

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Despite the severe shortage of land suitable for development in Hong Kong, we see pockets of vacant or underused sites across the territory. We hear from time to time that different community groups are looking for space to implement their initiatives but cannot find or afford appropriate locations. Yet there are currently more than 800 government short-term tenancy (STT) sites or vacant school premises available for community use at nominal rents.

These vacant sites are valuable resources, which could be transformed into usable public spaces for the benefit of the community. This would enhance the well-being of local residents, lift community spirit, and improve the living environment of Hong Kong.

Very Hong Kong has undertaken a nine-month independent study to engage the public through focus-group discussions, one-on-one interviews and a community-planning charrette. This helped to collect the views of residents and stakeholders and suggested new, improved ways to deliver community initiatives.

ISSUES

We discovered that the implementation of existing projects is currently hampered on the one hand by unclear and layered application procedures, and on the other by the lack of financial resources and professional support experienced by many community groups. In addition to the difficulty in securing financial resources, it is also a major challenge for community groups to search for sites. They must obtain government policy support and then go through a lengthy formal application procedure, win land-use approvals, and secure the required permits and licences.

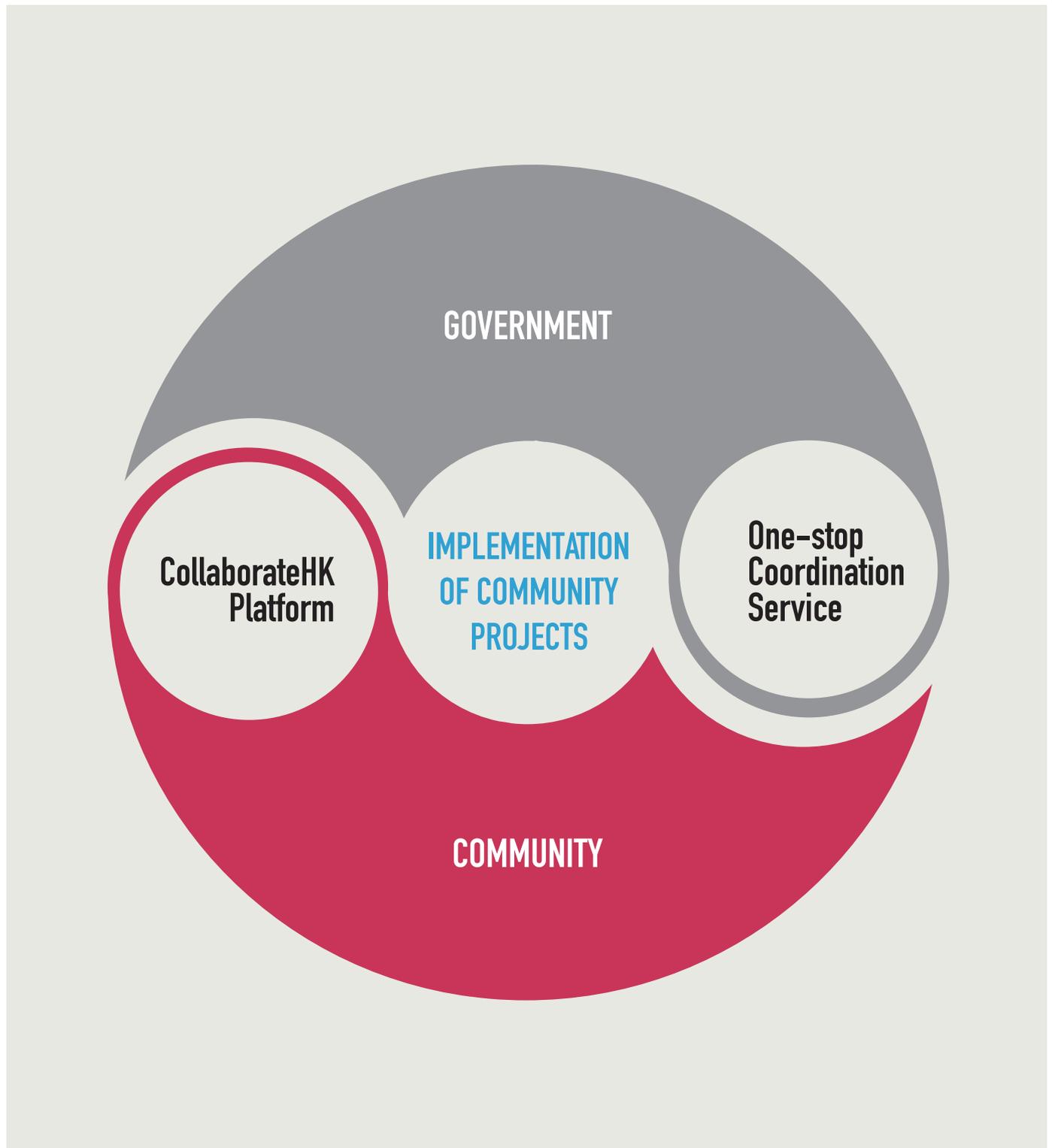


We have talked to local concern groups, community-project operators and professionals to understand their experience and difficulty in carrying out community projects. We have also reviewed desktop literature on local and overseas cases. This has helped raise ten major issues, and we have identified possible ways to resolve them.

