

POV

Community
Engagement & Education

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Of Men and War

A Film by Laurent Bécue-Renard



www.pbs.org/pov

Of Men and War came out of a reflection on what was left unspoken by my grandfathers. They had died by the time I was born—but they had also staunchly refused to talk about their experiences from the First World War while they were alive. In my first film, *War-Wearied* (*De guerre lasses*), I broached this subject with three widows who survived the Bosnian war. In a sense, that film was a portrait of my grandmothers. All the while, the war experiences of my grandfathers continued to haunt me. **Of Men and War** is my way of honoring them.

It took 11 years between my first idea for the film—when the Iraq war began in 2003—and its completion in May 2014. I spent 14 months in the therapy center and returned many times in the four years that followed.

Filming therapy was a way of acknowledging people who had decided to move forward with their lives. Some days I'd leave the therapy room overwhelmed. How was I to make sense out of this mess? How could I communicate it to an audience? I became convinced that from all this mud, I could eke out rays of light. In doing so, I could find meaning for the protagonists in **Of Men and War** as well as for its viewers.

The residents came to perceive the filming itself as an additional glimmer of hope. Consciously or not, the veterans began to sense that voicing their brutal experiences might uncover deeper meaning: Their stories might contribute to a greater public consciousness of the hardships veterans confront long after the war's end.

Laurent Bécue-Renard

Director/Writer, **Of Men and War**



Director Laurent Bécue-Renard.
Photo courtesy of Camille Cottagnoud

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Shot over five years, **Of Men and War** (83 min) provides an in-depth look at the aftermath of war through the lens of trauma therapy. It follows the lives of 12 veterans and their families as they struggle to live with and recover from PTSD. Through unprecedented access to their lives at home and intense footage of therapy sessions at The Pathway Home in Yountville, California, director Laurent Bécue-Renard unveils the gripping, upsetting reality that is the daily life of many war veterans.

In the film, veterans tell their stories—for themselves, for each other and also for us. The therapeutic process allows these men to grasp what they did, endured and witnessed—and to understand how those experiences mold who they are today. Hearing their stories transforms viewers into witnesses of the brutal truths of service members' experiences, creating a public consciousness of the hardships that these veterans confront long after war's end.

Of Men and War offers a glimpse into the difficult lives of some of our nation's fighters as they battle to make peace with their pasts. The film follows veterans who seek treatment for specific war-related mental health concerns. Their experiences do not and cannot reflect the experiences of all veterans, but their struggle compels us to think about our societal responsibility to meet the needs of those we send to war, both while they are "in country" and long after combat has ended. Though most combat veterans resume productive and happy lives, the film reminds us that an estimated 20 percent of soldiers (several hundred thousand men and women) have been traumatized in ways that make a return to normal life a challenge. Viewing gives us pause to think about whether the benefits we gain from war are worth the price that we ask service members and their families to pay.

POTENTIAL PARTNERS

Of Men and War is well suited for use in a variety of settings and is especially recommended for use with:

- **Your local PBS station**
- **Groups that have discussed other PBS and POV films relating to war, including *Almost Sunrise* (POV 2017), *Armadillo* (POV 2011), *War Feels Like War* (POV 2004), *Where Soldiers Come From* (POV 2011), *Point and Shoot* (POV 2015), *Soldiers of Conscience* (POV 2008), *Return to Homs* (POV 2015), *Regret to Inform* (POV 2000) and *The Way We Get By* (POV 2009).**
- **Groups focused on any of the issues listed in the Key Issues section**
- **Veterans' organizations**
- **Civic, fraternal and community groups**
- **Psychologists, social workers and medical professionals**
- **Academic departments and student groups at colleges, universities and high schools**
- **College and upper-level high school students**
- **Faith-based organizations and institutions**
- **Cultural, art and historical organizations, institutions and museums**
- **Community organizations with a mission to promote education and learning, such as local libraries**

KEY ISSUES

Of Men and War is an excellent tool for outreach and will be of special interest to people looking to explore the following topics:

