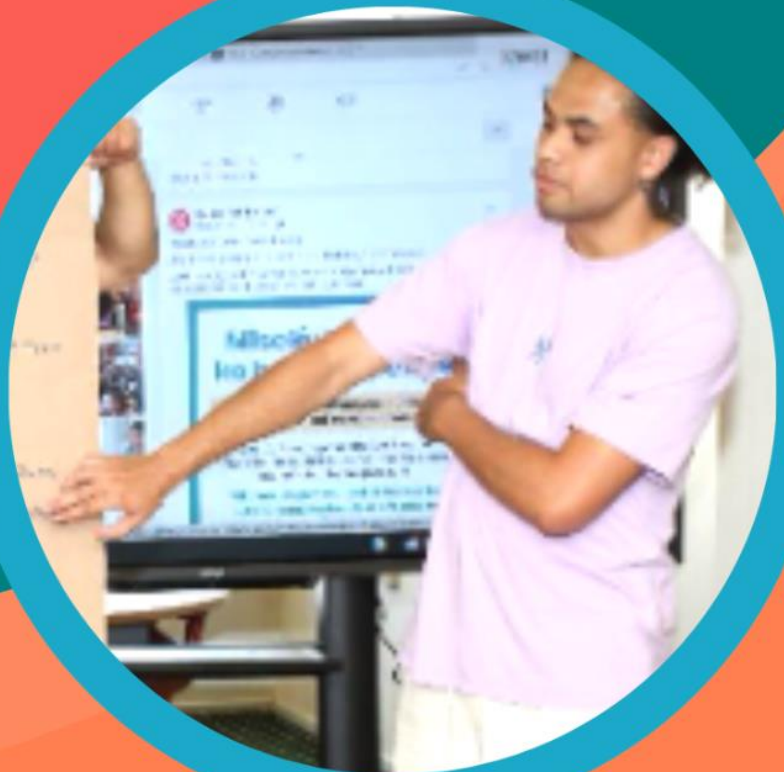


ENGAGING PACIFIC COMMUNITIES



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Empowering Pacific Communities: The Le Niu Project's Impact and Implications

This report focuses on the Le Niu project, a collaborative community initiative facilitated by Ako Aotearoa in partnership with Te Hiku Pasifika Trust and Fale Pasifika.

The project aimed to empower and uplift Pacific communities, particularly those in underserved areas, by fostering community engagement, partnership, and education support. Through a comprehensive analysis, we researched into the various aspects of the project, examining the enablers that contributed to its success, the methods employed for community engagement, and the outcomes achieved.

The overarching goals of the Le Niu project were to identify the enablers that facilitated community involvement, explore the methods employed to engage the community and analyse the responses received. This report sheds light on the short-term and long-term community engagement strategies implemented, the establishment of partnerships, and the overall community response to the project.

Furthermore, we aim to explore the implications of the Le Niu project for Pacific vocation and education. We seek to establish a blueprint for creating equitable and engaged Pacific communities by researching the project's outcomes. The collaborative efforts of Ako Aotearoa, Te Hiku Pasifika Trust, and Fale Pasifika serve as a valuable case study for organisations and stakeholders interested in engaging with Pacific communities.

This report highlights the significance of culturally safe and inclusive approaches to community engagement. By promoting sustainable and impactful initiatives, we aim to contribute to the positive development of Pacific communities. The findings and recommendations presented here guide organisations and individuals seeking to create meaningful change and address the needs of underserved Pacific communities.

Background:

Rebuilding Connections - Ako Aotearoa and the Northland Communities

In 2021, Ako Aotearoa specifically designed and organised two fono/hui events in the Northland region to enhance the capacity of Pasifika communities (*In the context of this report, the terms "Pasifika," "Pacifica," and "Pacific communities" are used interchangeably to refer consistently to the diverse groups of people originating from the Pacific Islands region. This includes a wide array of cultures, languages, and histories from islands in the Pacific Ocean, such as Polynesia, Micronesia, and Melanesia. While these terms serve as an umbrella for these groups, it's crucial to recognise that each community has its own unique identity and cultural characteristics. The interchangeable use of these terms throughout this report acknowledges both the collective experiences and the individual diversities of these groups.*) These gatherings aimed to provide opportunities for individuals and service providers interested in Pasifika education transformation in Te Tai Tokerau Northland to share updates, information, ideas, challenges, and dreams. Attendees felt greater inclusion and confidence in collaborating with other Pacific leaders and services. The focus areas prioritised included:

- To increase resources for Pasifika communities.
- To establish holistic health and well-being approaches.
- To preserve cultural identities.
- To provide literacy and numeracy support.

Following the fono, the main priorities were organising a follow-up gathering, establishing a centralised place for Pasifika people to access services, and ensuring locally-led approaches driven by the communities.

In April 2021, the Ministry of Education engaged Malatest International to evaluate the fono and assess the progress of the Le Niu project. However, the COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions in 2021 prevented Ako Aotearoa from meeting face-to-face with the communities and presenting the evaluation findings. The disruptions caused by COVID-19 and subsequent events like Cyclone Gabrielle hindered the momentum and growth of the relationship between Ako Aotearoa and the communities.

Over a year has passed since the first fono, and rebuilding the relationship has been significant. The prolonged period without regular engagement and in-person meetings posed challenges in maintaining connection and continuity. Efforts were needed to re-establish communication channels, rebuild trust, and reignite collaboration.

In March 2023, Ako Aotearoa was able to return and initiate rebuilding the relationship. However, the second meeting saw the absence of many familiar faces from the initial gathering, indicating a transition and change within the community. Despite this, we remained unwavering in our commitment to rebuilding as we forged connections with new and familiar community members. The second meeting served as a platform to reconnect, embrace fresh perspectives, and foster ongoing collaboration.

