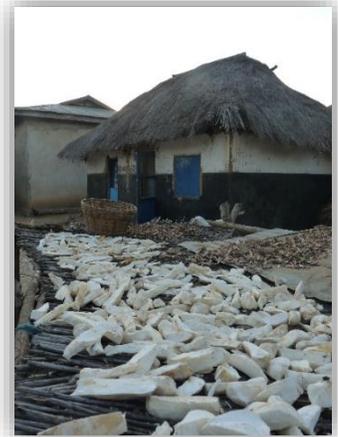


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# THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE IN ATSIKPOE-BATTOR

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Process Report

Strength & Problem Identification and Action Prioritization in  
the eco-tourism village Atsiekpoe-Battor,  
Volta Region, Ghana

November 2014

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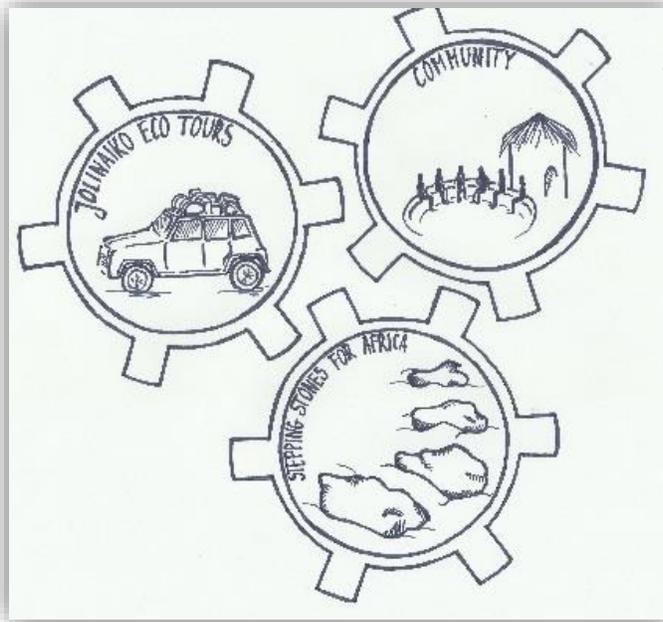


**stepping stones  
for africa**

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# 1. Introduction



This report describes the kick-start event of the newly transformed Stepping Stones for Africa Foundation (SSFA). The foundation is active since 2006, but decided to rejuvenate the organization in 2014 by attracting new board members, who are living and working in Ghana and consequently are more connected to the West-African context, and by adapting a new strategy whereby they operate in a public-private partnership with the Ghana-based tour operator Jolinaiko Eco Tours (JET). The mission of this partnership is to provide stepping stones-like guidance, expertise, inspiration and funding for community-initiated eco-touristic initiatives and destinations in West Africa. The ultimate

aim is to contribute to their development, make them a success for all parties involved while respecting the environment, and thereby significantly improve the quality of life of the inhabitants of the community. The target communities are potential or existing eco-tourism destinations.

Community participation is the main concept under the new strategy. Initiatives are community-driven and communities play a major role in decision making during each phase of the project cycle. This reports describes the identification and prioritization phase of the first appraisal conducted in the rural community Atsiekpoe in North Tongu District in the southern part of the Volta Region in Ghana. SSFA and JET have both been working with the people of Atsiekpoe in the past. They have built strong and positive relationships, and as they strive towards long-term relationships, they decided to select Atsiekpoe as a pilot location for their new approach. Actually, the new SSFA approach were we work in partnership with JET and the community was inspired by the way we have been working with Atsiekpoe since 2006.

The ultimate aim of the Community Development Initiative in Atsiekpoe is to contribute significantly to the quality of life of the people in Atsiekpoe by supporting community-driven initiatives, and at the same time, adding value to Atsiekpoe as an eco-tourism destination in general. The purpose of this particular appraisal was to mobilize the community and to facilitate a process whereby the community identifies the areas where development and intervention is mostly needed. The outcome of this appraisal determines the focus of future development initiatives carried out under the tree-legged partnership between SSFA, JET and the community as illustrated in Figure 1. This appraisal is the first step of the project cycle as illustrated in figure 2.

