

International Partnerships: A Case Study of Bo, Sierra Leone and Warwickshire, UK

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1. INTRODUCTION

This paper reviews examples of international partnerships and other international links and examines the challenges and benefits arising. Particular attention is given to international links being developed at local government level and to the opportunities these provide for more effective urban planning approaches. A case study of links between local authorities in Warwickshire UK and the city of Bo in Sierra Leone is discussed.

‘Think global - act local’ is a mantra with which we are all highly familiar. It has led to individuals and communities around the world becoming more aware of global responsibilities and benefiting from the cumulative effects of billions of individual actions at grass roots level. The growing number of international partnerships and other international links take this to another level – in short, ‘think global – act global’. We are becoming increasingly aware of global issues through globalisation of business, instant global communications, 24/7 global news reporting and climate change affecting the whole planet. International partnerships and links provide the opportunity to share experiences gained at the local level with others across the world with substantial mutual benefits.

‘Through linking, the complex and asymmetrical nature of global interdependence becomes evident as people from varying economic, political and social situations, connect and challenge each other’s understanding of the world. Improved security, justice, prosperity and peace are possible only once we have mutuality, reciprocity and respect and value the worth of others equally. ... Linking equips us to learn more ...’

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, 2007 (UKOWLA, 2007)

2. TYPES OF INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS AND LINKS

There are many different types of international partnerships and links including those between government bodies (national and local), professional bodies and civil society organisations.

Local Government Links

Local government in the UK has a history of international engagement dating from the 1950's when the traditional town twinning movement largely began. Twinning was initially between communities in western Europe and focussed on civic, cultural and education links. Since the late 1980's UK local authorities have actively supported countries in Eastern Europe and provided technical assistance to help municipalities prepare for EU membership. Increasing global awareness has led to a growing number of UK local authorities establishing partnerships with developing countries especially in Africa and South Asia. These partnerships have encouraged local democracy and effective local service delivery and have assisted wider efforts to tackle poverty in the developing world.

UK local authorities have statutory powers to engage in international activities. Potential funding sources include the British Council, the Commonwealth, UK Department for International Development, UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the World Bank. The UK Local Government Association (LGA) has estimated that approximately 60% of UK local authorities have an active international partner and engage in cooperation activities. The LGA recommends that each local authority becomes actively involved in international cooperation and adopts an international policy.

The Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) was set up in 1995 to provide a collective voice for local government in the Commonwealth to promote decentralisation and local democracy. Its web site is www.clgf.org.uk. CLGF promotes good practice, information exchange and capacity building through a variety of initiatives. At a wider international level CLGF represents the Commonwealth in working with bodies such as UN-HABITAT. CLGF manages a number of capacity building programmes at national, regional and pan-Commonwealth levels to help tackle poverty and help achieve the Millennium Development Goals. CLGF enables local authorities to work jointly on technical cooperation projects to share experiences and good practice, and build long term partnerships. A major initiative of CLGF is the Commonwealth Local Government Good Practice Scheme (GPS).

The GPS supports technical cooperation projects between local authorities around the world. The scheme began in 1998 and is now at the beginning of phase 3 which is expected to run through to 2011. The scheme to date has focussed on South Africa, India, Ghana and Jamaica although consideration is now being given to including Sierra Leone and Pakistan. The aim is to have lasting impacts on the communities and to use best practice examples as models for

future initiatives. In South Africa the focus of the GPS has been on local economic development, for example there have been project linkages between the Nkonkobe Municipality and Oxfordshire County Council and between the Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality and Lewisham Borough Council. As part of the GPS the CLGF is building up a data base of local government practitioners from across the Commonwealth who are willing to assist on international development projects.

Professional Links

Numerous professional institutions in the UK and elsewhere have international links, and there is a growing number of international bodies representing specific professional interests. For example, present at this conference are representatives of the Commonwealth Association of Planners (CAP) and the Global Planners Network (GPN).

'...sustainable urban development requires a complementary strategy of internationalisation by the planning profession. ... all [planning] associations can learn from the practices of others no matter the variations in levels of institutional development.'

Anna Tibaijuka, Executive Director UN-HABITAT, addressing RTPI Planning Convention, London, June 2007

CAP has a membership of some 25 countries from across the Commonwealth and provides a forum for sharing of planning experiences and a platform for taking action. CAP's website is www.commonwealth-planners.org.

GPN is an informal network of planning organisations that came together for the World Urban Forum and World Planners Congress in 2006 and is currently preparing for the next World Urban Forum in China later this year. GPN's website is www.globalplannersnetwork.org. GPN prepared the Vancouver Declaration which sets out a commitment for signatory planning organisations from around the world to work together to tackle the major global challenges of rapid urbanisation, the urbanisation of poverty, climate change and natural disasters. The Vancouver Declaration was accompanied by the paper 'Reinventing Planning' (Farmer et. al. 2006) which set out a new paradigm for managing urban settlements ('New Urban Planning') which would be better able to tackle global challenges. The Vancouver Declaration and Reinventing Planning are accessible on the GPN website. A closely related publication is the book 'Making Planning Work: A Guide to

Approaches and Skills' (Hague, Wakely, Crespin and Jasco, 2006) which presents planning case studies from around the world.

