

**THINK:**

Consider with your partners what makes up a community.

**REFLECT:**

Consider your perceptions of your community, and how different your neighbour's portrayal might be.

**QUESTION:**

Are you reaching out to all members of the community?

**Checklist:**

- ✓ Does your link reflect the diversity of your community?
- ✓ Have you considered how members of your community might become involved in the link?
- ✓ Have you thought about areas of the link which might interest them?
- ✓ What steps are you taking to enable and encourage people to get involved and to contribute their ideas?
- ✓ What steps are you taking to build a sense of belonging?
- ✓ Is your link addressing issues locally?
- ✓ Is your link supporting local initiatives in your partner community?
- ✓ Have you looked at issues of sustainable development within both communities?

**Next steps:**

- Consider the structure of your community.
- Identify all of the possible groups who could be involved in the link.
- Find out how interested groups and organisations are in global issues.
- Examine how your link is involved in raising awareness of local issues.
- Consider the external influences on the community.
- Think about ways to bring in more people to the link.

**TOOLKIT**

7a

**Involving the wider community****Participation**

There has been renewed interest in methodologies for participation, drawing on earlier traditions of participatory action research which had been long established as an integral part of many grassroots organisations in the South. Several important trends have shaped the need for enhanced forms of public engagement in modern society:

1. A long-run decline in people's engagement in civil society, including a loss of infrastructure that promotes participation;
2. Continuing exclusion of some social groups from decision-making and consequent exclusion from beneficial outcomes;
3. Continuing declines in the state of the natural and physical environment;
4. Reduced confidence in existing exogenous patterns of economic development to deliver sustainable and equitable solutions for all social groups.

What is important is for institutions and individuals to define better ways of shifting from the more passive, consultative and incentive-driven participation towards the interactive end of the spectrum.

*Participatory Appraisal for Community Assessment: Principles and Methods*  
Jules Pretty and Rachel Hine, University of Essex

I wish they would only take me as I am. *Vincent van Gogh*

Participation in a link can benefit a community by contributing to community cohesion and greater engagement with local issues. Links benefit from the expertise and experiences of as wide a range of people at both ends of the link. Links, as far as possible, should reflect the priorities of partner communities. Different communities face many similar issues such as overcoming prejudice, environmental degradation, and involving young people. Engagement with the wider community means investigating the concerns and interests of the local community, and exploring how addressing the issues can be handled within the link.

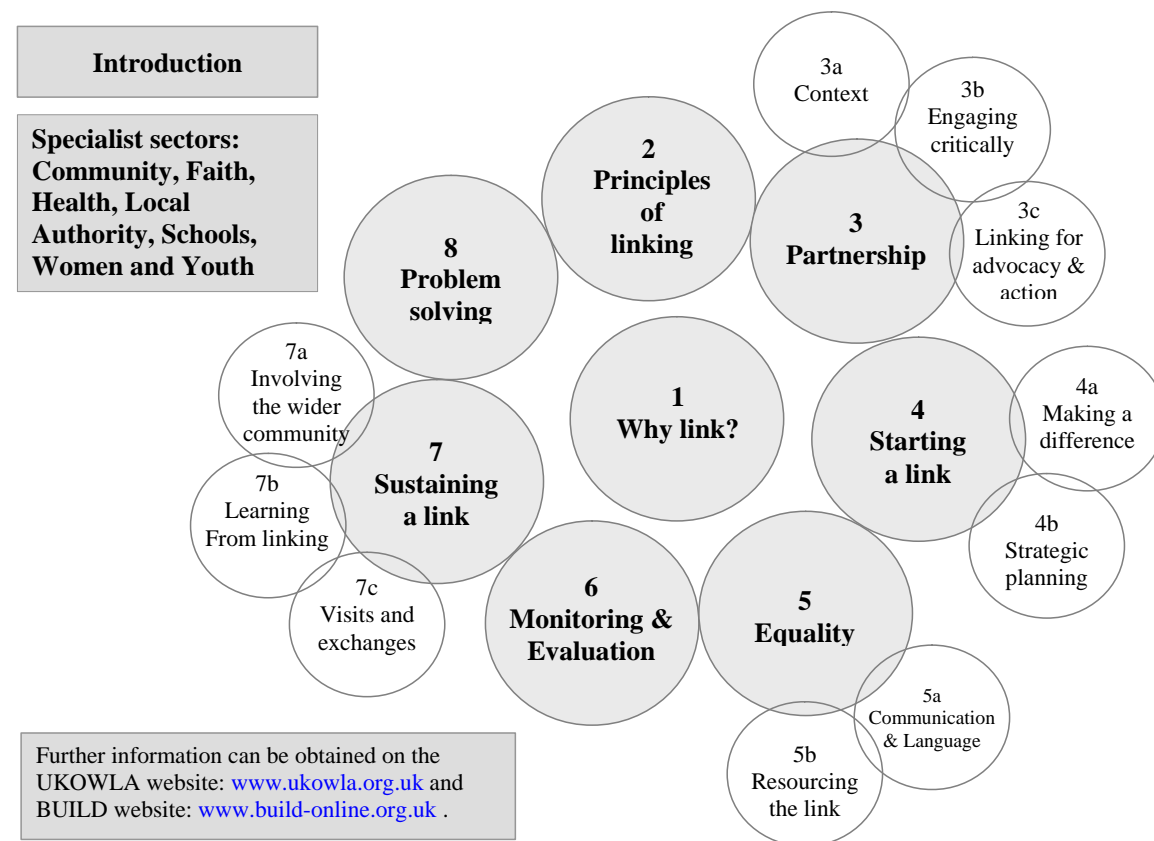
Wider community involvement also enables greater sharing of expertise and knowledge between groups and professional networks working in the same field, such as fire fighters, health professionals and information specialists. Faith communities share a common understanding and knowledge base; and groups such as professional institutions and the Scouts and Guides share common aims and goals which cut across country boundaries.

