

4. Starting a Link

Links can start in a variety of ways, for example:

- o personal contact leading to a shared interest or enthusiasm which is developed through a link.
- o the desire to draw on the experience of another institution or organisation for development of a new activity, a new training course or some administrative or technical skills.
- o the need for access to laboratory or field work facilities which requires linkage with another institution.
- o as a result of a "top-down" approach, an initiative may come from a government or aid agency as a way of meeting a specific need included in an aid package, e.g. establishing base-line data about a population before planning an immunisation programme.
- o through a desire to extend or formalize an existing informal arrangement.

Frequently an individual or an institution which initiates the link will already know, perhaps, through a period of study abroad, or research articles, where useful collaboration can be arranged. On other occasions help might be sought through an aid agency or an organisation like the Commonwealth Secretariat in the identification of a suitable partner.

Links are likely to be long-standing and successful only when a real advantage to both parties is evident and where there is a genuine shared interest. Thorough and frank preliminary discussions between possible partners is essential as to how a link is seen as developing over time.

If a link seems feasible then a link agreement should be produced. This should state clearly the objectives of the link, and the time scale, the various activities of the link, the cost of the activities year by year, and in total, and the benefits seen from the link. Willoughby has pointed out that institution building for mid-career training will very often require a time

horizon of perhaps ten years rather than the normal three or five years of the usual project cycle. (Willoughby 1985).

Each partner should nominate a co-ordinator with a major responsibility for overseeing the activities of the link. It is important to remain conscious of the "enormous time investment required to maintain the momentum of a project while seeking financial support and planning the future" [Baker et al 1989 [2]].