



Strategic Linkages Events

Complex social problems in relief and development require whole systems interventions and coordination between a variety of actors. Root Change's *Strategic Linkages* events are customized, facilitated processes that bring multiple stakeholders together across traditional boundaries in order to discuss a topic of common interest with the purpose of informing a strategy for future direction, generating breakthrough solutions, laying a foundation for new partnerships, and creating a climate for joint action.

A Strategic Linkages event works through structured dialogue techniques that promote collective understanding of a specific challenge and allow for capturing a diversity of perspectives around a set of key questions - often related to collaboration itself. Furthermore, Root Change employs a range of facilitated activities that promote the formation of new linkages and the strengthening of existing ties, such as Social Network Analysis (Root Change's innovative approach to mapping and analyzing interactions among stakeholders) to understand and benchmark current connections, 'speed networking' activities, and collective action planning. As such, Strategic Linkages events are valuable in contexts where there is need to align diverse stakeholders around a complex challenge for coordinated response and / or at the onset of an initiative where collaboration is essential to its success.



A Strategic Linkages event in Chennai, India

In the tsunami-affected region of Indonesia, our team facilitated a Strategic Linkages event on behalf of large international NGO on the topic of making a successful transition from relief to development following the massive international tsunami response, in particular as international actors - and funds - were beginning to exit the area. Coordination in the region was weak, with each stratum of the relief effort working in relative isolation and very few horizontal and vertical linkages in place. Local NGOs in particular were feeling the destabilizing effects of having been subsumed by international NGOs for the relief effort and all actors were concerned about the sustainability of current projects. The Strategic Linkages event brought together local NGOs and networks, INGOs, local government, and the national rehabilitation authority – many of whom had never previously had the opportunity to collaborate - to discuss the challenges they were facing and to develop strategies for achieving long term development objectives. The event yielded a joint

action-plan that highlighted the role of all actors in taking coordinated steps towards a responsible and successful transition from relief to development.

In Malawi, our team held a Strategic Linkages event with its local partner CADECO as part of a USAID-sponsored study of the capacity of civil society in Malawi to respond to the HIV/AIDS crisis. The two-day event convened local and international NGOs, umbrella organizations, donors, national government representatives, and media in order to better understand the challenges and opportunities facing civil society organizations in Malawi. Knowledge forums were held to discuss coordination in the HIV/AIDS sector, and a full day was devoted to networking activities that included: a facilitated Organizational Network Analysis survey to map current sector-wide interaction and relationships, a debriefing and discussion of the results, a 'speed networking' activity, and a trade fair venue in which organizations shared their work. Reinforcing Root Change's approach that assessments should be transformational, the Strategic Linkages event not only provided critical data for the sector study through the Organizational Network Analysis and related focus groups, but helped to build new relationships among those in attendance and served as a forum for sharing successes from past networked initiatives.

Root Change's facilitation techniques for group decision-making draw on convergent and divergent thinking processes (Kaner 2007), scenario-based discussion activities, ORID conversation methods (Institute of Cultural Affairs' Technology of Participation (ToP) Method), and PRA tools for capturing and documenting group perspectives.

While each event is tailored to the specific needs of the client and may be comprised of a variety of components, Root Change's Strategic Linkages approach delivers the following:

- Encourages breakthrough solutions to complex problems by challenging entrenched thinking and insular approaches
- Lays a foundation for mutual understanding, aligns diverse stakeholders around an issue, and builds consensus around a shared vision
- Increases social capital among participants
- Raises the profile of the importance of networked approaches to complex social problems
- Provides a foundation for strategy development and action-planning

For more information on how you and your partner organizations can take advantage of Root Change's Strategic Linkages services, please contact Jacob Gray at jgray@rootchange.org.