Methodology:

Culturally Responsive and In-depth Interviewing Approach

According to Filipo (2004), Thaman (2003), and Vaoleti (2006), this study employed in-depth interviewing, utilising interviews or talanoa (A traditional form of Pacific storytelling and dialogue) sessions with participants who were actively involved in the Le Niu project. In-depth interviews involve conducting detailed and open-ended interviews with participants to obtain qualitative data that is rich and nuanced. The focus of the interviews is on exploring the perspectives, experiences, and narratives of participants in a comprehensive manner, which enables a thorough understanding of the research topic. This approach often involves building rapport with participants to create a safe and comfortable space for talanoa and employing probing questions to elicit detailed responses. In-depth interviewing is commonly used in qualitative research studies to explore complex social phenomena, gain insights into individuals' lived experiences, and capture the richness and depth of qualitative data through direct personal interactions.

The researcher extended invitations to the participants, primarily conducting face-to-face interviews, with one interview conducted online via Google Meet. We also made an online form available for individuals who could not meet in person or participate in an online discussion. We sent participants an email that explained the purpose of the Le Niu project and expressed gratitude for their involvement. Each participant was offered a gift card as a gesture of appreciation and reciprocity. The provision of gift cards to participants in the research interview was a reflection of cultural sensitivity and respect. It was an acknowledgment of the value of their contributions and a gesture of appreciation, embodying the principles of reciprocity and mutual respect which are central in many cultures. This approach not only aligned with culturally appropriate practices but also demonstrated a tangible gratitude for their participation and time.

Email invitations were sent to 10 participants, giving them the option to either have a face-to-face interview or participate in an online discussion through Google Meet. I informed them that the interview would require approximately one hour of their time, although it generally lasted between 40 to 50 minutes. Five individuals responded to the invitation and willingly agreed to participate in the interviews. Of those, two participants were present at the initial meeting in 2021 and the subsequent meeting in 2022, while the remaining three joined the second meeting but did not attend the first one. The three participants who missed the first meeting were either not affiliated with the trust, unaware of the meeting, or had recently relocated to the area from outside the region. To prepare for the interview, I provided all participants with questions. By extending invitations to face-to-face and online interviews and ensuring representation from different meetings, we aimed to capture diverse perspectives and experiences.

The researcher shared a predefined set of questions with the participants to facilitate their interview preparation. The questions explored various aspects of the Le Niu project, including:

1. How did you first hear about the Le Niu project?
2. How well do you think the Le Niu project aligned with the goals and values of our community?
3. What was your overall impression of the communication and information-sharing during the Le Niu project?
4. How effective do you think the Le Niu project was in addressing the issues it was designed to tackle?
5. How well do you think the Le Niu project addressed the needs of underrepresented or marginalised members of our community?
6. Did you feel the Le Niu project was inclusive and accessible to all community members?
7. What role do you think Le Niu projects play in shaping decisions that impact our community?
8. What was your role in the Le Niu project? How did you contribute to its success?
9. What could have been done differently to improve the Le Niu project?
10. What did you find most challenging about the Le Niu project?
11. What suggestions do you have for improving the Le Niu initiatives in our community moving forward?
12. How do you think the outcomes of the Le Niu project could be used to inform future decision-making in our community?
13. What were some of the most positive outcomes of the Le Niu project?
14. How could the Le Niu project be expanded or replicated in other parts of our community or in other communities?
15. Is there anything else?

After conducting the interviews, the researcher transcribed the data and grouped the responses according to the list of questions. To ensure accuracy, the researcher emailed a summary of each discussion to the participants, allowing them to review and provide feedback. On average, the interviews lasted around 40 minutes. The participants appreciated the face-to-face meetings, as they aligned with traditional and culturally accepted practices, emphasising the importance of cultural sensitivity in the research process.

Before recording the interviews, I obtained permission from all participants, who graciously consented. I assured the participants that I would not use their real names in the report and would solely utilise the recordings for the study. To maintain confidentiality, I anonymised the participants and changed the place names by assigning hypothetical names to the information.

By adhering to ethical considerations and ensuring participant confidentiality, this research upholds the principles of integrity and respect for individuals' rights. The use of hypothetical names and the protection of personal information contribute to the trustworthiness and credibility of the study.

This study adopts a cultural approach that recognises and values the Pacific communities' unique cultural perspectives, values, and practices involved in the Le Niu project.

The cultural system acknowledges the importance of cultural context and sensitivity in understanding and addressing community needs, aspirations, and challenges. It emphasises engaging community members as active participants and co-creators of knowledge, ensuring that their voices and perspectives are central to the research process.

In adopting a cultural approach, the study seeks to go beyond merely analysing outcomes and impacts. It aims to explore the underlying cultural dynamics, values, and beliefs that shape community engagement, partnership development, and the empowerment of Pacific communities in vocational and educational pathways. By incorporating cultural lenses and frameworks, the research strives to uncover the more profound cultural meanings and implications of the Le Niu project, highlighting how cultural factors intersect with community development initiatives.

The cultural approach also recognises the importance of reciprocity and mutual learning. It acknowledges that research is not a one-way process but a collaborative endeavor involving meaningful engagement and knowledge exchange between researchers and community members. By actively involving participants in the analysis phase, the study seeks to promote co-learning, co-creation, and co-ownership of knowledge, fostering a sense of shared responsibility and empowerment within the community.

Overall, the cultural approach adopted in this study aims to ensure that the research is culturally responsive, respectful, and relevant to the unique contexts and aspirations of the Pacific communities involved in the Le Niu project. It seeks to amplify community voices, honor cultural values, and contribute to sustainable development and well-being in these communities.