The funding structure adopted under the new strategy explains that the first phases of each appraisal (identification, prioritization, planning and design) are funded by JET, SSFA and the beneficiaries which means in most cases the community. JET covers the organizational cost like vehicle rental, accommodation, food and if necessary tokens that need to be paid. SSFA board members facilitate on voluntary base and the community contributes where possible in hosting the event. External funding is solely used on direct project cost, and depending on the scope of the project for facilitating the implementation, monitoring, adaptation phase.

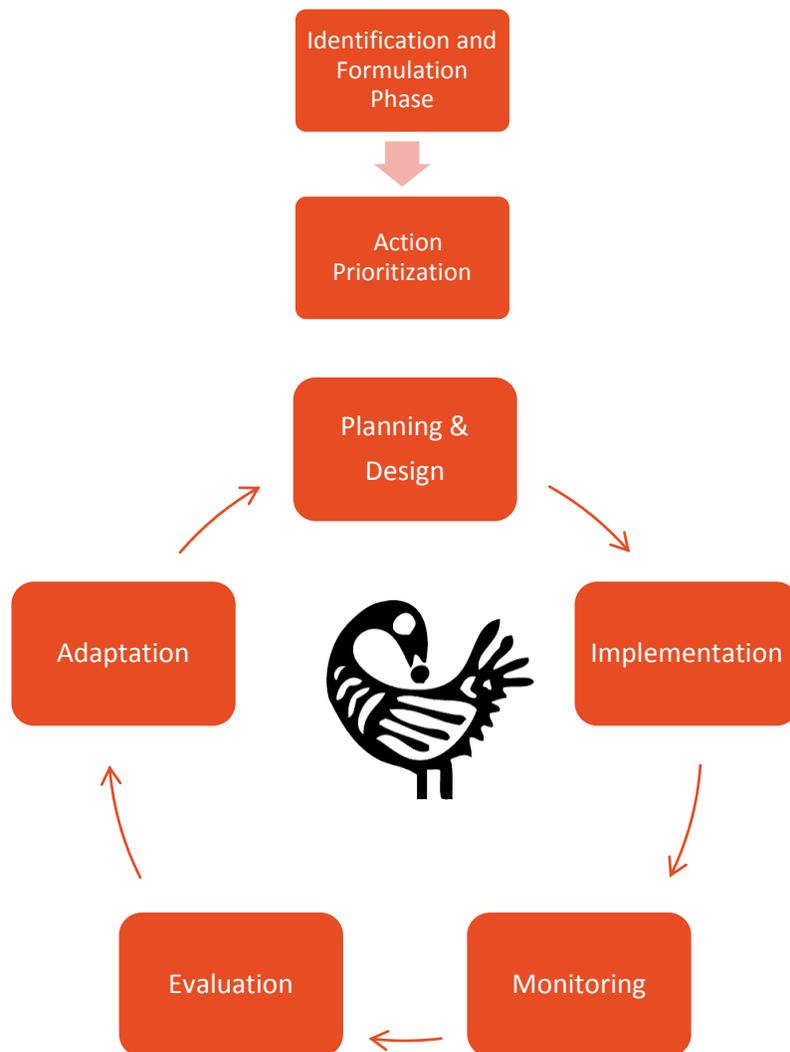


Figure 2. Draft image of the SSFA project cycle for community development initiatives.

## 2. Objectives and Outline of the Appraisal

The main objectives of this first participatory phase was: (1) to identify the specific development needs in Atsiekpoe and (2) to prioritize these areas for intervention. Additionally, (3) to evaluate the participatory methods and tools used during this assessment. SSFA decided that, under the strategy, every partnership in a community starts with an appraisal and that we develop a manual that sets a standard for all the appraisals carried out by SSFA in the future. Therefore, the participatory project cycle in Atsiekpoe could be seen as pilot project and a learning experience for all parties involved. As stated in the Introduction, the outcome of this phase will determine the focus of future interventions.

