

A collaborative approach to rural revitalization in Hong Kong

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Is the project a case of...:

- State-initiated co-creation
- Entrepreneur-driven co-creation
- Grassroots-based co-creation*

**For an elaboration of the typology, please consult the GOGREEN theoretical framework p. 25.*

Integrated case analysis

Before proceeding to the scoring of the GFs, please provide a 3–5 page case analysis in which you describe the background, history, and national, regional, and local contexts of the case, the problems and goals addressed by the local collaboration, the participating actors and their relationships, the unfolding of the co-creation process, the most important governance factors (this may include factors other than those in focus in this project), and the generated outputs and outcomes. The conclusion may specify a few lessons learned from the case study.

1) Background, history, and national, regional, and local contexts of the case (prior to and during the initiation phase of the co-creation process)

Background and local context – rural decline in Hong Kong

Contrary to common perceptions of Hong Kong, less than a quarter of its land area is characterised as urban/built up land (The Planning Department of HKSAR, 2020). There are over 695 Indigenous villages in Hong Kong, mostly situated in rural areas known as the New Territories (Home Affairs Department 2023). Many of these villages have experienced significant population decline beginning in the 1960s as villagers gave up farming and moved away to seek better jobs in urban areas or overseas.

Rural communities used to be able to devise and enforce their own rules to self-govern resource extraction and management, including the maintenance of the culturally and ecologically important Fung Shui Woods behind the village settlement, and small reservoirs and irrigation channels. As a result of rural decline, many of these self-governance systems have collapsed disrupting the dynamic interdependent relationships between human activities and the natural environment, which lead to the degradation of these previously managed natural habitats and the loss of cultural assets (Chu et al., 2022).

Government policies related to rural areas are siloed, drawing strict political demarcations between agriculture, recreation, cultural heritage, and conservation; few government-initiated projects managed to straddle multiple policy domains. Prior to 2017, there was limited formal coordination between different departments and bureaux in the government concerning rural governance and revitalization.

Another challenge to rural revitalisation pertains to the designation of country park boundaries within which development activities are restricted. For rural villages located within the country park—the enclaves as they are called, the restrictions have adversely affected the livelihoods of their inhabitants, causing further rural decay. Currently, there are 77 enclaves located in different protected areas. Furthermore, due to the commonly dichotomized relationship between nature conservation and development, the management of the enclaves has often invoked controversies between green groups and villagers. The Tai Long Sai Wan incident in which a developer bought and partially destroyed a large piece of vegetated land in an area of high scenic value has certainly shed light on the protection loopholes (WWF, 2014). Since then, at least four more enclaves have experienced ecological destruction. These loopholes had, therefore, hindered the attempts to enhance rural governance, village revitalisation and nature conservation.

One salient dynamic between indigenous villagers in rural areas and green groups relates to the development of "small houses" within the green belt. In Hong Kong, under the Small House Policy, which came into force in 1972, a male descendant of an indigenous villager can apply to construct a "small house" on any private land or, in cases where the applicant has no land, on government land at no land premium, provided that the site is within the so-called "village environs" (boundary) of a recognized indigenous village (Tang et al., 2005).

On the one hand, Indigenous villagers strongly uphold their customary right to develop, asserting that the government should respect their constitutionally safeguarded rights and that more land should be designated to meet their future demand for "small houses" (Tang et al., 2005). On the other hand, green groups are worried about environmental degradation in country parks and natural reserves, which are usually adjacent to these villages (Tang et al., 2005).

The identity of the Indigenous villagers in Hong Kong has been identified as a typical case of politicization of ethnicity (Chan, 1988). Indigenous villagers practised their rural traditions, followed the customary law, and even portrayed themselves as guardians of Chinese tradition as opposed to Western culture (Chan, 1988). For a long period of colonial history, the government treated the New Territories somewhat differently to the rest of Hong Kong. Though this slowly changed as the governance of villages become more integrated with the rest of Hong Kong alongside the development of new towns in the New Territories in the 1970s and changing socioeconomic circumstances, these changes caused Indigenous villagers' to be concerned about maintaining their own identity and preserving their privileges (Hayes, 2012). "By the late 1980s, the native population had found itself facing an increasingly critical and, before long alienated, Hong Kong society at large" (Hayes, 2006, p.167). As such, the likelihood of reaching a societal consensus on rural revitalisation was undermined, not to mention concerted revitalisation efforts.