Key Findings: Insights into Community Perceptions

Introduction:

This section presents the key findings derived from the research questions explored about the Le Niu project. The results derive from the perspectives and feedback actively shared by participants involved in the project. The research questions covered various aspects of the project, including its initial awareness, alignment with community goals and values, communication and information sharing, effectiveness in addressing issues, inclusivity, participant roles, areas for improvement, challenges faced, recommendations for future initiatives, and the potential impact of project outcomes on decision-making processes. These findings provide valuable insights into the community's perception of the Le Niu project and offer guidance for enhancing community engagement, empowerment, and sustainable development. By examining these key findings, we can better understand the project's achievements, areas of improvement, and the potential for broader replication and impact in similar communities.

How did you first hear about the Le Niu project?

Annie and Daniel initially had high expectations regarding the Le Niu project, anticipating discussions and support specifically focused on business ideas and Pacific-owned businesses. They first learned about the Le Niu project via a social media post. Annie expressed their initial expectations, saying, *"We were told that there might be some business discussion, support for business. Pacific-owned businesses, so we thought it would be of interest to us."* However, they later discovered that the project's content exceeded their initial assumptions and encompassed a broader scope.

Joseph's introduction to the project came through a personal connection with the facilitator. They had a previous relationship through mental health and addiction services, and the Le Niu project contacted Joseph to discuss the project. Joseph expressed excitement about the opportunity and encouraged others to participate.

Frank's knowledge about the project came through word of mouth and work connections. He did not receive any direct contact or information through social media. Frank emphasised the importance of community networks and informal communication channels in spreading awareness.

Oasis first heard about the Le Niu project from friends Sindy and Tom, who mentioned it separately. Oasis did not have any direct contact with the project. His first meeting regarding the project was in 2021 when he was still at his previous workplace, Active Life (fictional organisation)

These experiences highlight the significance of personal connections, community networks, word of mouth, and social media in disseminating information about the Le Niu project to different individuals.

How well do you think the Le Niu project aligned with the goals and values of our community?

Both Frank and Oasis express a positive outlook regarding aligning the Le Niu project with the goals and values of their Pacific community. They see strong alignment and opportunities for support and connection.

Frank emphasises the importance of addressing community issues and aligning with the community's strategic plan. The community appreciates the project's focus on addressing existing challenges.

The need for a Pacific hub is highlighted by Frank, emphasising the desire for a centralized space where Pacific peoples can gather, collaborate, and engage in various activities. This hub can be a meeting point for sharing ideas and fostering community interaction.

Oasis's feedback emphasises the significance of the Le Niu project in providing avenues for support, fostering a sense of belonging, and connecting the small community to the larger town and the bigger picture. Community members view the project as a valuable resource for their community.

Overall, the key take-home messages highlight the significance of aligning with community goals and values, addressing community issues, expressing the need for a centralised hub for community activities, and recognising the positive impact of the Le Niu project in providing support and fostering a sense of connection.

What was your overall impression of the communication and information sharing during the Le Niu project?

Frank expressed his impression of the communication and information sharing during the Le Niu project, stating, *"It would have been nice to do like a summary... explain a little bit more... what was the outcome you wanted from Le Niu project?"* He felt there needed to be better communication and a need for clarity, suggesting the need for better summaries of meeting discussions.

Annie and Daniel, on the other hand, had a positive view of the communication. They emphasised the value of face-to-face interaction and expressed, *"It was great... them coming out to this... smaller community... speaks volumes."* They found the communication clear and effective in reaching their community.

Joseph acknowledged the effectiveness of the communication but identified an area for improvement in digital communication. He emphasised the need to improve connectivity during emergencies, stating, *"We're gonna have to kind of look at improving how we can communicate... how can we make sure that we were able to reach each other?"*

Oasis shared their overall impression of the communication and information sharing, stating, *"Yeah, that was pretty good... it's pretty clear."* They appreciated the clarity in explaining government support and expressed, *"Often government bodies... can be quite daunting for communities to... find out about."* Oasis believed that both meetings effectively communicated the objectives and provisions of the Le Niu project.

In summary, there were varied opinions regarding communication and information sharing during the Le Niu project. While Frank expressed the need for better summaries, Annie and Daniel found the face-to-face interaction valuable. Joseph highlighted the importance of improving digital communication. On the other hand, Oasis had a positive impression, emphasising the clarity and effectiveness of the communication.

How effectively was the Le Niu project addressing the issues it was designed to tackle?

Participants held varying opinions on the effectiveness of the Le Niu project in addressing the identified issues. Joseph believed the project was highly effective, as it highlighted the problems and proposed solutions. Annie and Daniel noted that the project addressed community priorities impacted by COVID-19. However, Frank felt there needed to be more effective communication regarding progress and outcomes, leading to confusion and a perceived lack of action.

Oasis rated the project's effectiveness as a seven and a half out of ten, considering the disruptions and challenges, mainly due to COVID-19. They acknowledged the community's unique dynamics and occasional uncertainties, which may have affected the project's effectiveness.

In summary, while some participants recognised the project's positive impact and alignment with community priorities, others emphasised the need for more transparent communication and tangible outcomes. Oasis highlighted the challenges posed by disruptions and the importance of considering the unique dynamics of the Pacifica community.

How well do you think the Le Niu project addressed the needs of underrepresented or marginalised members of our community?

Frank expressed dissatisfaction with the Le Niu project, stating that it needed to address the needs of underrepresented or marginalised community members adequately. He pointed out the absence of representation from various communities, highlighting the missed opportunity for improvement. On the other hand, Joseph believed that the project successfully addressed the needs of underrepresented individuals by including representatives from different ethnicities. He emphasised the importance of their involvement and representation.

Annie and Daniel acknowledged the inclusive nature of the project but indicated that its effectiveness in meeting the needs of underrepresented or marginalised community members was still to be determined. They stressed the significance of not excluding anyone and providing guidance to individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

Oasis had a positive perspective, stating that the Le Niu project effectively addressed the needs of underrepresented and marginalised members of their community. They found the conversations during the meetings to offer clear opportunities and benefits. Despite the challenges of isolation and disruptions, Oasis considered the project's impact very good, highlighting the community's isolation due to limited access and periodic flooding events.