- **anger management**
- **family**
- **Iraq and Afghanistan Wars**
- **marriage**
- **masculinity/manhood**
- **military recruiting**
- **military service**
- **peace studies**
- **psychology**
- **PTSD**
- **recovery**
- **service members**
- **substance abuse**
- **therapy**
- **trauma**
- **veterans affairs**
- **violence**
- **war**



This guide is an invitation to dialogue. It is based on a belief in the power of human connection, designed for people who want to use **Of Men and War** to engage family, friends, classmates, colleagues and communities. In contrast to initiatives that foster debates in which participants try to convince others that they are right, this document envisions conversations undertaken in a spirit of openness in which people try to understand one another and expand their thinking by sharing viewpoints and listening actively.

The discussion prompts are intentionally crafted to help a wide range of audiences think more deeply about the issues in the film. Rather than attempting to address them all, choose one or two that best meet your needs and interests. And be sure to leave time to consider taking action. Planning next steps can help people leave the room feeling energized and optimistic, even in instances when conversations have been difficult.

For more detailed event planning and facilitation tips, visit www.pov.org/engage

Of Men and War is an intense film on a sensitive subject. If you are facilitating a discussion, be prepared to take care of yourself and audience members. If possible, we strongly recommend having a specialist trained in treating PTSD on site. If that isn't possible, be prepared to refer people who are especially upset to local support agencies.

If the tension level rises, additional strategies might include pausing to let everyone take a deep breath. You might also consider providing a safe space for people to “vent” or decompress, perhaps with a partner or in a small group of familiar faces. If applicable, be sure to note the presence of members of the press and whether comments are “on the record” (i.e., public and not confidential).



The Pathway Home

The Pathway Home, located in Yountville, California, is a treatment center for male veterans who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan. Therapist and social worker Fred Gusman founded the center in 2008 after shaping PTSD programs for the Veterans Administration in the late 1970s. The center provides a free residential treatment program, including both group and individual therapy, with a particular focus on assisting veterans as they return to family and community life. Families of veterans are integrated into the program through family support groups and counseling.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs offers PTSD treatment in both outpatient and inpatient settings, as well as collaborating with independent providers, like The Pathway Home, to secure treatment for veterans across the country. According to a major study conducted by RAND Corporation in 2007, 53 percent of veterans with PTSD symptoms sought treatment in the past year.

Sources:

Poole, Robert M. "The Pathway Home Makes Inroads in Treating PTSD." *Smithsonian*, Sept. 2010. <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/people-places/the-pathway-home-makes-inroads-in-treating-ptsd-55062082/?no-ist>.

Tanielian, Terri, and Lisa H. Jaycox, eds. *Invisible Wounds of War: Psychological and Cognitive Injuries, Their Consequences, and Services to Assist Recovery*. Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2008. <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG720.html>.

Impact of War on Service Members

Studies conducted by both the military and outside researchers have found that 15 to 20 percent of service members returning from combat in the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan are subject to a host of mental health challenges, including PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder). PTSD is an anxiety disorder that occurs after a person is exposed to an event that is life-threatening or extremely dangerous. Symptoms of PTSD include flashbacks, nightmares, insomnia and general anxiety that make returning and readjusting to civilian life difficult. People who experience PTSD may go on to have problems with substance abuse; employment; relationships and controlling impulsive behavior. Secondhand effects of PTSD also impact spouses, children and parents. Almost 30 percent of the more than 830,000 Iraq and Afghanistan War veterans treated through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs have been diagnosed with PTSD.

The effects of PTSD and traumatic stress are increasingly being seen as a public health issue. Across demographic groups, veterans are at increased risk of dying by suicide. It appears that veterans' risk of suicide is highest in the three years immediately after they leave military service. At the height of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, from 2009 to 2011, the number of male veterans under the age of 30 who died by suicide increased by 44 percent.

Sources:

Nicks, Denver. "Report: Suicide Rate Soars Among Young Vets." *Time*, Jan. 10, 2014. <http://time.com/304/report-suicide-rate-soars-among-young-vets/>.