Existing solutions to rural decline/rural development

Although there was an absence of holistic governmental intervention to address rural decline prior to 2017, some government funding was available to tackle specific issues such as nature conservation. Under the Nature Conservation Management Agreement Scheme ("MA Scheme"), non-profit organisations are sponsored to enter into management agreements with landowners of the priority sites to conduct

conservation activities. In 2011, the MA Scheme was extended to cover country park enclaves and private land within country parks. There are currently eight MA projects covering around 50 hectares of land and over 600 hectares of fishponds.

As acknowledged by the then Environment, Transport and Works Bureau (2004), the support and capability of NGOs as well as cooperation of the landowners are vital to the success of the Scheme. If the NGO lacked adequate capability to implement measures enhancing the ecological value of the land or to organise revenue-generating activities (e.g. eco-tours), it would be difficult to persuade the landowners to confer management rights over their land or to cooperate, especially when the landowners often have a strong desire for development over conservation (Environmental Protection Department, 2008). Usually the funding duration of the MA scheme is three years, and when it ends, there is no guarantee that the landowner will continue these arrangements. This is not to mention that the limited funding often constrains the project's scale as well as the landowners' incentive to cooperate.

2) The aims of the project and the sustainability problems that it seeks to address

This case study examines a co-creation process for the revitalization of Hong Kong's Northeastern New Territories (NENT) which spans over ten years. The earliest organised collaborative revitalization efforts in HK began in 2013, focused on a village called Lai Chi Wo (LCW) in NENT. After the first five years, collaborative revitalization efforts continued in LCW and were extended to two adjacent villages, Mui Tsz Lam and Kop Tong (see Figure 1 for a map of the area and the location of these villages).