In summary, there were diverse perspectives on how well the Le Niu project addressed the needs of underrepresented or marginalised community members. While Frank expressed dissatisfaction and Annie and Daniel emphasised the need for further evaluation, Joseph

believed in the project's success in addressing those needs. Oasis provided an optimistic view, noting the project's effectiveness in supporting underrepresented and marginalised individuals in their community.

Did you feel the Le Niu project was inclusive and accessible to all community members?

The conversation revealed a shared sentiment among Joseph and Frank regarding the need for greater inclusivity and accessibility in the Le Niu project. Joseph emphasised the importance of strengthening communication channels and involving community leaders, stating, *"At this time? I think it's accessible for us as a trust... Probably something to look at regarding how Le Niu can communicate... It's about looking at probably strengthening the message... We want the new committee to take control of their own voices."* Frank also expressed the need for inclusivity, mentioning the absence of specific communities and his efforts to promote collaboration among leaders, saying, *"There was no Fiji, there was no Niue, there was no Tongans. So it could have been better... slowly I'm building... it can be done if it's more."*

Oasis acknowledged the inclusive and accessible nature of the Le Niu project while also highlighting the need for community members to participate and meet halfway actively. They mentioned that some community members posed a challenge by expecting things to be done for them rather than actively participating. Oasis appreciated the clear pathways and ideas presented during the meetings, which incorporated community input. They also recognised the difficulties in scheduling and accommodating everyone's availability.

The conversation underscored the importance of enhancing inclusivity and accessibility in the Le Niu project. Joseph and Frank emphasised community leaders' involvement and addressing diverse communities' needs. Oasis acknowledged the project's inclusivity while highlighting the need for active participation from community members.

What role do you think the Le Niu project play in shaping decisions that impact our community?

Frank emphasised the advocacy role of the Le Niu project, stating the importance of taking action and addressing community expectations: *"We want to see physical stuff happening rather than just sharing information."* Annie and Daniel acknowledged the ongoing discussion phase but recognised the potential for the Le Niu project to have an influential, collaborative, and formative role in shaping decisions: *"I still think though that the proof is still in the pudding (meaning we have yet to see the outcome). We're still at the information."* They also highlighted the community's interest in having a hub as a valuable resource.

Oasis shared valuable insights on the impact of the Le Niu project, highlighting its role in fostering the generation of ideas and instilling a sense of hope within the community. Attendees left the project meeting with newfound inspiration, carrying with them ideas that could be pursued and a glimmer of optimism for the future. The project served as a guiding force, urging the community to recognise their own expertise and offering structures to facilitate community-driven initiatives.

One compelling example discussed during the meeting further illustrated the tangible benefits brought about by the Le Niu project. This initiative showcased the transformative influence of

the project by demonstrating the positive outcomes that could be achieved when the community leveraged its capabilities and worked together towards a common goal.

Overall, the Le Niu project sparked a wave of creativity and hope within the community, empowering individuals to tap into their expertise and drive meaningful change. Through the provision of guidance and structures, the project facilitated the realisation of community-driven initiatives that profoundly impacted the well-being and development of the community members.

In summary, the quotations highlight the advocacy role mentioned by Frank, the potential for influence and collaboration discussed by Annie and Daniel, and the empowerment and guidance provided by the Le Niu project highlighted by Oasis. The project has made an impact by generating ideas, facilitating the realisation of community-driven initiatives, and fostering hope within the community.

What was your role in the Le Niu project? How did you contribute to its success?

Joseph described his role as a facilitator and coordinator, bringing people together and acting as a doorway into the community. He emphasised the importance of trust and coordination, stating, *"My role is just getting people together... I think we can play the coordinating and facilitating role... We can be the doorway into our community."*

Annie and Daniel saw themselves as collaborators, taking on leadership and advisory roles. They considered themselves participants who also provided valuable feedback during discussions. They emphasised the significance of approachability, active listening, and making participants feel valued. They said, *"At the end of it, we felt heard, and we felt like somebody cared... It makes a big difference if the facilitators know how to engage and make people feel valued."*

Frank began his journey with the Le Niu project as an observer, eventually gaining a deeper understanding of its model through his involvement and information-gathering efforts. Anticipating that the meetings would yield actionable plans, he contributed by compiling an in-depth report and sharing his ideas. *"Just like any other meeting, there's an expectation for concrete actions... I perceived it as a venue for sharing ideas, and hopefully, some actions will materialize in the near future."* elaborated Frank. Since the meeting, Frank has actively led and coordinated initiatives to support families with basic needs. Only last week, he took the initiative to lead the Samoan Language Week event in collaboration with a local primary school and other stakeholders. The activities included food preparation, music, and dance workshops. The event achieved significant success and acted as a rallying point for all Pacific groups living in the local area, cultivating a feeling of unity.