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs: National Center for PTSD. "PTSD Basics." <http://www.ptsd.va.gov/PTSD/public/PTSD-overview/basics/index.asp>

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs: Public Health. "National Health Study for a New Generation of U.S. Veterans." <http://www.publichealth.va.gov/epidemiology/studies/new-generation/>

Welch, William M. "Trauma of Iraq War Haunting Thousands Returning Home." *USA Today*, Feb. 28, 2005. http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/world/iraq/2005-02-28-cover-iraq-injuries_x.htm

Invisible War Wounds

The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are the longest U.S. military operations since the Vietnam War. Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom troops returning from combat have experienced a wide range of psychological responses and mental health problems. Every year, 11 to 20 percent of veterans who served in those wars screen positive for PTSD. According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' National Center for PTSD, many veterans experience some level of sleeplessness, anger, anxiety, irritability, unwanted memories, guilt, hopelessness or feelings of isolation. The group Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America reports that the severity of these symptoms varies widely among individuals, and that a veteran's symptoms may fluctuate over time. If the symptoms become severe or persistent, they are often diagnosed as either PTSD or major depression. In addition to these psychological injuries, some troops who have suffered concussions (from improvised explosive devices, for example) may be experiencing the effects of traumatic brain injury, including mood/behavior changes and cognitive impairments. It is not unusual for veterans to be coping with both psychological injuries and traumatic brain injury, and the effects of these two kinds of injuries can overlap.

PTSD was formally recognized by the American Psychiatric Association in 1980, after troops traumatized by hand-to-hand combat, insurgencies and ambushes in the Vietnam War had been back on American shores for years. For some veterans, the warning signs appear quickly after deployment. For others, months or years pass before they surface.

The disorder may include the following:

1. Reliving the event (also called re-experiencing symptoms): Bad memories and hallucinations of the traumatic event can come back at any time, resulting in nightmares and flashbacks. Triggers such as a car backfiring, which sounds like gunfire, may cause a veteran to relive events of war.
2. Avoiding situations that remind the veteran of the event: Veterans may try to avoid situations or people that trigger memories of the traumatic event and may even avoid talking or thinking about the event.
3. Feeling numb: Veterans may find it hard to express their feelings and may not have positive or loving feelings toward other people.
4. Feeling keyed up (also called hyperarousal or hypervigilance): Veterans may be jittery, or always alert and on the lookout for danger, which can cause them to become angry or irritable suddenly or to have a hard time concentrating. Crowds and open spaces, such as supermarkets, can be triggers.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' National Center for PTSD recommends that PTSD counselors consider avoiding labeling veterans as having PTSD or providing other formal diagnoses at the beginning of treatment, as veterans may resist diagnosis or downplay their symptoms in reaction to the societal attitudes toward PTSD and/or fear about their status in the military. Rather, counselors might focus on addressing symptoms and discuss potential diagnoses only after confidentiality concerns have been addressed.

Sources:

Berglass, Nancy. "America's Duty: The Imperative of a New Approach to Warrior and Veteran Care." Center for a New American Security, Nov. 2010.
http://www.cnas.org/files/documents/publications/CNAS_AmericasDuty_Berglass_0.pdf

Hamilton, Jon. "Football's Brain injury Lessons Head to Battlefield." *Morning Edition*, Oct. 12, 2010.
<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=130436629>

Kim, Paul Y. et al. "Stigma, Barriers to Care and Use of Mental Health Services Among Active Duty and National Guard Soldiers After Combat." *Clinical Manual of Psychosomatic*

Medicine, June 1, 2010. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1176/ps.2010.61.6.582>

Matson, John. "Legacy of Mental Health Problems from Iraq and Afghanistan Wars Will Be Long-Lived." *Scientific American*, June 27, 2011. <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/ptsd-awareness-day-afghanistan/>

Mulhall, Erin with Vanessa Williamson. "Red tape: Veterans Fight New Battles for Care and Benefits." *Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America*, Feb. 2010.

http://media.iava.org/IAVA%20Redtape%20Report_2010.pdf

Williamson, Vanessa and Erin Mulhall. "Invisible Wounds: Psychological and Neurological Injuries Confront a New Generation of Veterans." *Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America*, Jan. 2009.