Concerning the organization of this appraisal, the community was informed prior to our coming. Key people were asked to select 20 community members of various clans, ages and gender in order to have a representative group of participants. The necessary customs were conducted the evening before by greeting the chief, pouring libation and letting people know that we were around. The community heads decided upon the Cashew Village Lodge as the meeting ground, and set a time 8.00 am.

The appraisal was structured around three participatory exercises:

	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Output</b>
<b>The Past</b>	A Participatory Community Meeting	To obtain information on the development Atsiekpoe has experienced since Jolinaiko Eco Tours first came to Atsiekpoe in 2004. What actions have been undertaken? By whom? What are the results and impact they have made? Are there any other stakeholders involved, or other initiatives that have contributed to the development?	Base-line information on the history, local structures, actors and stakeholders, and assets and achievement indicating the state of development.
<b>The Present</b>	A Community Territory Transect Walk	To explore the community and to generate discussion on the current developments issues. To locate assets and areas that are noteworthy in regards to development.	Community map indicating noteworthy assets and areas related to development in either positive or negative sense.
<b>The Future</b>	Identifying and Prioritizing Development Needs	To create a list with development needs derived from the presentation of the community transect walk map. To prioritize the most urgent needs	A base for the short- and long-term planning of development activities.

## 3. Outcome of the Appraisal

### 3.1 Kick-off and introduction

The appraisal started at 9 am with roughly 20 members (males/females). The advantage was the presence of Atsiekpoe youth who have migrated to Accra but came to Atsiekpoe to attend a funeral.

After the introduction was made by Cindy Noordermeer-Panou (JET), Margriet Reinders (SSFA) introduced the purpose and content of the workshop. All the group members introduced themselves with their name and profession(s).



The symbol of the Sankofa Bird is drawn on the wall of one of the buildings of the Cashew Village Lodge. It's a powerful Adinkra symbol and Margriet made wisely use of this by linking the purpose of the appraisal to the meaning of this symbol: "Go back not to forget, and take the egg from the past into the future". This makes sense as everybody is familiar with this symbol.

After the introduction, she emphasized that even though we are all farmers, we have many other professions among ourselves which means that we have a lot of expertise in trading, fishing, carpentry, construction, teaching etc. This was an empowering remark.

### 3.2 Visualizing the Past – A Participatory Community Meeting

The first exercise was introduced with a question. ‘What happened after Jolinaiko Eco Tours came to Atsiekpoe for the first time?’ They were asked to explain the development Atsiekpoe went through from that moment till this date. This question needed clarification as most inhabitants of Atsiekpoe know Jolinaiko Eco Tours by the name of the two people behind, Apollo Panou and his wife Cindy who is also known as Mama Duneny, as she was stooled as a ‘Development Queen Mother’ in 2009. Every verbal contribution in the discussion was visualised with a symbol. The two shells in the middle visualised Jolinaiko Eco Tours. All other items on the ground illustrated the entire input of the participants in the discussion. Table 1 and 2 list all the concepts that were mentioned.



**Pictures: Visualising the Past**

### Concepts directly linked to the presence of JET in Atsiekpoe

<b>Unity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• JET brought unity. Atsiekpoe means ‘Land good for Cashew Farming’ and they brought back the cashew tree by planting it in the community and the lodge. Unity was mentioned a second time. There’s strength in unity, because of that people are coming.</li></ul>
<b>Tree Planting</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• JET planted trees and we are now enjoying mango in our houses.</li></ul>
<b>Electrification Sanitation (KVIP)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• JET assisted us in making electricity poles</li><li>• JET sponsored the construction of a 9-seater KVIP at the Primary School</li><li>• JET sponsored the construction of 8 2-seater household latrines</li></ul>
<b>Waste-Management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• JET created awareness about the importance of keeping the environment clean, collecting and burning plastic bags.</li></ul>
<b>Tourism Infrastructure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• JET supported the construction of the tourist reception and museum</li><li>• JET created a guesthouse thus tourists stay in Atsiekpoe</li><li>• JET supported the construction of a canoe.</li></ul>
<b>Transport</b>	