Oasis's role in the Le Niu project involved creating and coordinating community initiatives. They explained, *"I suppose in 2018... we formed the Pacific community group. The first meeting we had, I didn't go... I wanted to be part of a community... I really wanted to, you know, the schools I teach up here are 70% to 80% Maori... So I suppose to answer your question, all this other stuff just happened out of as a by-product of me just trying to get people together."*

Oasis extended their contribution to the project beyond the trust. They mentioned running the Pacific Rim festival and the Carter Community Choir, stating, *"I'm really big on using music as a way of bringing people together... I just wanted to do something to give my kids something"*

to understand who they are." Oasis emphasised their commitment to creating opportunities for the community, adding, *"I suppose I've always been big on just getting... using my talent... So, Cindy actually came back with her band at the end of last year and performed at the festival."*

Regarding succession planning, Oasis mentioned their intention to delegate responsibilities to others. They stated, *"I've already said to her this year, you know, this will be the last festival I run... I'm gonna hand it over to you, you know, next year... just trying to create a few things that... I think music, for me, is the catalyst for bringing people together."*

Each participant in the Le Niu project played a unique role in contributing to its success. Joseph served as a facilitator and coordinator, bridging connections within the community. Annie and Daniel acted as collaborators and leaders, offering crucial feedback and fostering a supportive environment. Frank transitioned from an observer to an active participant, anticipating actionable outcomes from meetings and leading community initiatives, such as the Samoan Language Week event. Oasis created and coordinated community initiatives and utilised music to foster unity within the community. Beyond their current contributions, Oasis also expressed plans for succession to ensure the continuity of the community initiatives. These roles collectively fostered a sense of belonging and solidarity within the community.

What could have been done differently to improve the Le Niu project?

Participants provided various suggestions to improve the Le Niu project. Frank emphasised the importance of enhanced communication and targeting the right audience, stating, *"Firstly communication because you can target a really big audience if their communication was gone out to the right people."* Joseph highlighted the need to support the Pacific workforce and develop educational pathways, expressing, *"If Le Niu can develop a pathway, process or pathway and helping families and learners... that will build up to our workforce... we want to create this opportunity for our youth to be able to work in higher earning jobs."* Annie and Daniel discussed resource limitations and community engagement challenges, emphasising the need for dedicated individuals and capacity building. They expressed, *"It makes a big difference if the facilitators know how to engage and make people feel valued."* Oasis suggested meeting more frequently to maintain regularity, stating, *"My only thing would probably be just maybe meeting once or two more times... just a bit of regularity... Maybe if it happens twice a year, it would be good. Possible, if possible."* These insights, supported by the participants' quotes, highlight the significance of tailored approaches, increased community involvement, consistent communication, and regular engagement to enhance the Le Niu project and better address the community's needs.

What did you find most challenging about the Le Niu project?

The Le Niu project presented various challenges that impacted its effectiveness. Joseph identified critical challenges of community engagement, resource limitations, stakeholder collaboration, and communication and information sharing. Frank initially struggled to understand the project but emphasised the importance of asking questions and feeling empowered to contribute. Oasis highlighted two main challenges: the need for individuals to step up and the importance of regularity in project activities. Overcoming these challenges, such as fostering active community participation and ensuring consistent engagement, can enhance the project's effectiveness and drive more significant community impact.

What were some of the most positive outcomes of the Le Niu project?

The Le Niu project yielded several positive outcomes, as shared by Oasis. Oasis shared a story about two individuals, Lote and a teaching assistant, who were positively impacted by the Le Niu project. Both were not interview participants but were inspired by the project's initiatives. Lote went on to start his own building and construction business, and the teaching assistant realised his ambition of running a successful food truck business. These examples underscore the Le Niu project's role as a catalyst in fostering entrepreneurial spirit and ambition among its participants. Oasis stated, *"If the community is prepared to do some work as well, then the effectiveness of the Le Niu project becomes even greater."* These examples exemplify how the Le Niu project impacts by providing a catalyst that ignites individuals' drive and determination to take action on their aspirations.

Annie and Daniel also emphasised the positive outcomes of improved communication, information sharing, understanding of community needs, and the empowerment of underrepresented groups. Annie noted, *"Enhance understanding of community needs and empowerment of underrepresented groups."* This comment highlights the significance of the project's impact, stating that it enhances understanding of community needs and empowers those who may have been previously overlooked or marginalised. Daniel emphasised that the project gives individuals a voice at the decision-making table, contributing to positive outcomes.

It is worth noting that the impact of the Le Niu project extends beyond mere support and encouragement. It serves as a catalyst that inspires and ignites individuals' passion and initiative, enabling them to take significant steps toward achieving their goals.

Overall, the Le Niu project has achieved positive outcomes, including increased opportunities, improved communication, understanding of community needs, and empowering individuals. These successes, as shared by participants, demonstrate the transformative power of the project, igniting a flame of inspiration and motivation within the community to create meaningful change.

What suggestions do you have for improving the Le Niu initiatives in our community moving forward?

During our discussions, participants provided valuable suggestions for improving the Le Niu initiatives in our community moving forward. Joseph highlighted the importance of having a dedicated individual to coordinate the project and effectively implement the discussed plans. He emphasised the need for resources that support families and provide pathways for their development.

Annie and Daniel emphasised the significance of continuous evaluation and feedback. They suggested utilising research insights to develop resources that address the specific skills required in their community. Frank stressed the need for tangible progress and visible actions, emphasising the importance of communicating outcomes and plans to the community to ensure their assurance and involvement.

Additionally, Frank emphasised the value of utilising data to justify funding and drive projects, highlighting the need for evidence-based decision-making. Annie and Daniel highlighted the role of research outcomes in shaping policies and empowering the community, emphasising the importance of providing evidence to have a voice at the table.

These suggestions collectively emphasise the importance of effective coordination, evaluation, resource development, visible progress, and data-driven decision-making to enhance the Le Niu initiatives in Te Tai Tokerau..

Annie also expressed her appreciation for the work being done by the Le Niu project and highlighted the opportunity to drive digital innovation among Pasifika and Māori people in her community. She shared that four out of five participants in their after-school program were of Pasifika descent, underscoring the under-representation of Pasifika people in the industry and their desire for growth. Annie mentioned the Silver Surfer's Club, an initiative they created to support the matua in navigating the digital world. She recently discovered that a nationwide Digi-Matua initiative already exists and expressed hope that the Le Niu project could extend its support to drive that initiative in her area, showcasing tangible outcomes.