Identified Issues		Possible Solutions
1	Application procedures are too complicated and time-consuming; how and where to obtain policy support is unclear	A “one-stop” advisory and coordination office within government to receive and follow up on community-initiative proposals
2	Community groups lack professional advice to realise their ideas	A non-government collaboration platform providing affordable professional advice to help community groups consolidate their ideas into sound project proposals
3	Lack of public engagement in community projects	Bottom-up planning and placemaking activities to support decisions on community initiatives
4	Mistrust of private-sector participation in community projects	An open and transparent public-private partnership to slowly build trust
5	Community groups lack capital and other funding for community projects	A fund searching platform to link potential fund sources with funding recipients
6	Community groups lack business skills to run community projects in a financially sustainable manner	An educational capacity-building platform to empower community groups
7	Administrative workload is overwhelming for funding schemes	Advice for funders to streamline report-writing requirements
8	Land tenure for community projects is too short to achieve financial viability and long-term impact	The government to reflect project needs in the tenancy duration of STT sites
9	Lack of collaboration and support among community groups	A non-government collaboration platform to share information and build networks
10	Direct-grant short-term-tenancy sites (at nominal rent) forbid commercial activities	A new government approach in assessing land premiums for community projects, reflecting both the social benefit and permitted commercial activity that helps meet operational and management costs

SUGGESTED TWO-PART COLLABORATION FRAMEWORK

The possible solutions identified by Very Hong Kong fall into two main categories: government action to enhance governance and public inclusion; and non-government response to encourage collaboration among different sectors in society. When both private and public sectors respond, this structure would form a two-part collaboration framework.



Government: One-Stop Coordination Service

There is clear support for the provision of a one-stop coordination service within the government to receive and process community-project proposals. As the 800+ vacant STT sites are currently held by the Lands Department, a special unit could be formed within the department to streamline the application process. For community projects that do not involve specified STT sites, the Project Coordination Team within Policy Innovation and Coordination Office might be the appropriate choice. The suggested government-coordination office could do the following:

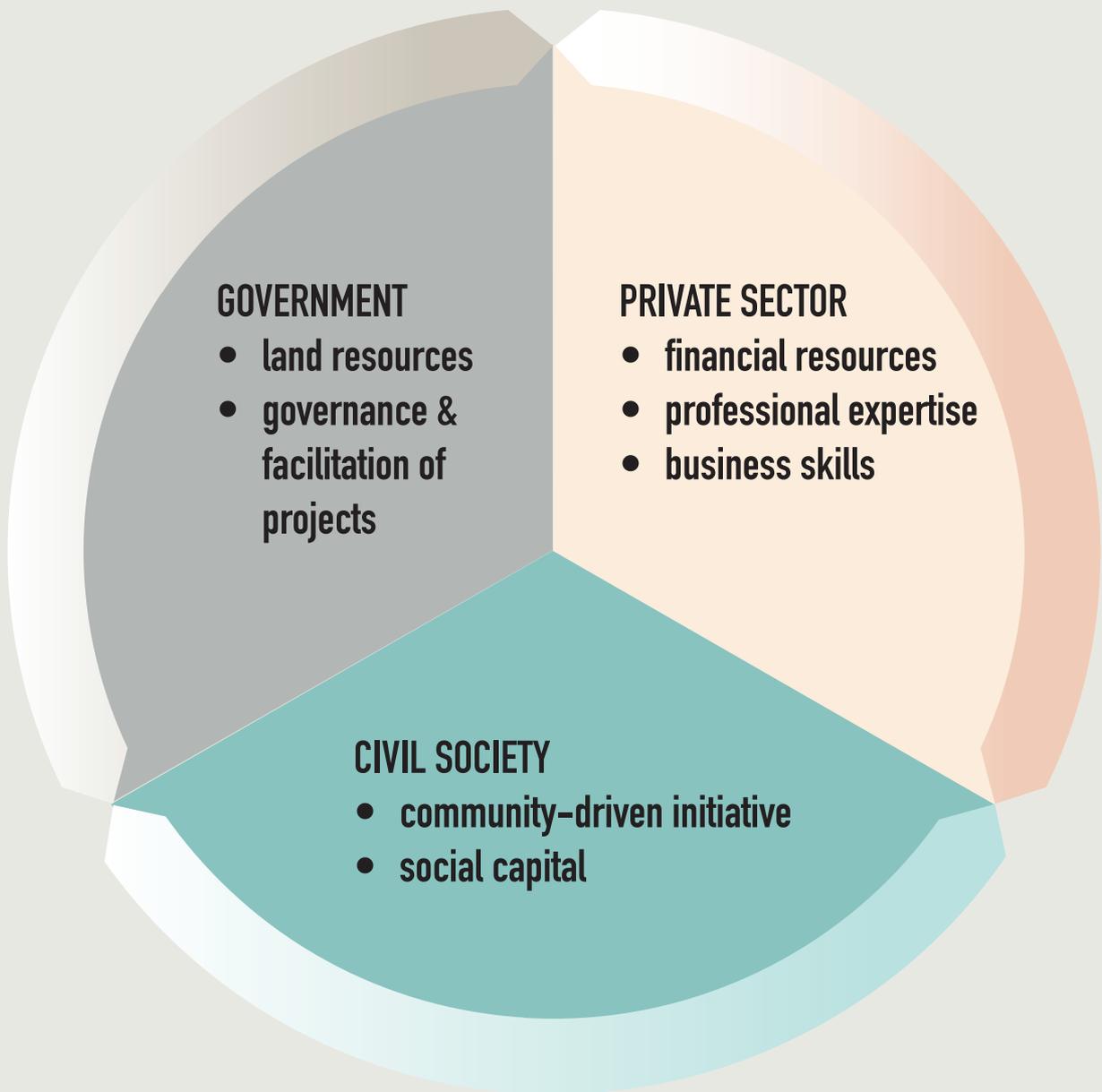
- Receive community-project proposals
- Dispatch proposals to relevant government departments for collecting their comments and obtaining policy support
- Assist project proponents in filing for required permits and licences such as the Temporary Places of Public Entertainment Licence, Temporary Food Factory Licence, Fire Services Certificate and letters of confirmation or no objection for carrying out specific community initiatives

