

THINK BEFORE YOU LINK

REFLECT:

Think about the commitment needed to successfully establish and sustain a link.

QUESTION:

The level of involvement and understanding by members of the link group.

Checklist:

- ✓ Why are you trying to establish a link?
- ✓ What is the purpose of your proposed link?
- ✓ What are you hoping to achieve?
- ✓ Who will benefit most from the link?
- ✓ Have you thought about the potential implications of an unequal power relationship?
- ✓ Why is it important to link now?
- ✓ Do you have the necessary support to develop, establish and sustain a link?
- ✓ Have you considered the implications of time, energy and commitment necessary to establish a successful link?
- ✓ Have you explored any existing local or international links within your area, including existing Diaspora links?
- ✓ Have you thought about consulting a local diaspora, or expatriate group to help facilitate and give advice?
- ✓ Have you considered a link within your own country?
- ✓ Have you talked to those with experience of linking, both positive and negative?

Next steps:

- Ask everyone to list why they are interested in linking.
- Make a list of all of the reasons given for forming a link.
- Discuss the list of reasons.
- Ask someone who is unconvinced about linking to ask you questions.
- Consider how a partner might respond to the list.
- Consider the list in relation to the issues in this leaflet.
- Review the checklist opposite.
- Consider whether the alternatives to linking in the *Making a difference* leaflet would achieve your objectives.
- If linking is the agreed next step read the other leaflets in the Toolkit.

Background to linking:

Linking aims to create relationships between diverse cultures which benefits both partners.

The members are the people in each partner community who involve themselves in the link. They may be individuals or representatives of local organisations, such as a church, health or school, or local council. They will usually contribute their time and effort voluntarily.

People have always made links and friendships, though formal linking or 'twinning', as we use the term, began in the aftermath of World War II with the philosophy that if people got to know and understand each other, there would be less likelihood of conflict. It was seen by governments as a means to building bridges of understanding and confidence between peoples of nations which had been at war. Many cities and towns continue to "twin" in order to compare systems of government, and involve organisations and others, such as social and sports activities as well as enjoying each others' company.

A subsequent impetus to linking was given by the publication of the Brandt Report *North-South: a programme for survival* in 1980.

Over the years links have evolved so that the many different interests, activities and objectives within links means that there is no single model for linking. Each link is unique.

Global interdependence is a reality today. However the asymmetrical and complex nature of interdependence with the imbalance in the distribution of power, wealth and resources has to be recognised. Linking can help to promote genuine understanding and respect for each other's society and culture and can lead to greater international understanding and justice for all provided.

The UN has recognised this in 1971 with *Resolution 2861: international cooperation among communities is a natural complement to the cooperation of states.*

Linking is an evolving process. It may be a partnership between a town, or city, aiming at international solidarity; or it may involve a few individuals with a shared interest. Links involving different interest groups, or sections of the community, offer the opportunity for professional development, enhancing the educational agenda and shared working.

Linking offers opportunities to develop friendships, strengthen the local community and share ideas and resources to the benefit of all. It may offer opportunities for travel. It can bring a whole new dimension to everyone involved. At the heart of the link should be a desire for learning from others - learning about how other people live, work and understand the world.