https://issuu.com/iava/docs/invisible_wounds_2009

Impact of PTSD on Veteran Families

The effects of PTSD can extend beyond the individual, but can place added stress on partners and children. A partner takes on new roles during a soldier's absence and, upon return, the renegotiation of those roles can add tension to an already challenging period. For a spouse, it can be stressful to share a home with a soldier who experiences PTSD, who may be irritable, prone to nightmares and socially withdrawn. For a veteran, it can be difficult to communicate with a spouse about the experiences of war or symptoms of PTSD. In addition to causing depression and anxiety, PTSD can interfere with social functioning. It can be especially difficult for service members with PTSD to reconnect with friends and social contacts outside the family, putting extra pressure on the family unit. Often, the emotional "numbing" effect of PTSD leads soldiers to feel detached from their loved ones and to be less interested in family life and parenting activities. Development of relationships with other veterans and the cultivation of a social network are another focus of PTSD treatment aimed at maintaining a healthy home life.

Veterans with PTSD may have difficulty finding and keeping jobs, as common symptoms of PTSD—such as irritability and trouble with functioning socially—can deter employers or cause workplace stress and anxiety. In addition to the psychological burden, this can place a financial burden on the family. Counseling providers often focus on giving families skills, such as anger management, conflict resolution and stress reduction tools, to employ during the transition to home life, which can help facilitate a successful transition into employment. In addition, many organizations work to connect veterans with job opportunities—and connect employers to a skilled workforce.

In recent years, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has made it a priority to increase the percentage of veterans who seek and receive mental health treatment upon their return from war. In treating and addressing the health needs of the large number of veterans returning from war who experience PTSD, care providers are also working to lessen the effect of PTSD on families and children. When understanding of the trauma caused by war is facilitated, veterans receive more comprehensive treatment and support for their successful return to civilian life.

Please see the Resources section of this guide for a directory of organizations for veterans and families coping with PTSD and other psychological injuries.

Sources:

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs: National Center for PTSD. "Effects of PTSD on Family." <http://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/family/effects-ptsd-family.asp>

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs: National Center for PTSD. "Helping a Family Member Who Has PTSD." <http://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/family/helping-family-member.asp>



Immediately after the film, you may want to give people a few quiet moments to reflect on what they have seen or pose a general question (examples below) and give people some time to themselves to jot down or think about their answers before opening the discussion:

- What's your initial reaction?
- If you had to summarize the main message(s) of the film, what would you say?
- Describe a moment, scene or person in the film you found particularly compelling. What about it or them was especially compelling for you?
- Was there anything in the film that surprised you?

At the end of your discussion, to help people synthesize what they've experienced and move the focus from dialogue to action steps, you may want to choose one of these questions:

- What did you learn from this film that you wish everyone knew? What would change if everyone knew it?
- If you could require one person (or one group) to view this film, who would it be? What do you hope their main takeaway would be?
- Complete this sentence: I am inspired by this film (or discussion) to _____.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

Sending Men to War

If you could ask one of the veterans a single question, what would you want to know?

Why do you suppose the film opens with this quote from All Quiet on the Western Front: "What would our fathers do if we suddenly stood up and came before them and proffered our account?" What does the quote mean to you and how does it relate to the rest of the film?

In therapy, the men reveal the experiences that haunt them. How do their stories inform the way you think about war?

War Stories

As you listen to the veterans tell the stories that haunt them, what do you notice about the things that the stories have in common? How do the stories differ? How did their job assignments—active combat, morgue staff, medic—contribute to their unique perspectives on death?

How do these veterans' wartime experiences influence their relationships with their wives, girlfriends, parents and children?

Accepting collateral damage as regrettable but inevitable is a tenet of the military's rules of engagement. How might this increase or decrease the difficulty that these veterans have in processing their experiences?

PTSD

What did you learn from the film about PTSD? What did the vets at The Pathway Home have in common, and in what ways did their symptoms differ?

Why might so many veterans hide their symptoms of PTSD? How does that affect them and others?