### Concepts indirectly linked to Jolinaiko and Tourims

<b>Signboard</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A signboard ‘Welcome to Atsiekpoe’ was raised to ensure that people are not brought to another village.</li></ul>
<b>Electrification Projects</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Community raised funds and used community labour to construct concrete poles. JET also donated a pole.</li></ul>
<b>Livelihood activities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Various livelihood activities were mentioned – fishing, construction, charcoal making, basket weaving, black smith, farming (groundnuts, corn and vegetables around the house). They mentioned that tourist come to see it.</li></ul>
<b>Traditional Medicine</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Traditional herbs used to overcome health issues</li></ul>
<b>Cultural Fundraising Festival and Drumming Group Community Labour</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• There’s an annual festival and cultural group that performs and generates funds.</li><li>• Normally 80% of the people respond to community labour.</li></ul>
<b>Chief and Elders Atsiekpoe Migrants</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Chief and elders play an important leading role</li><li>• Many people left Atsiekpoe but still participate and contribute in development.</li></ul>

### 3.3 The Present – A Cross-Cut Transect walk

The objective of the transect walk was to obtain a clear impression of the present Atsiekpoe, to identify and locate the developments versus underdevelopments and to identify development needs and potentials. The participants were divided into two heterogeneous groups. Participants were asked to explain or mention all the aspects that are important to them either positive or negative. Each group was assisted by a facilitator, Margriet or Cindy, who facilitated the discussions during the walk, and by Petra or Emillia who sketched everything that was said. Based on these sketches, a larger map of the walk was drawn. These maps identify and locate all the concepts that were mentioned and were presented to the group by one of the participants. The outcome of the transect walk is visualised in the last two pictures of this paragraphs (Map1 and Map 2).

The two routes of cross-cut transect walk:

- Group 1: from the riverbank to the museum and the central square through various compounds to the edge of Mr. Tamaklo's compound.
- Group 2: from behind the Cashew Village Lodge through the farmland to Mr. Ameko's compound, Rasta's house, the JHS, Michaels Cassava Mill to Togbe Akati compound.



***Pictures: The Transect Walk***



### 3.4 The Future –Identifying and Prioritizing Development Needs

Much information was shared during the presentations; however, this report focuses on the development needs that derived from these discussions. The participants were asked to filter the development needs for Atsiekpoe from the two maps that were presented. The topics that were mentioned are listed in the tables below including the explanations given by participants.

Development Needs filtered from Map 1	
<b>Absence of a Clinic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “The nearest health post is the Catholic Hospital in Battor which is not easily to access from Atsiekpoe”. They specifically mentioned the poor quality of the water they drink and use for bathing resulting in diseases. They specifically mentioned the disease causing ‘black urine’ and the struggle pregnant ladies go through before delivery.</li> </ul>
<b>No portable drinking water</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “The water we drink is of bad quality, it comes straight from the river where we wash and bath”. Sand pumping machines operate just opposite the river.</li> </ul>
<b>No Street Light</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “No light alongside the main path to the river, but necessary for safety reasons and convenience”. “We could not receive guest in the darkness”</li> </ul>
<b>Access Roads</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “The paths are narrow and cars cannot pass through the town”</li> </ul>
<b>Poor maintained KVIP’s (bad maintenance culture)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two KVIPs were identified. One was in terrible state and cannot be used anymore. This indicates a poor maintenance culture which should improve since this is very important if you want to work with development partners like SSFA.</li> </ul>
<b>Irrigation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “We depend on rains for irrigation, and don’t use the river for irrigation”.</li> </ul>
<b>Work</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “The museum is nice” but we need work is what one the women said.</li> </ul>