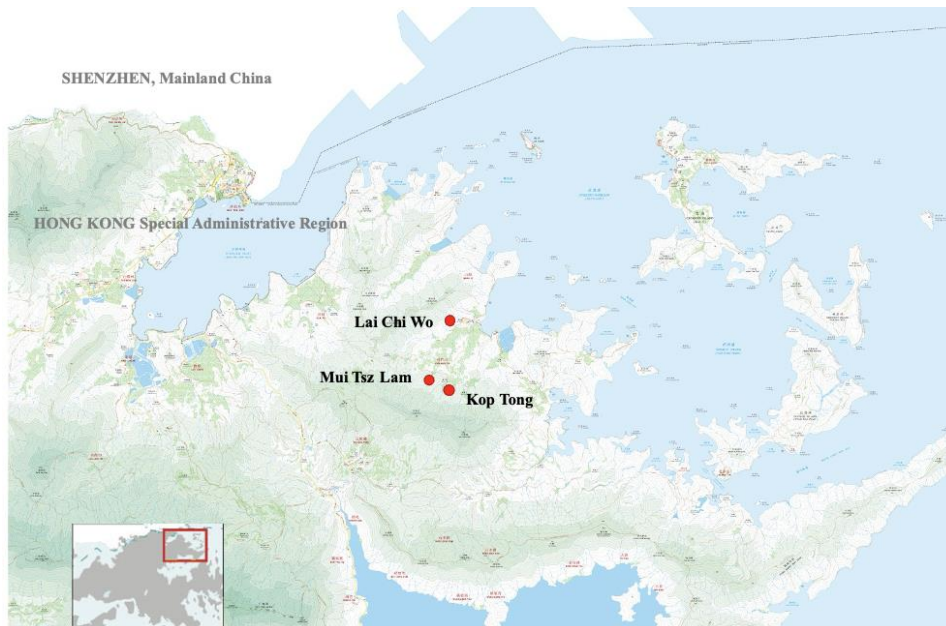


Figure 1: Map of Northeastern New Territories of Hong Kong

A total of four revitalization and natural habitat management projects were included in this case study to provide a coherent and focused analysis of the co-creation of green transition solutions (listed in Table 1). The entire co-creation process can be divided into three phases, and the demarcation in relation to the relevant programs can be found in Table 1. As shown in table 1, much of the co-creation process was conducted in relation to the first Programme (the "Sustainable Lai Chi Wo" Programme); therefore, the emphasis of this case report will be placed largely on it. Three post-2017 projects were selected amongst

other revitalization projects in the area to be included in this case study as their objectives correspond to at least one of the Green SDGs identified by GOGREEN. Other revitalization projects in the area focus more on cultural and built heritage conservation.

Lai Chi Wo’s strategic location justifies nature conservation as one of the key themes of the revitalization efforts. The village is embraced by a range of statutorily-protected areas: Site of Special Scientific Interest, Feng Shui Woodland designated as the Lai Chi Wo Special Area¹, and National Geopark of Hong Kong, China; the village’s main stream is listed as one of the 33 Ecologically Important Streams in Hong Kong. Other than natural assets, LCW is also rich in cultural legacy. There is a total of 211 houses inside the village, including three ancestral halls, Hip Tin Temple and Hok Shan Monastery; both the Temple and the Monastery were rated to be Grade 3 Historical Buildings. LCW was once the largest and most prosperous Hakka walled-village in the North-Eastern part of the New Territories. The village was first established in the 1670s, and had a long history of farming.

Revitalisation programs	Aims
The initiation phase	
2012-2013: Preparation for and initiation of the “Sustainable Lai Chi Wo” Programme	
The design phase and (early) implementation phase	
2013-2017: Sustainable Lai Chi Wo: Living Water & Community Revitalization - An Agricultural-led Action, Engagement and Incubation Programme at Lai Chi Wo “Sustainable Lai Chi Wo” Programme	Revitalize agricultural activities by adopting innovative farming methods Initiate a whole catchment management approach for biodiversity and conservation Develop the village as an environmental/sustainable development education hub Diversify local products and services to create business opportunities and returns to sustain the community
The implementation phase (includes output and outcomes)	
2017-2022: HSBC Rural Sustainability* “HSBC Rural Sustainability” Programme *based at LCW, but includes many initiatives extending to Mui Tsz Lam and other rural villages	To incubate diverse local socio-economic models for rural communities’ sustainability and resilience To strengthen collaborative and innovative actions among change agents with a view to building community stewardship towards the rural natural and cultural environment To re-establish the rural-urban relationship for sustainability

¹ The Lai Chi Wo Fung Shui Woodland is recognised for its high ecological and conservation value in terms of its woodland structure, species richness, diversity and composition. Though small in size (around 1 hectare), more than 100 species of plants including rare species could be recorded in the woodland (Hong Kong Government, 2004).

<p>2017 – ongoing: Management Agreement Scheme at Lai Chi Wo Enclave “MA” Programme</p>	<p>Engage local community farmers at Lai Chi Wo to farm for conservation and adopt active management approach with community farmers</p> <p>Adopt biodiversity conservation measures and monitor target wildlife</p> <p>Continue to lease farmland from Indigenous villagers and conduct community engagement with local farmers</p> <p>Implement public education and engagement activities to promote biodiversity and countryside conservation as well as rural sustainability</p>
<p>2019 – ongoing: Forest village - Mui Tsz Lam and Kop Tong Sustainable Village Programme “Forest Village” Programme</p>	<p>Restore mosaics of land uses of “Forest Village Ecosystem” to enhance biodiversity and ecosystem services</p> <p>Conserve upland forest species and protect their habitats</p> <p>Formulate sustainable management strategies and promote an adaptive repurposing of tangible and intangible rural assets to support the sustainable development of the villages</p> <p>Foster a sense of community stewardship and facilitate collective local actions among stakeholders in nature and cultural conservation</p>