Other Linkage Organisations

The UK organisation Building Understanding through International Links for Development (BUILD) aims to mainstream international partnerships. Its members include an all party Parliamentary Group of MPs and a variety of public and private sector organisations as well as civil society organisations and NGOs.

The UK One World Linking Association (UKOWLA) is a group of over 300 community groups from around the UK who are committed to mutually beneficial partnership links between communities in the UK and other parts of the world particularly in Africa, Asia, Caribbean and Latin America. Its web site is www.ukowla.org.uk. UKOWLA has published a toolkit of good practice on linking which was launched by Archbishop Desmond Tutu in 2007 (UKOWLA, 2007). The Toolkit provides valuable practical advice about establishing and developing international linkages and partnerships.

3. A CASE STUDY OF BO, SIERRA LEONE AND WARWICKSHIRE, UK

Background

Two UK local authorities, Warwick District Council and Warwickshire County Council are participating in an innovative approach to link with Bo City Council in Sierra Leone.

Warwickshire is a county in the centre of England covering 762 square miles (1975 sq km) with a population of approximately 530,000. Warwick District Council is part of Warwickshire and includes the historic towns of Warwick (population 26,000) and Leamington Spa (population 46,000). Bo is a provincial city of 170,000 population in the Southern Province of Sierra Leone about 170 miles from the capital, Freetown.

Sierra Leone is making a remarkable recovery in a post-conflict situation following ten years of civil war. The recovery involved the establishment of a new local government structure in 2004 and is being driven by a very positive outlook from politicians, business and citizens.

Most of the people in Bo live on or below the poverty line. There is intermittent electricity, no piped water supply or mains drainage, and the city's health care facilities are inadequate.

The City Council has extremely limited financial resources, and only a handful of the paid staff are literate and none are planners. The city faces huge challenges in tackling urban poverty but on a positive note there is an absence of large squatter settlements that characterise some African urban centres.

Bo – Warwickshire Links

Bo has had a friendship link with Warwickshire communities for over 25 years as part of the One World Link organisation. The One World Link between Warwick and Bo Districts was set up in 2001 to foster understanding of life in an African country. The emphasis was on individual relationships and practical matters, rather than fund-raising and aid. The initiative was supported and assisted by District councillors, but there was no formal civic link initiated at that stage. The informal relationship has continued ever since.

In 2001, after the civil war, a new initiative was established to explore potential for links between Warwickshire and Bo City Council. This led to Warwickshire County Council and Warwick District Council agreeing more formally to explore a development partnership with Bo. Water and waste management and financial management were identified as themes for action. As a result, a survey of Bo's water needs was carried out by one of the Warwickshire County Council's private sector partners and a waste management audit has been undertaken.

A recent visit took place (November 2007) in which five professionals from Warwickshire with skills in planning, environmental health, waste management, finance and governance visited Bo to meet their professional counterparts. The visit was funded by CLGF and led to the preparation of an action plan discussed later in this paper.

Planning in Bo

The legislative basis for all planning in Sierra Leone is the 1946 Town and Country Planning Act. All planning functions in Sierra Leone are currently carried out by the national Government. However under the Local Government Act 2004 various national functions are to be devolved to local government including the preparation of 'Land Use and Strategic Local Plans'. The 2004 Local Government Act identifies a timescale for decentralisation, although in Bo there is uncertainty over the timing of this in relation to planning. To help ensure that decentralisation is effective there needs to be adequate capacity at the local level

and a redefinition of practice at the centre.

The current statutory responsibility for planning is with central government which has a regional office in Bo. There is only a very rudimentary planning system in operation at present and most development takes place in an ad hoc way without formal consent.

Because of the lack of resources and planning skills the city's ability to operate effective land use planning has been limited. This has led in many cases to inappropriate land uses occurring close together. The most obvious example of this is the central dump, which is a large and active refuse disposal site in the heart of the city adjoining a food market and people's homes. Also, there are examples of refuse sites and markets being located adjacent to rice growing areas where there is a threat of contamination.

Bo City Council has prepared the Bo Development Plan 2006-2008; an excellent document providing a three year strategy for the Council's activities. This was prepared in consultation with the local population through Ward Committees and local Chiefs. The Plan which was based on a needs assessment has a prioritised list of objectives, a programme of projects, indicative budgets and processes for monitoring and evaluation. The participative way in which the Plan was prepared and is proposed to be updated is a particular strength. The Plan reflects aspects of the new public sector management in the city, but it does not have any spatial basis or take a long term view.