Greater understanding and knowledge of other communities within our own countries is a positive development that can lead to greater understanding and social cohesion. Try to set up a representative steering committee, reflecting the diversity of the community. However do note that a local figure posing as a representative of the community, or even a group of local enthusiasts, can exclude wider involvement. Look for ways of bringing people together using different means to reach out to all members of the community. This will take commitment and the need to be as open as possible in establishing the agenda

Engagement with marginalised members of the community is a challenge to all links. Participatory approaches using diagrams and visual techniques can encourage creativity and facilitate the exchange of ideas. Grassroots participation can also involve rethinking power relations and partnerships. If people within the community do not respond to invitations to participate then different approaches have to be tried.

Diaspora and expatriate communities, that is the people of a country or area who now live in other countries, can be a rich source of information on, and support for, your partner community.

Recognise too that those not involved in the link may be suspicious of the group and the aims of the link. Meet such suspicion head-on, recalling that nothing encourages suspicion more than the appearance of secrecy. Openness and transparency are important in all you do.

**Toolkit for Linking leaflets**

Further information can be obtained on the UKOWLA website: [www.ukowla.org.uk](http://www.ukowla.org.uk) and BUILD website: [www.build-online.org.uk](http://www.build-online.org.uk).

## What others say

The call to develop relationships with people of other faiths and for white Christians to build relationships with black churches remains difficult. Denominations are different, interfaith work remains anathema to some. There is a running wound because of the way black people were turned away from white churches in the 50s and 70s. Racism needs to be addressed.  
*Tany Alexander, One World Week, UK*

If a link is to reach its potential, the town or city's schools, university, hospital, fire service, library, associations for the handicapped and the other local institutions will all be involved in their town's link. *Nigel Ringrose, UNDP*

Why are you thinking of forming a link with a community 5 000 miles away when you could be linking with a group of Ghanaians living in the UK? *UK resident.*

If we are not using international linking for greater social cohesion within our own diverse societies, maybe we shouldn't be doing it. *UKOWLA Strategy*

We don't want a link like last time ... we want a real partnership this time. *South African teacher*

Responsibility does not only lie with the leaders of our countries ... it lies with each of us individually. *The Dalai Lama.*