Annie's comments further emphasise the importance of addressing the digital needs and aspirations of both the younger generation and the matua within the Pasifika and Māori communities. Their participation in the after-school program and the Silver Surfer's Club reflects the community's enthusiasm for educational opportunities and support in the digital realm. Collaborating with Le Niu to drive the Digi-Matua initiative locally would be a significant step toward fulfilling these aspirations and showcasing the positive impact of community-driven efforts.

The Le Niu project greatly appreciates Annie's valuable insights and suggestions. Rest assured; we are committed to exploring opportunities to support the growth and education of the Pasifika and Māori communities through our initiatives.

How do you think the outcomes of the Le Niu project could be used to inform future decision-making in our community?

Participants expressed their views on how the Le Niu project's outcomes could inform future community decision-making. One participant highlighted the importance of using research findings, insights, and recommendations to address community needs, stating, *"Use those research findings, insights, and recommendations to leverage the project outcomes... policy development and planning, community empowerment, and advocacy."* Another participant emphasised the need for tangible actions and the power of sharing stories, stating, *"There has to be something physical that's actually happening... They need to hear our stories and do something for other people."* Additionally, a participant shared a success story where the project had empowered individuals to create initiatives in the community and fostered a reciprocal relationship, saying, *"We're helping people set up the business, and then we are coming full circle by them being the people that we're going to."*

These quotes highlight the participants' belief in using research outcomes to drive meaningful change, empower the community, and support initiatives that benefit all stakeholders.

How could the Le Niu project be expanded or replicated in other parts of our community or in other communities?

Oasis expressed that they may need more experience to comment on expanding or replicating the project in other communities. However, they emphasised the importance of maintaining

regular contact and engagement with the district, particularly for isolated communities like theirs. Oasis highlighted the unique situation of their community, where many Pacifica individuals are married into Maori families and may struggle with their identity. They noted that the Pacifica Trust has helped individuals feel confident in their Islander identity and given them a sense of belonging. Oasis stated, *"Having that option of now I need to find... as proudly, probably as a Pacifica is quite a nice avenue that we can all the project could provide."*

In their concluding remarks, Oasis emphasized the importance of maintaining regular engagement within the community, while acknowledging the uncertainties of future events. Other participants involved in the interviews did not provide additional comments or points to add to this question.

Key Findings: Community Engagement and Sustainable Development

Based on the findings, the following key points emerge as the most relevant and significant:

Awareness and Initial Expectations:

- Participants had different ways of first hearing about the Le Niu project, including through personal connections, social media, and community organisations.
- Initial expectations varied, with some anticipating specific discussions and support for Pacific-owned businesses.

Alignment with Community Goals and Values:

- The Le Niu project was generally perceived to align well with the goals and values of the community.
- The participants noted a strong alignment in addressing community issues and desired a centralized hub for Pacific peoples to gather and collaborate.

Communication and Information Sharing:

- Participants had diverse perspectives on communication and information sharing during the project.
- While some found the communication clear and compelling, others felt the need for better summaries, improved digital communication, and more explicit progress updates.

Effectiveness in Addressing Community Issues:

- Views on the project's effectiveness in addressing identified issues varied among the participants.
- Some participants believed it successfully addressed community priorities impacted by COVID-19, while others highlighted the need for more transparent communication and tangible outcomes.

Inclusivity and Accessibility:

- Participants shared their opinions on the inclusivity and accessibility of the Le Niu project.
- While some felt inclusive and accessible, others emphasised the need for greater inclusivity and reaching out to underrepresented or marginalised community members.

Influence on Decision-Making:

- Participants discussed the role of the Le Niu project in shaping decisions that impact the community.
- Participants recognised the project's potential to advocate for community needs, empower individuals, and contribute to policy development and planning.

Positive Outcomes and Success Stories:

- The Le Niu project yielded positive outcomes, including securing grants and funding for businesses, improving communication and understanding of community needs, and inspiring individuals to pursue their aspirations.

Suggestions for Improvement:

- Participants provided valuable suggestions for enhancing the project, such as improving communication, addressing resource limitations, involving the community in decision-making, and maintaining regular engagement.

Summary of Key Findings: Insights and Implications for Future Initiatives

These key findings highlight the initial expectations and awareness, alignment with community goals and values, communication challenges, effectiveness in addressing community issues, inclusivity, accessibility, influence on decision-making, favorable outcomes, and suggestions for improvement. In addition, the findings provide valuable insights into the project's progress, challenges, and potential areas for growth and enhancement in future initiatives.

Discussion: Insights and Implications for Community Engagement

Introduction:

The success of community engagement activities is vital for developing and sustaining projects aimed at empowering communities. This section will explore the main findings from the community engagement activities in the Le Niu project. These findings provide valuable insights into the perceptions, experiences, and needs of community members, shedding light on the effectiveness of the project and identifying areas for improvement. By analyzing these key findings, we gain a deeper understanding of the various challenges and successes encountered, as well as insights for enhancing future activities in community engagement. The results highlight the importance of building solid relationships, tailoring approaches, fostering inclusivity, investing in capacity building, and implementing effective communication strategies. This exploration of the findings will enable readers to understand how they can inform and shape future initiatives in community engagement.

Awareness and Initial Expectations:

The findings indicate that participants became aware of the Le Niu project through various channels, including personal connections, social media, and community organisations. Future community engagement activities must leverage these diverse channels to ensure broad reach and accessibility. Understanding and managing initial expectations is crucial to aligning community members' interests with the project's scope and goals. Clear and transparent communication at the outset can help manage expectations and ensure that participants comprehensively understand the project's focus and potential outcomes. Clear communication can contribute to greater engagement and involvement from the community, fostering a sense of ownership and active participation.