Table 1 – Co-creation phase, time period and revitalization programs

Ultimately, the “Sustainable Lai Chi Wo” Programme seeks to develop a collaborative approach to sustainable village revitalization, and to examine and assess its feasibility through experimentation and iterative development of a social-economic model for the Lai Chi Wo village. The aim was not to propose a one-size-fits-all model that could be replicated and applied to other villages but to demonstrate the potential of this approach and its principles in addressing localised issues, as well as highlighting the need to tackle some of the systemic problems stated above.

3) The participants and their interaction and communication in and between meetings & 4) How often do they meet, and do they communicate between meetings?

Programme names and 'Project owners and facilitators'	Co-creation participants	Funder
<p>"Sustainable Lai Chi Wo" Programme</p> <p>Project owner and facilitator: The University of Hong Kong (HKU), mainly its Centre for Civil Society and Governance (CCSG)</p>	<p>Hong Kong Countryside Foundation, Conservancy Association, Produce Green Foundation, LCW Indigenous villager community, non-Indigenous community members (individuals who work and/or live in LCW on a regular basis) Researchers and experts</p>	<p>Hongkong Bank Foundation</p>
<p>"HSBC Rural Sustainability" Programme</p> <p>Project owner and facilitator: HKU-CCSG</p>	<p>In addition to those listed above. Local community of Sha Tau Kok (nearest town) Communities of interest in the themes of art and culture, agri-food system, sustainable resource use and well-being</p>	<p>Hongkong Bank Foundation</p>
<p>"MA" Programme</p> <p>Project owner and facilitator: Hong Kong Countryside Foundation (HKCF), Conservancy Association (CA),</p>	<p>Lai Chi Wo community farming groups Volunteers</p>	<p>The Hong Kong Government – Countryside Conservation Funding Scheme</p>
<p>"Forest Village" Programme</p> <p>Project owner and facilitator: HKU-CCSG</p>	<p>HKU-CCSG Mui Tsz Lam and Kop Tong villagers Association for Sha Tau Kok Culture and Ecology Outdoor Wildlife Learning Hong Kong Hong Kong Tree Society Researchers and experts Communities of interest in the themes of art and culture, nature conservation and camping</p>	<p>The Hong Kong Government – Countryside Conservation Funding Scheme</p>

Table 2 – Co-creation participants and funders for each programme

There is a range of formal and informal platforms for different groups of collaborators (in different project roles) to meet and discuss issues related to the revitalization process. There are in-person meetings as well as digital platforms such as Whatsapp and Facebook which have been found to be useful for ensuring transparency and accountability. Given the nature of the innovation—a collaborative approach to rural revitalization, the co-creation process involved entails discussions, actions, and decision-making of a multitude of actors in an array of venues; the co-creation process is distributed and diffused.

Formal meetings and informal discussion between the organizations involved, and with local communities were highly frequent in the initiation and design phases (which include the definition of problems and

goals, and the iterative development, testing and revision of prototypes). Afterwards, as the implementation phase matured, i.e. 2017 onwards, revitalization efforts have become characterized by a polycentric approach. Fewer formal communication was needed across the various groups; co-creation has often taken place between different combinations of stakeholders in a more distributed manner. Organizations and individuals who are more active (living and/or working) in LCW have continued to communicate frequently between meetings. In general, many members of the community attended at least one, and usually several, meetings/group activity/social gatherings, every month.

5) The role and forms of knowledge sharing, coordination and joint problem-solving

Knowledge sharing across disciplines into joint problem-solving was crucial for developing a sustainable revitalization model. A multifaceted approach was adopted to address issues ranging from biodiversity protection, cultural conservation, diversifying livelihood, agricultural revival, to environmental impact management. In many ways, traditional knowledge and wisdom were found to be a valuable source of knowledge to be integrated with modern/scientific knowledge, playing a key role in joint problem-solving leading to the formulation of sustainable solutions in this case study (Chu et al. 2022). In addition to joint problem-solving, knowledge sharing was also important across different groups of actors who have come together to work on different aspects of the rural revitalization process and/or in different rural villages.