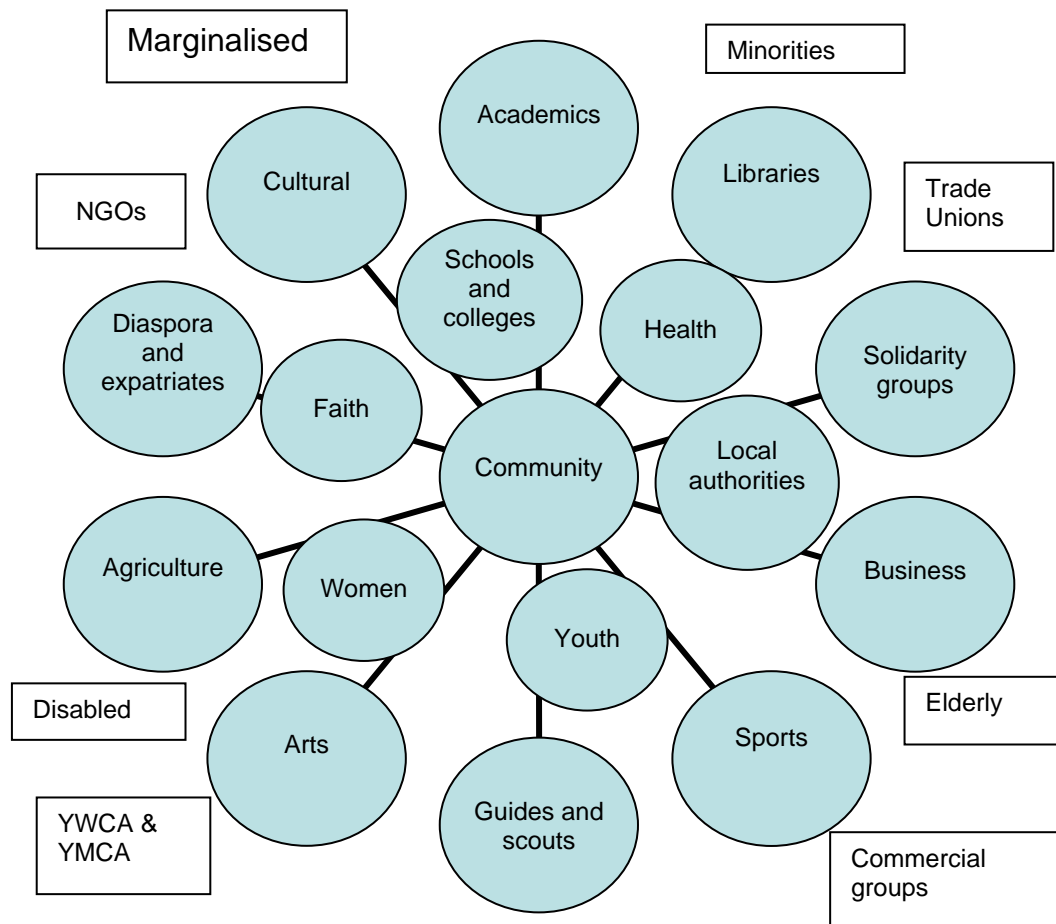
When you throw a stone into a bush, you never know what will come out. *Ugandan proverb*

Traditional aid diminishes the justice aspect of the poverty divide. *Stan Thekaekara, India*

The greatest impact the link has had on our community has been the relationship between men and women. *Mankamang Touray, The Gambia*

Action expresses priorities. *Mahatma Gandhi, India*

## Involving the wider community: Participatory approaches allow a community to express, analyse and plan actions needed for change.



The areas at the centre of the diagram:

Community  
Faith  
Health  
Local authority  
Schools  
Women  
Youth

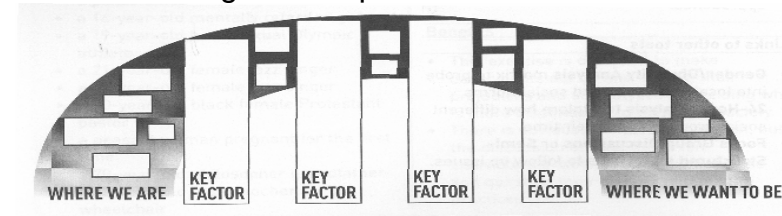
each have separate leaflets:

All areas overlap with other areas because members of the community will inevitably belong to several groups. The community is not composed of distinct groups, but collections of people who live in a place and share various things in common with other members.