Alignment with Community Goals and Values:

The positive perception of the Le Niu project's alignment with community goals and values highlights the importance of considering local contexts and priorities when designing community initiatives. Future community engagement activities should continue to prioritise alignment with community aspirations, strategic plans, and cultural values. Regular consultation and collaboration with community leaders and stakeholders ensure that projects effectively address pressing issues and contribute to sustainable development. Additionally, the desire for a centralized hub indicates a need for dedicated spaces that facilitate community interaction, collaboration, and the sharing of ideas. Incorporating such areas into future initiatives can foster a sense of belonging and provide platforms for ongoing community engagement.

Communication and Information Sharing:

The varied perspectives on communication and information sharing underscore the importance of clear and effective communication strategies in community engagement activities. Future projects should prioritise providing regular and concise updates to participants to enhance communication. By adopting this approach, stakeholders are encouraged to actively participate and gain a comprehensive understanding of the project's

progress, outcomes, and future actions. Information transparency enables stakeholders to stay informed and engaged, fostering a sense of involvement and accountability. This approach promotes open dialogue, collaboration, and shared decision-making, leading to more effective and inclusive project outcomes. It fosters effective engagement and understanding among all parties, facilitating collaborative decision-making and meaningful participation. Utilising a mix of communication channels, including face-to-face meetings, digital platforms, and precise summaries of discussions, can enhance accessibility and understanding. Incorporating feedback mechanisms and actively listening to community members' suggestions can foster a culture of two-way communication, making participants feel valued and engaged.

Effectiveness in Addressing Community Issues:

The mixed views on the project's effectiveness in addressing community issues highlight the need for ongoing evaluation and continuous improvement. Future community engagement activities must incorporate robust evaluation mechanisms to assess their impact and effectiveness. Measuring effectiveness includes collecting participant feedback, tracking outcomes, and measuring progress toward predefined goals. Regular evaluation allows for timely adjustments and ensures that projects remain responsive to evolving community needs. Clear communication of project outcomes and tangible actions can also enhance community trust and confidence in the project's effectiveness.

Inclusivity and Accessibility:

The findings suggest that while the Le Niu project was generally inclusive and accessible, there is still room for improvement in reaching underrepresented or marginalised community members. Future community engagement activities should strive for greater inclusivity by actively seeking the participation of diverse groups and individuals. Inclusivity can be achieved through targeted outreach efforts, partnering with community organisations, and ensuring the project accommodates diverse needs and perspectives. To enhance accessibility, it is crucial for projects to address and overcome various barriers that may hinder participation. Solutions include tackling language barriers, bridging the digital divide, and addressing geographic limitations. By proactively addressing these challenges, projects can ensure that all individuals, regardless of their language proficiency, access to technology, or location, have equal opportunities to engage and benefit from the project. This commitment to accessibility promotes inclusivity and empowers a broader range of participants to contribute their unique perspectives and experiences. Providing clear pathways for participation and offering support to individuals who face unique challenges can contribute to more inclusive and accessible community engagement activities.

Influence on Decision-Making:

The findings highlight the potential of community engagement activities, like the Le Niu project, to shape decision-making processes. The project's ability to advocate for community needs, empower individuals, and contribute to policy development and planning demonstrates the impact of inclusive and participatory approaches. Future community engagement activities should foster meaningful involvement of community members in decision-making processes, ensuring that their voices are heard and respected. Community engagement activities can strengthen their influence on decision-making and drive positive change by actively engaging with decision-makers and demonstrating the project's outcomes and successes.

Positive Outcomes and Success Stories:

The Le Niu project's positive outcomes and success stories highlight the transformative power of community engagement activities. These achievements underscore the importance of providing resources, support, and platforms for individuals to pursue their aspirations and initiatives. Future community engagement activities should prioritise creating opportunities for community members to thrive and succeed. To achieve this, active support, mentorship, and resources should be provided to help individuals realise their goals. Support empowers individuals to overcome challenges and make meaningful progress toward their aspirations. Sharing success stories and highlighting the project's positive impact can inspire others and create a ripple effect of community-driven initiatives. Additionally, future activities should foster a sense of community empowerment, belonging, and connection. By nurturing a supportive and collaborative environment, community engagement activities can empower individuals to take ownership of their ideas and drive positive change.

Implications for Future Community Engagement Activities:

The key findings identify several implications for future community engagement activities. These findings highlight the importance of building solid relationships, tailoring approaches, fostering inclusivity, investing in capacity building, and implementing effective communication strategies. These implications guide stakeholders in enhancing the impact and sustainability of community engagement efforts, ensuring they actively respond to community needs and aspirations. Firstly, there is a need for effective communication strategies that provide clear and transparent information sharing, regular updates, and active listening to community feedback. Secondly, projects should aim for alignment with community goals, values, and cultural contexts to foster a sense of ownership and relevance among participants. Thirdly, prioritising inclusivity and accessibility requires actively engaging underrepresented or marginalised groups and addressing barriers to participation. This involves creating an inclusive and welcoming environment, providing targeted support and resources, and ensuring diverse voices are heard and valued. By proactively addressing these issues, future community engagement activities can promote inclusivity, empower individuals from diverse backgrounds, and encourage active participation in community development. Fourthly, ongoing evaluation and monitoring are crucial to measure the effectiveness of community engagement activities and make necessary adjustments. Lastly, future initiatives should strive to empower individuals, provide resources and support, and foster a collaborative environment where community members can realise their aspirations and drive sustainable change.

By incorporating these implications into future community engagement activities, the Le Niu project can build stronger relationships with the community, facilitate meaningful participation,

and contribute to all community members' holistic development and well-being.

Additionally, the findings highlight the importance of tailored approaches and recognising the unique dynamics of each community. Community engagement activities should be flexible and adaptable, allowing for customisation based on the community's specific needs, values, and cultural contexts. This requires building solid partnerships and relationships with community leaders, organisations, and key stakeholders to ensure collaboration, shared decision-making, and collective ownership of the initiatives.