Development Needs filtered from Map 2	
<b>Lack of Palm Trees</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “We use palm branches for weaving, and we normally take or buy them from palm trees on our own or neighbours farms. We sometimes experience a shortage.”</li> </ul>
<b>Lack of KVIP</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Not every compound has a KVIP”</li> </ul>
<b>Lack of electricity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Not every compound has electricity”</li> </ul>
<b>Poor drinking water</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “We do rain harvesting and drink it straight from the pot or from the river.”</li> </ul>
<b>No Clinic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “We need a clinic, the hospital is too far.”</li> </ul>
<b>Technology</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They showed “Rasta’s innovative project of wood and tin to grind cassava. He also built an extra-ordinary</li> </ul>

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**Waste Management****Irrigation**

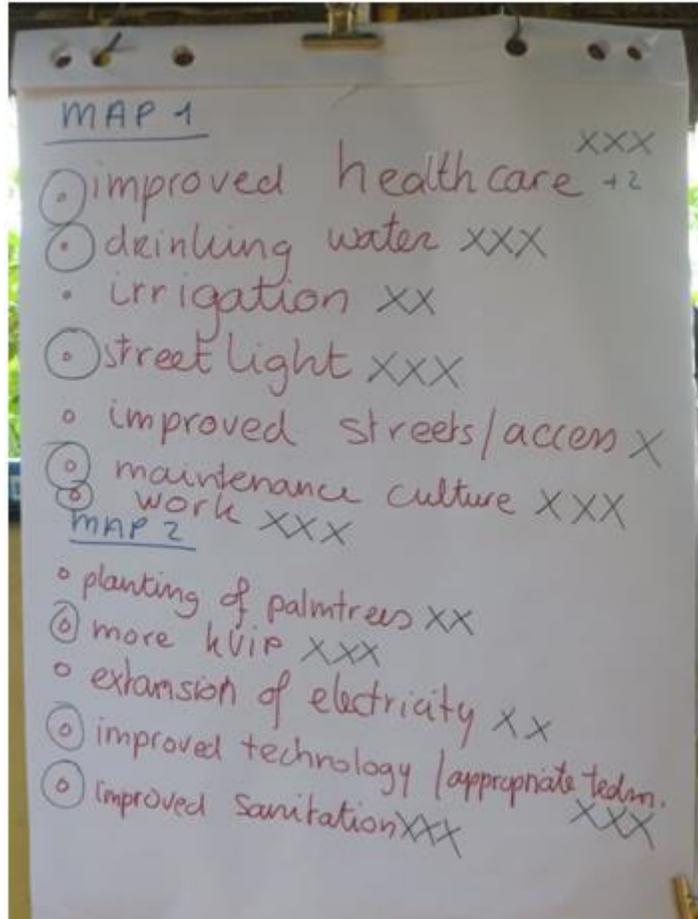
thatched-roofed house. “We really like him, he is so creative and tourist like it as well”.

- The community was relatively clean, however there were areas polluted with plastic bags.
  - “We depends on rainwater for farming, and we don’t have resources to invest in irrigation”
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After listing the development needs mentioned above, the participants prioritized these needs. They were asked to assess these needs from a combined perspective of the community, the tourist and Jolinaiko Eco Tours rather than from their own personal perspective. Every stakeholder should have interest in the development of each particular topic.

The items that were highly prioritized (3 stars) as most important development needs were:

1. Improved Health Care
2. Safe drinking water
3. Sufficient streetlights
4. Maintenance Culture
5. Work/Jobs
6. Sufficient household latrines
7. Appropriate Technology
8. Improved Sanitations (waste-management)



### 3.5 The Next Step – Planning

The prioritising exercise was the final activity of the first appraisal. The next step should be taken by the community members who were asked to follow up by organizing a meeting and discuss the outcome of the appraisal with the people who were absent. Together they should draw a calendar for the next two years (2015-2016) indicating when they like the specific topics to be addressed, since all these topics could not be addressed at the same time. After they have accomplished this step and contacted Cindy, SSFA will follow up with a second appraisal focused on further planning and project design, the next steps of the project cycle. There is also a need to brainstorm together on potential funding sources, both internal and external.