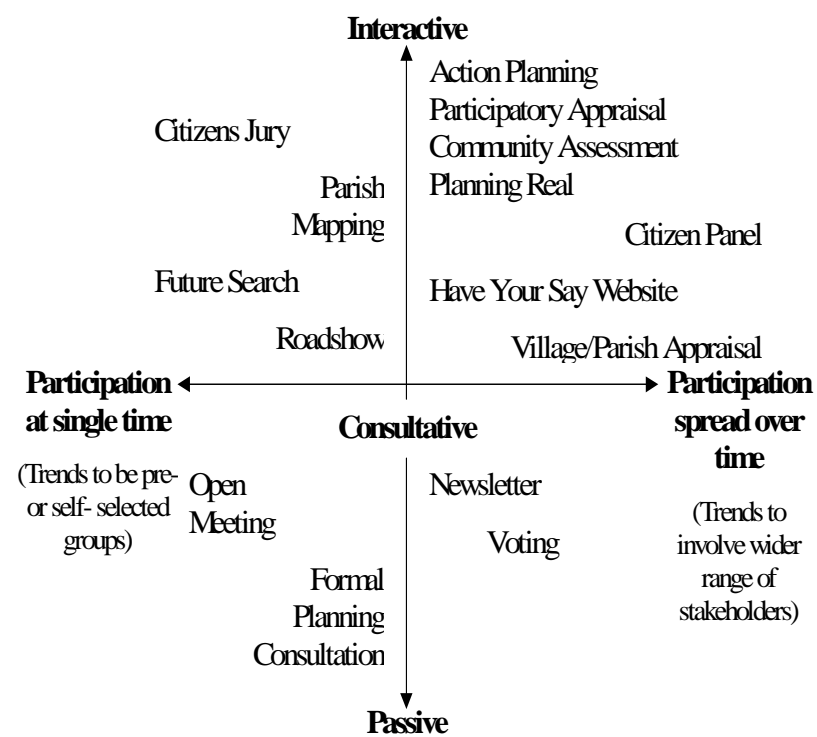
Reflecting on your own community is a useful joint activity to carry out, with partners contributing their perceptions from outside the community

The Bridge Model: helps groups to identify where they are, where they want to be, and how to bridge the gap between the two.

1. Participants first draw or list characteristics of their present situation.
2. Participants then visualise where they would like to be and represent this with words, symbols or drawings.
3. A bridge is then constructed between the two situations, with blank pillars to represent those things that will be needed to construct a bridge to get from the present to the future you want to reach.
4. Post-It notes, pictures or cards are then added between each factor to represent ways to achieve these strategies or aspirations.



From *Participatory Approaches: A facilitator's guide*, VSO



*Participatory Appraisal for Community Assessment: Principles and Methods. Jules Pretty and Rachel Hine, University of Essex.*

## Key principles for wider involvement

- **Everybody's view counts:** recognise that different individuals and groups have different perceptions and thus assess situations differently, which then leads them to different actions.

- **Learning attitude:** everyone should adopt a learning attitude, through which they learn from the persons/groups they are working with – rather than a teaching or preaching attitude.

- **Transparency:** an atmosphere of mutual trust is the basis for compromise and constructive co-operation and transparency by all stakeholders is a basic requirement.

- **Flexibility:** being open to other peoples' ideas and opinions is often the most difficult aspect of participatory processes. Often, their views may be difficult to understand and contradictory or incompatible with one's own ideas and beliefs. Accepting this reality requires a high degree of flexibility.

*UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) Informal Working Group on Participatory Approaches & Methods: [www.fao.org/participation](http://www.fao.org/participation)*

In any culture there is a wide spectrum of voices; within linking such a variety of voices should be welcomed. If there are members of the Diaspora or Expatriate community living locally they can help strengthen links between communities in different countries. The Diaspora community, that is a community which identifies itself by a shared connection with an ancestral "homeland" other than its present country of residence, by providing useful insights, information and support networks.

Expatriates, or those temporarily or permanently residing in a country and culture other than their home country, can provide helpful connections. However in the view of Peter Nyoni, from Zimbabwe, they can 'be both a blessing and a curse in the lives of other people. They should deal with problems in *themselves* first, before they can stretch out their hands to others in search of an international village'.

*Taken from: South-North partnerships in Development Education, DEA 1996*