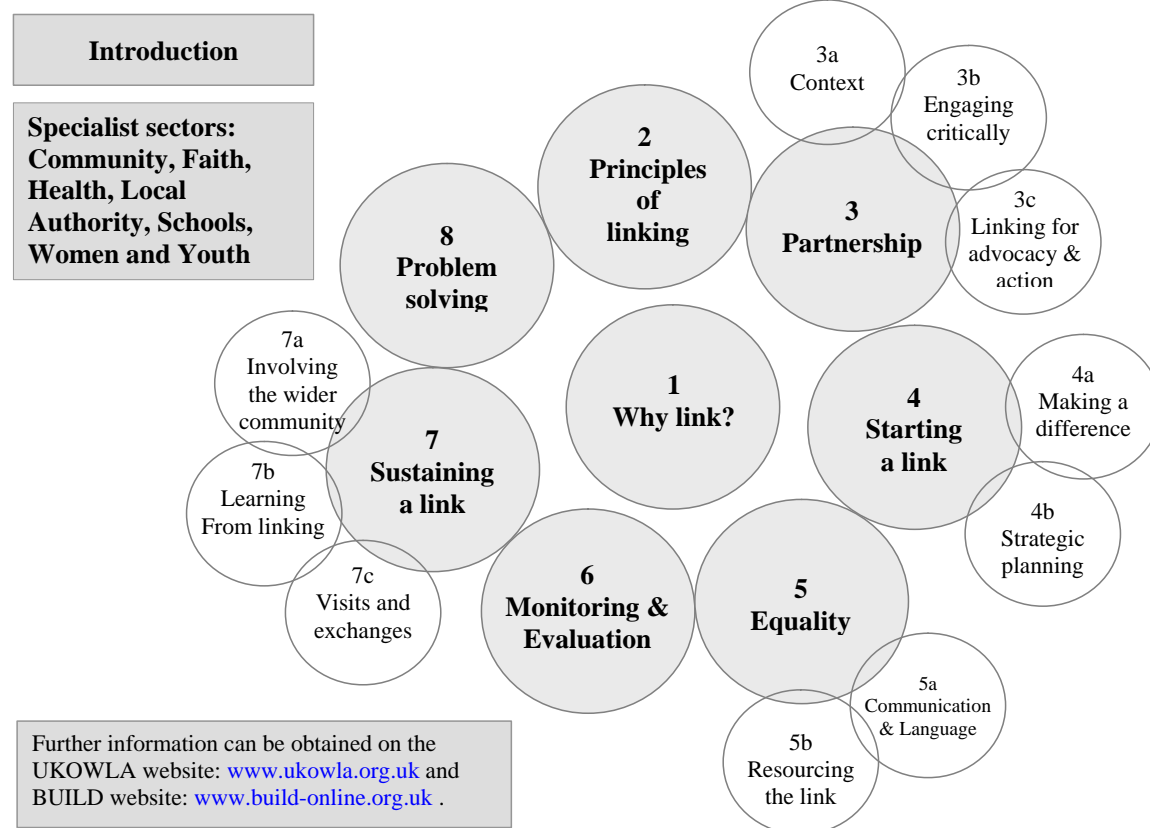
Every link is unique. Maintaining the same momentum within a link is not possible all of the time, the pace will inevitably change. But open communications with your partner and anticipating events can reduce the effects. Link partners must be able to resolve differences in a constructive way. With enough effort difficulties can be resolved and may strengthen the link.

Links often aim to establish a long-term relationship between two communities. This is a process that takes time, energy and effort. Change happens slowly. The essential element of trust takes time to develop. If possible visit others who have set up a link and talk to them about the challenges they faced, to learn how potential difficulties might be avoided. Be patient. Accept that things will go wrong and misunderstandings will arise.

The link co-ordinators are key to maintaining the relationship. They must be good communicators; flexible, open to change and willing and able to adapt and compromise. Investing time in consultation and energy in communication will help to strengthen the partnership. Recording the process can help you see how far you have come.

Visitors and visits can play a part in sustaining links as can utilising existing support networks, which help to increase communications and the sharing of ideas. Your local authority and the diaspora community, as suggested, may be able to provide technical or financial resources; you may find it helpful to keep them informed.

Toolkit for Linking leaflets



Introduction

**Specialist sectors:
Community, Faith,
Health, Local
Authority, Schools,
Women and Youth**

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

A clever person solves a problem. A wise person avoids it. *Albert Einstein*

What others say

Smooth seas do not make skilful sailors.
African saying

Of course we have made mistakes – so have our partners – false expectations, post colonial arrogance and subservience, mistaken assumptions ... but nevertheless, once we got to know our partners well enough to share our doubts and suspicions and to abandon our stereotypes, to see them as people, some easy to get on with, some nigh impossible, then real understanding could begin.