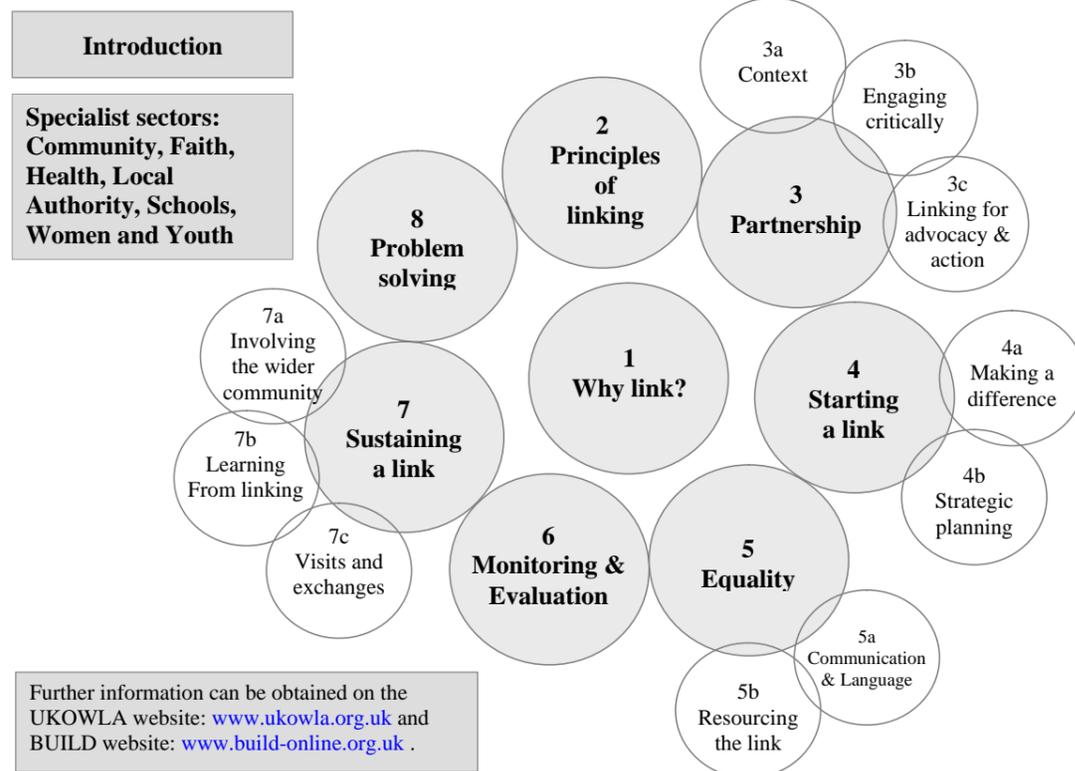
Successful linking:

- increases knowledge and understanding of global issues,
- broadens and deepens knowledge about other countries,
- develops friendships and feelings of solidarity with others,
- enables us to learn about self in relation to others
- strengthens the local community and challenges narrow and distorted ideas about other races and cultures.
- Is great fun!

However such benefits are not automatic. Linking is a complicated and time-consuming process. Without careful planning and consideration, linking can be patronising, reinforce racism and stereotypes on both sides, compound differences and result in a negative experience for participants. The *Principles of Linking* leaflet outlines issues such as inclusivity, collaboration, transparency and equality that need to be considered for a successful link. Furthermore, decentralised cooperation projects, such as those funded by the European Union focus more on know-how transfer and less on solidarity and mutuality and may only last as long as the funding for the link lasts.

For those who understand the commitment necessary to establish a successful partnership, linking is a life enhancing experience which can benefit all and even be great fun. Successful linking can provide a fresh and vital new outlook on life and how we understand the world.

Toolkit for Linking leaflets



What others say

The shaping of our common future is much too important to be left to governments and experts alone.
Willi Brandt, Germany

First you came to us as missionaries, then you came to us as colonisers, now you come to us as linkers.
Conference on linking, 2002

We are busy making our living ... every extra letter I have to write becomes a burden.
Stroud Consultation report, 1988

South-South links should be strongly encouraged. This will help communities in the South to learn from one another and to understand what it is that enables one community to do better than the other.
Stroud Consultation report, 1988

Communities are becoming more and more involved in combating social exclusion and poverty and other programmes which build peace through cross cultural understanding and international solidarity.
Nigel Ringrose, UNDP

Development will not be sustainable unless it originates from the concept of local development ... and is based on the efforts of the local population who respect priorities that they themselves define.
Abdou Diouf, President, Senegal

To know the road ahead, ask those coming back.
Chinese Proverb

Why do you want to link with an Indian community several thousand miles away, when you never say more than 'A Guardian please' to the Indian family who run the shop at the end of the road?
Community Link Newsletter, 1988

Ideologies separate us. Dreams and anguish bring us together.
Eugene Ionesco, Romania

Linking is not easy: most of us enter it without knowing much about it.
Stroud Consultation report, 1988

Why link?