Some interventions demand significant financial resources whilst other issues could be tackled by behaviour change and/or at relatively low cost. SSFA strongly advised the community to sit together as soon as possible and to plan the follow-up meeting before the end of 2014.

## 4. Observations and Conclusions

This paragraphs describes some observations made and conclusions drawn by the facilitators which are worth mentioning in relation to the outcome of the first appraisal.

The first exercise indicated that Jolinaiko Eco Tours has made significant impact in Atsiekpoe. The participants shared a lot of information on the developments that happened after their coming. They shared this information without hesitation and with enthusiasm. They spoke about the tangible results, such as a village-lodge, museum and house-hold latrines etc. Interestingly, they also mentioned and valued the role Jolinaiko played in creating unity in the community and awareness on the need of waste-management, tree-planting etc. The trust they showed in Jolinaiko Eco Tours is promising for future relationships. The sounded very positive about Atsiekpoe being an eco-tourism destination and receiving guest seems to be a pleasure.

The absence of health care facilities in the community is their major concern. Even though the well-known Battor Hospital is not far, crossing the river is seen as a major obstacle. From the input of the appraisal, we understand that there is no health post or community health worker in Atsiekpoe and surrounding communities. The major health concerns that were mentioned were diseases caused by drinking directly from the river and the difficulties women go through during pregnancy. An appraisal focused on health care need to be organized in order to obtain more insight in the health related problems and needs in Atsiekpoe. Another remarkable observation was the need for better health care mentioned by the fetish priest, which shows that there is a belief in both the traditionalist and the regular medical services, and that the traditionalist himself also respects the regular medical services.

Lack of work causing poverty is another concern. Remarkably, interventions to assist their current livelihood activities, such as irrigation for farming and tree planting for basket weaving, were not prioritized as very important. Jolinaiko Eco Tours seems to be the only active development partner, no other organizations or government bodies were mentioned in relation to development in Atsiekpoe except from community members, community labor and the chief and elders, and the Atsiekpoe migrants. The organization Compassion International was only mentioned in a personal interview with a teacher. This organization works together with the church and provides meals to children at Saturdays and also offers some education support. However, this was not mentioned by other participants.

Finally, the community was already pro-active regarding their own development before Jolinaiko Eco Tours entered the community. They were having their youth association and generated funds for development, among other electricity, during their annual fundraising festival (last Saturday of the year). This fund raising event is still being organized annually.

## 5. Lessons Learned regarding the methodology

One of the objectives of this appraisal was to try out participatory appraisal methods for the future development of a general manual, which can be used during other meetings. Several issues were noticed that might have a positive or negative influence on the outcome of the appraisal, and thus should be taken into account.

- Everybody in the group has a right to speak, however some participants might be more active, and thus dominate the people that are shier. Training in facilitation methods and techniques could be considered once the manual has been developed to find an appropriate way to conduct a village meeting with no participants taking control over the group involvement. For example, there is this 'stick rule'. Only a person carrying a stick/other item can speak. Flexibility is important, especially with regard to the timing. Events might occur during the time of the meeting (e.g. a funeral in Atsiekpoe) that will be the cause of the key persons being absent.
- There is a strong belief in visual symbols and metaphors. The use of the Sankofa bird painting on the building wall was a good way to start off the meeting. It is wise to think before-hand which symbol or story could be used as a metaphor carrying the message of the meeting.
- Some information are forgotten in the process or not easily shared during the group meeting. To solve this, personal in-depth interviews can provide additional information before the appraisal.
- It is important that all participants of the meeting introduce themselves, mentioning the name, function and occupation. This will create a more familiar atmosphere and break the first ice.
- The notes from the meeting are very valuable for future evaluation. A person taking notes should have some guidance on the aspects to focus on, and on reporting the events of the appraisal.

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*“Meaningful community participation extends beyond physical involvement to include generation of ideas, contributions to decision making, and sharing of responsibility”* Principles of Community Engagement p13.

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