Tony Grey, Mayor of Marlborough, UK

We want to build up the relationships professionally for our mutual development.
Daniel Marandure, Tanzania

It is difficult to interest the people in the South in a movement whose practical advantages are not clear. There is neither time, nor money, nor energy in most Southern communities to engage in activities which do not improve the health, nutrition or education of the people.
Cecelia Obuya, UKOWLA conference 2001

We are talking about a partnership of equals. In development as in all linking, if inequality is inherent or apparent in the relationship then we should not call it a partnership.
Peter Nyoni, Oxfam Zimbabwe

Plan carefully, make sure you know what your partner wants, be patient, remember that overseas partners' politics are different from yours; and remember that we too have our images and stereotypes of Europeans.
UKOWLA partner discussion 1980.

When you get involved in a link it's amazing who comes out of the woodwork with the right skills.
Nick Maurice, UK

Honest disagreement is often a good sign of progress.
Mahatma Gandhi, India

Energy and persistence conquer all things.
Benjamin Franklin, USA

Continuity in linking: tips and ideas

Key linking characteristics for a successful link: Commitment; Community wide participation; Mutual understanding and respect; Equity; Mutuality of endeavour and sacrifice and Reciprocity
Links may be long term or short term initiatives.

Sustaining a link over time calls for a range of factors to be addressed.

Review: review the purpose of your link with your partner regularly. Be prepared to make changes.

Expectations: examine your own and your partners' expectations. Be as clear as possible. Be explicit about the benefits to all partners.

People: involve as wide a range of people in the planning as possible, including young people and women, and be prepared to listen. Show a genuine interest in your partners and community. Offer friendship and care for each other. Appoint enthusiastic and energetic champions, and 'back-ups', in both communities.

Partnership agreement: Review your Partnership Agreement or, if you do not have an agreement or Memorandum of Understanding, work with your partners to develop one. Consider using a facilitator.

Planning: planning should be a framework rather than a rigid template. Try to integrate various functions – people, finance etc into a coherent and consistent overall direction. Be clear about co-ordination and roles and responsibilities.

Scale: small is beautiful and a small project might be more effective than a big project that might fail because of its size.

Opportunities: explore expanding your link to include other groups within the community. Strengthen your link by involving visitors or members of your partner community within your own country.

Practicalities: ensure that practical issues are addressed: share holiday dates, community events, timetables and work programmes; and think about availability of simple resources such as pens and paper. Don't make assumptions. They can be dangerous.

Technical issues: think about the technical circumstances in other countries. Look into the compatibility of equipment. Partners may only have access to poor or non-existent telecommunications and postal systems. These may also be expensive.

Commitment: consider whether the necessary level of real support by participants still exists. Look at ways to revitalise and re-engage participants.

Communications: ensure your communications systems are as good as they can be and are being used. Recognise cultural barriers to open dialogue. Arrange face to face meetings if possible.

Share expertise: be open and honest with your partner about any difficulties and listen to theirs. Share your thinking and learning, build on the expertise of others and what others have developed.

Pressures: be aware of the pressures your partner is under and share your own pressure points. All links have a different rhythm and anticipating this is important. Remember that illness can be an ever present constraint and affect progress.

Linking organisations: organisations exist in a number of countries, which promote linking, but many communities do not have access to such support.

Networks: common interest, for example, health, or teaching, networks can also help to facilitate effective links.

Development Non Governmental Organisations can play a role in providing support and helping communications and processes.

Environment: environmental issues can spark reflection and action - locally, regionally and globally. Make sure you are aware of issues affecting your partner community.

Funding: consider applying for funds to further develop your link or to run a discrete project within your link.

Evaluation: review your monitoring and evaluation process to encourage honesty, transparency and openness on both sides. Ensure monitoring and evaluation of reciprocity.

Act now if there are problems with your link. There are no quick fixes and waiting is likely to add to the complications.

Who establishes a link?

North/South links are in most cases initiated from the North. There are several reasons as well as different opinions on the effect of this. One of the main reasons is the economic differences between communities in the South and in the North.

Communities in the South, especially away from the main cities have limited access to information and other resources that would enable them to link up with other communities in the North. There is also lack of a policy and commitment on the part of national authorities that would enhance the links. This lack of policy is usually a challenge to North/South linking because in most cases the North partner has their needs and goals fairly defined at the national and local level, while the South partner is usually not very sure what the whole thing is all about. This challenge is made even greater by the differences in access to information. The North partner uses many avenues to access information including donors, the Internet, other communities and they attend seminars and conferences where North/South linking is a topic.

It is important for participants especially from the North to be aware of these advantages/disadvantages so that they can avoid frustration due to lack of response. They can also avoid starting on the 'wrong foot' because of a lack of common understanding with their partner. The initiators should be aware that the burden of information and creating understanding about the link initially lies with them.

Take into account:

- Community priorities
- Expectations
- Availability of resources
- Policies

Taken from: Many small people – a manual in cross-cultural linking. Friendship North/South www.vennskap.no