

Toolkit for Linking Opportunities and Challenges

Local Authority Links

Supplementary leaflet to the set of core leaflets on linking.

Background:

Many local authorities across the globe understand there are considerable benefits and opportunities to be gained from international partnerships. Increasing global awareness has led to more and more local authorities establishing partnerships with counterparts all around the globe but there is considerable potential for more partnerships to be made. Smaller town and district authorities are just as able to establish successful and mutually beneficial international partnerships as larger metropolitan and provincial authorities.

Local government linking can take many forms. The forerunner is the traditional 'town-twinning' link that brought together partners from Western Europe post World War II. Although historically these were often civic, cultural and education links, many partnerships have evolved to include more technical and innovative exchanges of expertise. Through these partnerships local government has encouraged the growth of local democracy, improved effective service delivery and community engagement, and they have contributed to combating extreme poverty.

Opportunities: Linking can help your to:

- **Institutional benefits** - improving service delivery by working on common issues; accessing funding through partnership working; developing useful links and networks of authorities; and enabling staff and Councillor development and training.
- **Citizen benefits** - increased tolerance and understanding between and within communities leading to better social cohesion; stronger community partnerships and community engagement; cultural enrichment; intercultural understanding and greater global awareness.
- **Sustainable development benefits** - local economic development; increased trade, tourism etc; community well-being; environmental improvements; and better links with the wider community (civil society, education sector, businesses etc).

Checklist:

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Develop a local strategic plan including: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the aims and objectives of partnerships and activities• how the aims and objectives will be achieved• list desired outcomes and benefits | <input type="checkbox"/> Find a partner - ensuring compatibility by an exploratory scoping visit/s |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Establish the rationale for the partnership | <input type="checkbox"/> Scope options for joint action and learning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communicate the rationale clearly to build local political, staff and community support | <input type="checkbox"/> Formalise the relationship through a charter or agreement |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Explore wider national and international context – assess national Poverty Reduction Strategies, UN national reports e.g. UN Development Programme | <input type="checkbox"/> Set schedule for activities – Assigning responsibilities for each function |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Follow up - Monitor activities, review procedures and improve as necessary |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> On-going communication of aims, objectives and achievements to the wider community. |

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

Setting up

- Prepare - talk to others involved in links with your partner country
- Take time - ensure both sides' objectives and expectations are compatible
- Grow at a steady pace - don't try to do too much too soon and risk burning out
- Focus - stick to agreed goals
- Persevere - be determined to succeed
- Reciprocity – ensure both parties have clearly defined their aims of the exchange
- Prepare arguments for possible opposition to linking by members of the community

Organisation

- Be strategic - an international strategy is needed to guide all overseas work;
- Allocate responsibility - a lead person or committee to drive the link forward, preferably with dedicated staff;
- Be creative - think of projects and events that capture people's imaginations
- Community involvement – to ensure better sustainability of the link and widen benefits

- Build commitment - use enthusiastic people to promote the partnership
- High level political support - crucial to promote and drive links
- Be realistic - don't set unachievable expectations at home or abroad
- Involve central government – include various government departments
- Consult international agencies e.g. UNDP and in-country donors' national offices
- Ensure broad involvement of local community actors
- Involve experts - use the skills of professionals, such as academics, engineers, health workers etc.

Communication and participation

- Accessible information - say what the partnership is doing, how and why
- Be proactive - anticipate criticisms and be prepared to justify the link
- Be open - try to understand the cultural context and needs

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

- Partnership image / perception
- Fundraising and human resources
- Accountability to partners and to domestic audience
- Managing different working practices and cultures
- Changes of staff and sustainability
- Different scales of commitment

Resource rich communities: specific issues

- Weigh up rationale for establishing the link – focusing on quality over the quantity of links
- Define the relationship jointly with your partner in the form of a Memorandum of Understanding or Partnership Agreement to minimise misunderstanding and ensure clarity of aims
- Take time to establish a relationship of mutual respect and shared learning
- Be open to alternative approaches to problem solving and management styles
- Recognise and appreciate different value systems and perspectives
- Take care not to lead the agenda
- Take time to investigate and understand the political, social and cultural background of your partner's country and the role of local government and its relationship to central government
- Place special emphasis on engaging / supporting more marginalised partner groups e.g. women, youth, indigenous people
- Consult with and understand priorities of in-country donor agencies e.g. UNDP

Resource poor communities: specific issues

- Weigh up rationale for establishing link – focusing on quality over the quantity of links
- Take time to establish a relationship of mutual respect and shared learning
- Define the relationship jointly with your partner to minimise misunderstanding and ensure clarity of aims by working together on a Memorandum of Understanding or Agreement
- Recognise and appreciate different value systems and perspectives and different role of local government and its relationship to central government in your partner's country
- Linking and exchange can be seen as a luxury therefore need to be clear about the aims and benefits of linking, as well as the time and costs involved in maintaining the relationship
- Be open to alternative approaches to problem-solving and management styles
- Link may require extra funding and resources to ensure continuity and wider impacts
- Weigh up costs & benefits of shorter technical exchanges versus longer term partnerships
- Be strategic and prioritise use of resources available