A service member suffering from anxiety says he is embarrassed "because you feel small. You don't feel as strong as you used to. You feel defective." Do expectations about what it means to be a good man or what it means to be a good service member influence the veterans' interpretations of their experiences during and after deployment? How so?

The mortician describes walling himself off from the other service members, explaining: "I don't want to know you, I don't want to know anything about you. Because I don't want to have to grieve for you. If I did do that for everyone, if I had done that for everyone, I would have gone crazy." How does this survival strategy affect the way he copes with PTSD?

One of the men says, "I'm scared of myself. My wife is scared of me." What do you think it feels like to know that the people you love most in the world are afraid of you? Have you ever been afraid of yourself? What was that like?

A vet expresses guilt at flinging open a door, which unintentionally killed a young girl, and then yelling at the girl's mother. The therapist explains that he acted out "because what happened was not okay with you...What I'm saying to

you is, what you did was because what happened was so bad for you.” From this perspective, how do the symptoms of PTSD, including displacing anger or feeling survivor’s guilt, indicate that a person is morally conscious?

In your experience, how are people with mental health issues generally and PTSD specifically depicted in media? How did the film compare to other things you’ve seen or heard? How do these depictions influence the way veterans are treated in your community?

Reflect on your perceptions of PTSD and mental health issues before seeing the film. Have they changed at all?

Healing

Why does the therapist encourage the men to tell their stories? What is the power of naming one’s experience and having others bear witness to it?

Several of the veterans describe shutting off emotions and emotional connections in order to survive their experiences “in country.” What other types of professionals train to keep emotions in check on the job? How do we help those people reclaim their emotional lives when they aren’t on the job? How could their experiences be relevant for returning service members adjusting to civilian life, or service members leaving civilian life and returning to conflicts? How could their experiences be relevant to families of service members?

One of the vets says that people in his life don’t understand him: “I really just don’t feel like I fit in anywhere at all.” What difference do you think it would make for him, or others like him, if people did understand?

The therapist tells one of the men, “Stop being a medic and take care of yourself.” What do you think he means? Why might medics have an especially difficult time accepting help? What obstacles do others face that prevent them from accepting help?

A veteran who accidentally killed his friend fixates on the outcome that he can’t change: “So what the f*** does it matter, accident or not. The guilt’s the guilt and the shame’s the shame...Nothing can be done about it.” The therapist responds: “Well, the other option is to decide what do you do with something like this, because you can’t bring the person back.” How might this man see that he can choose to make a valuable contribution to his family and community, despite the past?

What was it like for you to see the veterans with their children?

In several scenes where veterans speak about their trauma, the camera is very close. In your view, how does the presence of a camera influence therapy? What are the ethics of filming group therapy sessions? What are the benefits and drawbacks of recording the veterans as they work through their issues?

What did you learn from the film about mental health treatment? What would you tell someone with PTSD symptoms about treatment?

What are some ways you think non-veterans can become more engaged and supportive of veterans?

Additional media literacy questions are available at:
www.pbs.org/pov/educators/media-literacy.php

Taking Action

- **Get involved in or volunteer to support local groups serving veterans.**
- **Work with a local veterans organization to host a potluck, barbecue or other social gathering for both veterans and community members. Dispel stigmas and misconceptions by offering a space for veterans and community members to interact, have fun and get to know one another.**
- **Create a buddy system for families in your community who are coping with veterans who have returned from service with PTSD. Prepare volunteers with information on local resources, including a referral list of professionals who can help. Provide training on support strategies that are especially helpful for family members of veterans.**
- **Hold an education session for police, parole and corrections officers; attorneys and judges; social workers and psychologists; and other professionals who encounter veterans with PTSD.**
- **Create a local education campaign to combat stereotypes about PTSD and other mental health issues that prevent people in need from seeking or getting treatment.**

Film-Related Resources

OF MEN AND WAR

www.ofmenandwar.com

The production company's website offers information and a schedule of international screenings.

www.menandwar.com

The U.S. distributor's site for the film includes information on organizing a screening in the United States or purchasing the film for educational/institutional use.