Non-Government: CollaborateHK Platform

A non-government collaboration platform named CollaborateHK would be set up in the form of a company limited by guarantee with S.88 charitable status. CollaborateHK would be responsible for recommending validated projects to submit to the government's one-stop coordination office for consultation and eventual approval by the relevant authorities. CollaborateHK would ensure project proposals have sufficient public support and deliver measurable social benefit. CollaborateHK would also arrange for the provision of professional advice and assist in search for funding to support validated proposals.

CollaborateHK would perform six major functions to address community needs:





GOVERNMENT

- land resources
- governance & facilitation of projects

PRIVATE SECTOR

- financial resources
- professional expertise
- business skills

CIVIL SOCIETY

- community-driven initiative
- social capital

HOW COLLABORATEHK HELPS HONG KONG

Benefits to the Government

Make Best Use of Existing Legislation: The suggested framework is easy to implement. It requires no new legislation or amendment to existing laws to accommodate its proposed one-stop coordination service.

Enhance Administrative Effectiveness: A one-stop coordination service would streamline the process of submitting project proposals to the government. This would make government more efficient, and allow early government input on the viability of projects.

Reduce Government Pressure: By adopting a bottom-up approach with a streamlined application process, this system would put vacant public spaces to better use. The services provided will meet community needs, as identified by the community, reducing pressure on the government.

Provide Public Space Without Extra Resources: Projects would be initiated and managed by local groups with funding mainly from the business sector, and do not require extra resources from the government.

Create Community Character: The suggested framework would facilitate community-initiated projects for a wide range of uses and contribute to the unique urban character of our city and neighbourhoods.

Benefits to Civil Society

Contribute to Community Development: The suggested framework would encourage community involvement in local planning and development, and help the community nurture a sense of neighbourhood ownership.

Encourage Social Jamming: CollaborateHK would provide community groups a much-needed networking platform for “idea jamming” which could lead to unexpected social innovation.

Diversify Funding Sources: CollaborateHK would help source funding from different sectors of society, including established corporations, medium to small businesses, charitable groups, private foundations and individual donors.

Stimulate Community-Group Responsibility: CollaborateHK would provide capacity-building and education programmes to empower communities to implement individual projects.

Benefits to the Private Sector

Foster Corporate Social Responsibility: CollaborateHK offers the business sector an opportunity to participate in community-initiated projects. It paves the way for further partnerships and collaborations between businesses and civil society.

Contribute Business Skills: The private sector could contribute meaningful support by sharing business skills with community groups to improve the financial performance of their projects.

Win Public Trust: By engaging with different NPOs and concern groups, the business sector could slowly build trust with the community and contribute positively to social harmony.