Furthermore, future community engagement activities should prioritise community capacity building and skill development. Providing training, education, and mentorship opportunities can empower community members to take on leadership roles, contribute their expertise, and actively participate in decision-making processes. By investing in the growth and development of community members, projects can foster a sense of ownership, sustainability, and long-term impact.

In terms of communication and information sharing, there is a need for diverse and inclusive strategies that go beyond traditional channels. Utilising multiple platforms, such as social media, community gatherings, workshops, and newsletters, can reach a wider audience and ensure that information is accessible to all. Clear and concise messaging, regular updates, and feedback mechanisms can enhance community engagement and create a sense of transparency and trust.

Moreover, the findings emphasise the importance of building on existing community networks and relationships. Leveraging personal connections, word of mouth, and influential community members can significantly enhance engagement and participation. Collaborating with local organisations, schools, and cultural groups can also create synergies and expand the reach of community engagement activities.

Conclusion: Enhancing Community Engagement for Sustainable Impact

The key findings from the community engagement activities underscore the significance of building solid relationships, tailoring approaches, fostering inclusivity, investing in capacity building, and implementing effective communication strategies. By incorporating these elements into future initiatives, projects can create a sustainable and impactful community engagement framework that empowers individuals, strengthens social connections, and drives positive change. Continuous evaluation, feedback, and adaptation are essential to ensure that community engagement activities remain responsive, relevant, and meaningful to the evolving needs and aspirations of the community.

Critical Recommendations for Community Engagement

The following section presents a set of key recommendations to enhance community engagement and empowerment in the context of the Le Niu project. We derived these recommendations from a comprehensive analysis of the project's findings and discussions. Each proposal reflects the overarching goals of Ako Aotearoa and aligns to foster equitable and engaged Pacific communities. By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders can enhance community engagement, empowerment, and sustainable development. The recommendations emphasise the importance of transparent and inclusive communication strategies, adequate resource allocation, collaborative partnerships, capacity building, and culturally responsive practices. By implementing these recommendations, organisations, and individuals can empower Pacific communities and drive positive change. Through the adoption of these recommendations, stakeholders and organisations can contribute to long-term sustainability and positively impact community initiatives. The proposals include communication strategies, resource allocation, collaboration, capacity building, and inclusive practices. We hope these recommendations will serve as a valuable guide for future endeavors, fostering meaningful change and addressing the unique needs of Pacific communities.

Key Recommendations for Future Community Engagement Activities:

Strengthen Relationship Building:

Prioritise building solid relationships with community members by fostering trust, active listening, and open communication channels. This foundation of trust will enhance community engagement and ensure long-term collaboration.

Tailor Approaches:

Recognise the diversity within the community and tailor engagement strategies to meet the specific needs, interests, and cultural contexts of different groups. Embrace a flexible, inclusive approach that respects and values all community members' unique perspectives and contributions.

Invest in Capacity Building:

Provide opportunities for capacity building within the community by offering training, workshops, and resources to empower individuals and community organisations. Strengthening their skills and knowledge will enable them to participate in community initiatives actively.

Enhance Communication Strategies:

Develop clear and effective communication strategies that reach all community members. Utilise various channels, including face-to-face meetings, digital platforms, social media, and community networks, to ensure information is accessible and disseminated widely.

Foster Collaboration:

Encourage collaboration and partnerships between community members, organisations, and

stakeholders. Create platforms and spaces for dialogue, idea-sharing, and joint decision-making, fostering a sense of ownership and collective responsibility.

Incorporate Continuous Evaluation and Feedback: Establish mechanisms for ongoing evaluation and feedback to monitor the effectiveness and impact of community engagement activities. Regularly assess the outcomes and adjust strategies accordingly to ensure continuous improvement.

Empower Underrepresented Groups:

Prioritise the needs and voices of underrepresented and marginalised groups within the community. Take proactive measures to ensure their inclusion, participation, and representation in decision-making processes.

Promote Resource Mobilization:

Seek and secure financial and non-financial resources to support community engagement activities. Actively collaborate with funding agencies, government bodies, and private sector organisations to access resources that align with community priorities.

Foster Sustainable Partnerships:

Build sustainable partnerships with relevant stakeholders, including local government, educational institutions, community organisations, and businesses. By forging strong alliances, stakeholders can share resources and maximise collaborative efforts for long-term community development. This recommendation emphasises building partnerships and fostering collaborative relationships among organisations, community members, and key stakeholders. By working together, pooling resources, and leveraging collective expertise, the community can achieve more significant impact and sustainability in its development initiatives. Collaboration enables sharing of knowledge, skills, and resources, leading to innovative solutions, increased efficiency, and a holistic approach to community development. By actively fostering these alliances, stakeholders can enhance their capacity to address community needs and drive positive change.

Share Best Practices and Lessons Learned:

Encourage exchanging knowledge and spreading successful strategies from productive community engagement activities. Facilitate networking opportunities and platforms where communities can learn from one another's experiences and replicate practical approaches.

Implementing these key recommendations will contribute to more meaningful and impactful community engagement activities, fostering a sense of ownership, empowerment, and sustainable development within the community.

Conclusion: Enhancing Community Engagement and Empowerment

The recommendations presented in this section provide a roadmap for improving community engagement and empowerment within the context of the Le Niu project. By prioritising these recommendations and implementing them effectively, stakeholders can further enhance the impact and sustainability of community initiatives. The recommendations emphasise the importance of transparent and inclusive communication strategies, adequate resource allocation, collaborative partnerships, capacity building, and culturally responsive practices. By embracing these recommendations, organisations, and individuals can create a supportive and empowering environment for Pacific communities, driving positive change and addressing their unique needs. Through these collective efforts, we can build stronger, more resilient, and equitable communities for the future.

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