Online Special Features from POV

To enhance the broadcast, POV has produced a companion website to enable viewers to explore the film in greater depth. The **Of Men and War** website—www.pbs.org/pov/ofmenandwar—features an interview with the filmmaker; an update on the film's subjects; a list of related articles and books; and educational resources.

Veterans Organizations and Family Resources

COALITION FOR IRAQ + AFGHANISTAN VETERANS

coalitionforveterans.org

This is a clearinghouse of 52 agencies serving veterans who have been deployed in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

MAKE THE CONNECTION

Maketheconnection.net

This website connects veterans and their families to resources and information. It also collects personal stories of veterans that can be sorted by gender, service era and branch, as well as combat experience.

NATIONAL VETERANS FOUNDATION

nvf.org

Among this group's resources are recent reports on PTSD and a guide for attorneys defending veterans in criminal court (nvf.org/attorneys-guide-defending-veterans-criminal-court/).

STOP SOLDIER SUICIDE

stopsoldiersuicide.org

This civilian organization connects at-risk active service members and veterans with resources to help prevent suicide.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS: NATIONAL CENTER FOR PTSD

PTSD.va.gov

This division focuses on research and education on trauma and PTSD.

VETERANS COMING HOME

Veteranscominghome.org

This cross-platform public media campaign aims to bridge America's military-civilian divide by telling stories, challenging stereotypes and exploring how the values of service and citizenship are powerful connectors for all Americans. Produced by Wisconsin Public Television, in partnership with the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

VETERANS CRISIS LINE

Veteranscrisisline.net

This organization's resource locator helps veterans find local resources based on their zip codes or states.

VETERANS' FAMILIES UNITED FOUNDATION

Veteransfamiliesunited.org

This volunteer organization provides resources and support for veterans and their families coping with war or service related illnesses.

HOW TO BUY THE FILM

To purchase **Of Men and War**, visit www.menandwar.com



Produced by American Documentary, Inc., POV is public television's premier showcase for nonfiction films. The series airs Mondays at 10 p.m. on PBS from June to September, with primetime specials during the year. Since 1988, POV has been the home for the world's boldest contemporary filmmakers, celebrating intriguing personal stories that spark conversation and inspire action. Always an innovator, POV discovers fresh new voices and creates interactive experiences that shine a light on social issues and elevate the art of storytelling. With our documentary broadcasts, original online programming and dynamic community engagement campaigns, we are committed to supporting films that capture the imagination and present diverse perspectives.

POV films have won 32 Emmy® Awards, 18 George Foster Peabody Awards, 12 Alfred I. duPont-Columbia University Awards, three Academy Awards®, the first-ever George Polk Documentary Film Award and the Prix Italia. The POV series has been honored with a Special News & Documentary Emmy Award for Excellence in Television Documentary Filmmaking, two IDA Awards for Best Continuing Series and the National Association of Latino Independent Producers (NALIP) Award for Corporate Commitment to Diversity. More information is available at www.pbs.org/pov.

POV Digital www.pbs.org/pov

Since 1994, POV Digital has driven new storytelling initiatives and interactive production for POV. The department created PBS's first program website and its first web-based documentary (*POV's Borders*) and has won major awards, including a Webby Award (and six nominations) and an Online News Association Award. POV Digital continues to explore the future of independent nonfiction media through its digital productions and the POV Hackathon lab, where media makers and technologists collaborate to reinvent storytelling forms. @povdocs on Twitter.

Front cover: A veteran and his daughter at home.
Photo courtesy of Alice Films

POV Community Engagement and Education

POV's Community Engagement and Education team works with educators, community organizations and PBS stations to present more than 650 free screenings every year. In addition, we distribute free discussion guides and standards-aligned lesson plans for each of our films. With our community partners, we inspire dialogue around the most important social issues of our time.

American Documentary, Inc. www.amdoc.org

American Documentary, Inc. (AmDoc) is a multimedia company dedicated to creating, identifying and presenting contemporary stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream media outlets. AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture, developing collaborative strategic engagement activities around socially relevant content on television, online and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback to educational opportunities and community participation.

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