Bo Development Plan 2006 – 2008

Objectives include:

- Upgrading of roads and parking for motor bikes
- Improved health and education
- Construction of civic centre
- Improved water supply and sanitation
- Provision of funeral home
- Women empowerment and youth involvement
- Efficient refuse disposal
- Street lighting
- Sporting facilities

Food self sufficiency

“The overall goal of the Plan continues to be, to reduce poverty, ensure sustainable growth and provide improved quality services for all within the framework of an open and inclusive democratic system.” Dr Wusu Sannoh, Chairman, Bo City Council.

The City Council is now looking to prepare a spatial local plan with a strong lead being provided by the Mayor. To assist with this there is a need to seek improved resource capacity and skills in planning and also improved base mapping of the city. The central dump, whilst being one of the city’s most acute problems also provides one of its greatest opportunities. If a mechanism could be found to secure its removal then the site of the dump in the very heart of the city provides potential for commercial developments as well as social, community and recreation uses to benefit all citizens. Before this can happen however, there needs to be an effective alternative waste management facility.

Warwickshire / Bo Action Plan

The Warwickshire team together with Bo colleagues, including the Chairman and Chief Executive of Bo City Council have produced a three year Action Plan which identifies areas for further professional cooperation and potential sources of funding support. The Action Plan focuses on establishing effective waste planning and management, improving financial systems, removing the waste dump in the heart of the city, improving mains water supply and establishing a community focussed city wide local plan.

The Action Plan identifies a number of actions to help the provision of planning services and in particular the preparation of a local plan. To secure additional professional and technical support consideration is being given to assistance through the CLGF Good Practice Scheme, VSO and similar initiatives. The City Council already has a VSO officer working in the finance team and so is familiar with this kind of approach. However there may be risks arising from an approach which involves external support for a relatively short period of time. To support the initial baseline work associated with the local plan it is important to have mapping information available – there is only limited mapping at present and investigation is taking place to assess the availability of GIS and satellite imagery. The preparation of a local plan will benefit from the existing top level support in the Council combined with the strong ward committee structure and a history of community level involvement in the Bo

Development Plan.

During the visit to Bo direct training was undertaken in local government financial management and this has already led to improved systems and significant financial benefits. The Action Plan identifies a number of areas for continued development of the financial systems.

Waste management is a key focus of the Action Plan and a number of initiatives linked to improved waste management across the city are identified. These include developing a new approach for waste collection, and provision of additional plant and associated training. Initiatives based on new sources of income generation from waste related activities are also identified.

The Action Plan identifies a number of areas for skills development. It is hoped that a senior environmental health official in Bo will be able to benefit from a Commonwealth Scholarship programme – and there is potential for others to participate including planners. Also, opportunities for member training and training in community development work are being identified.

This project is being looked at as a model for others to follow and there is potential for future support under the CLGF Good Practice Scheme.

4. BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF INTERNATIONAL LINKAGES

International partnerships and links provide many benefits and challenges. Common benefits include achieving greater awareness of a diverse, complex and interdependent world. These help lead to mutual respect for cultural, social and religious diversity as well as to improved social cohesion and community well being. Where there are linkages between local authorities there is potential for improved local government delivery across a wide range of service areas including planning.

The benefits from linkages and partnerships also occur at an individual level through improved personal and professional development. The best partnerships are two-way and where the benefits to northern partners are identified and valued as part of the process.

International partnerships and linkages are commonly aimed at tackling specific issues and in this way can help bring benefits in addressing deep seated problems such as urban poverty and poor education. Also they can avoid the disadvantages of short term technical assistance which may focus on short term issues and be less culturally sensitive.

Set against these benefits are a number of major challenges including:

- How to ensure that benefits are a two way process between all parties
- How to achieve benefits for the long term
- How to learn from individual initiatives so that others can gain
- How to overcome severe financial and human resource constraints
- How to ensure that structural underlying problems are addressed

There is clearly still much to learn for achieving effective international partnerships and linkages which can overcome the above challenges.

5. CONCLUSIONS

As globalisation continues and as we better understand the nature of global ecosystems, climate change, world poverty and urbanisation, it becomes increasingly important to take an international and global view as individuals and planners. Many of the major challenges we face can only be successfully tackled by taking a global perspective.

Within the planning profession, the Commonwealth Association of Planners, the Global Planners Network and others are showing how we as planners can use our skills to address global challenges.

This paper has identified a range of international partnerships and links - many being developed between local authorities in the Commonwealth and beyond. The experience of the Warwickshire – Boleyn link has demonstrated how the sharing of professional expertise can make a real difference and can help address deep seated problems bringing widespread community benefits.

International links between peoples from across the world – north/south, east/west, rich/poor, play a vital role in encouraging and achieving positive attitudes to different cultures. Cooperation and partnership are increasingly recognised as vital ingredients in

sustainable development - locally and globally.

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KEY WORDS

International, partnerships, government, commonwealth, Bo, planning