The strength of linking is in the direct 'people to people' approach to addressing needs and solving problems. A partnership between two communities working together can be a short term or long term initiative. The benefits below apply to all successful links.

Links can contribute to:

- Awareness raising
 - Employment
 - Governance
 - Municipal management and city services
- Health
Education
Peace building
Capacity building
- Democracy
Anti racism
Gender awareness
Social Cohesion
- Contributing to fulfilment of the UN Millennium Development Goals (see Learning from Linking)

Personal development:

- enables us to experience different cultures and learn other systems of knowledge and values
- involvement of real people offers an insight into a different way of life and different outlook on life
- opportunity to establish friendships and relationships
- respect for self and others
- encourages us to think critically and challenge assumptions
- encourages different angles and perspectives: the big picture
- raises awareness and questions
- offers volunteer opportunities

Co-operation:

- strengthens relationships
- enables the sharing of information, ideas and experiences
- increases access to a range of expertise
- facilitates sharing of resources
- working together on solutions
- supports environmental work & Local Agenda 21;

Professional development:

- encourages development of new skills and experiences
- increases motivation and engagement
- leads to questioning of values and attitudes
- offers new challenges and focus in the work environment

Social cohesion:

- strengthens local community
- opportunities for inclusion for marginalised members of communities
- increases respect, understanding and tolerance
- raises community awareness of global issues
- challenging stereotypes

Education/Learning:

- increases knowledge of peoples, places and issues
- learning about real places enhances our understanding of the world
- in learning about others we learn more about ourselves
- effective way of learning, new ideas and ways of working
- challenges prejudice and raises equal opportunities

Solidarity:

- greater understanding leads to increased action
- supporting the work of a partner may help raise the profile of an issue
- working with a partner community reminds them that they are not alone
- a short-term link might be the result of a particular project or initiative such as Make Poverty History which brought people together to effect change on debt
- induces greater self confidence in the partners

Poverty reduction:

- Many activities in linking can lead to poverty reduction:
- opportunities for education
 - reduced infant and maternal mortality
 - skills training
 - small business activities
 - and more

And linking, can be and should be FUN.
If it isn't people won't do it!

Link locally first

One strong recommendation is that partners attempt to form a link within their own country as a first step. Links are assumed to be made with other countries, but linking across cultures within one's own country is an effective way of learning about others and the diverse nature of our own communities, challenging assumptions and helping to break down barriers.

Greater understanding and knowledge of other communities within our own countries is a positive development that can lead to greater social cohesion. Such links have the added benefit of enabling partners to experience linking within a more familiar setting where partners have access generally to common communications systems, greater understanding of the cultural, social and political context and easier travel opportunities.

Types of links:

Links may be bilateral, clusters or multilateral links with a range of partners or the whole community:

Community to community (C2C);

Friendship, Solidarity and Aid links; Trading and Fair Trade links. Friendship and cultural links; Sporting links; Rotary and Women's Institute; Professional links: individuals or groups from specific interest areas such as medical, academic or technical. Institutional links cover a wide range of institutions: Schools, Hospitals, Colleges, Religious establishments, Town hall twinning; City-to-city co-operation (also C2C); Municipal international co-operation; Decentralised co-operation (DC); Municipal technical exchanges;

Community wide multipurpose links may be composed of many groups linked through a shared interest in a specific area. Links may start as one type and evolve into another.

** Closing the Gap: a UN guide to linking communities across the globe for international solidarity and mutual benefit. Nigel Ringrose*