6) The relation between consensus and conflict and the handling of the latter

A prerequisite for the initiation of this co-creation process was an alignment of immediate goals and expectations of different stakeholder groups. While such alignment helped motivate the actors to participate in the collaborative revitalization process, agreeing on a common long-term vision is always a challenge. Participating individuals and organizations are often driven by slightly different aims and goals, which vary in foci (e.g. nature conservation or economic viability) and the desired scale of impact (individual-level or organizational-level, LCW village, or Indigenous community of HK, the wider society). Some conflicts could be mediated and sometime resolved by certain individuals playing leadership roles (e.g. Chu et al. 2022). (See below, elaboration on GF 13 for further details)

7) The role and form of leadership: lead actor, steering group and/or collective leadership

HKU-CCSG as the project owner and facilitator of the “Sustainable Lai Chi Wo” Programme had certainly played important roles in driving the co-creation process and coordinating various collaborators (Chu et al., 2022 and Williams et al. 2021). However, they could not have done so without the facilitative leadership roles played by certain Indigenous villagers and representatives from key organizations. Especially as the co-creation process enters the implementation stage, when the revitalization efforts have become more diversified and need to be supported by several programs, leadership roles performed by the responsible organizations and local community representatives have taken on further importance in their respective (but related) scope of work. A distributed leadership was important as the division of labor between the organizations (and the programs) became clearer after the “Sustainable Lai Chi Wo” Programme. This enabled each team to steer the collaborators they have gathered for their defined goals. These collaborators include newly recruited groups or individuals and also existing groups or individuals; community members and groups who have already been active in LCW often find themselves being involved in more than one revitalization programs.

8) The temporal unfolding of the co-creation process: major shifts and ups and downs

A brief overview of the temporal unfolding of the co-creation process can be found in 2) above. The launch of the “Sustainable Lai Chi Wo” Programme in late 2013 marked the end of the initiation phase in which the threshold for collective action was overcome. By this stage, a core group of stakeholders had emerged, and become motivated to participate in rural revitalization activities in an active and committed manner.

The innovation threshold was then overcome during the design phase. As the “Sustainable Lai Chi Wo” Programme progressed, problems and goals were better defined; frequent exchanges and cross-fertilization of ideas took place on a regular basis. More actors became engaged in the iterative development of revitalization activities and strategies, paving the way for the polycentric approach in the implementation stage from 2017 onwards.

2017 marked the success of overcoming the political support threshold, when policy change was attained. The need for a new approach to managing and conserving rural villages became officially acknowledged and a collaborative revitalization approach gained support by the government. Funding support and institutional change through the establishment of the Countryside Conservation Office and the Countryside Conservation Funding Scheme have enabled the scaling of the collaborative approach to other rural areas, allowing different actors to gather and work on revitalizing Hong Kong’s villages.

9) The most important governance factors

GF5 – Bottom-up social accountability (top-down accountability was less relevant)

GF7 – Positive and negative narratives (serves as collective motivation for the collaboration process to be initiated rather than as a continuous facilitative factor for continued co-creation)

GF8 – Institutional platforms (regular meetings, and more importantly, informal gatherings)

GF10 – Leverage support (relationship with authorities facilitated leveraging of support to remove higher level challenges to the revitalization process)

GF 11 – Inclusion and empowerment (especially for non-Indigenous participants to be recognized as a member of the community)

GF12 – Interdependence (collective actions for common problem)

GF 16 – Facilitative leadership (played by different representative figures)

10) The generated outputs and outcomes

The programs were able to meet their respective objectives. The green sustainability goals include community revitalization and environmental enhancement, rebuilding human-nature relationships, adopting whole catchment management approach, experimentation of sustainable farming practices, advocating sustainable production and consumption practices, and incubating environmental education hubs in rural villages (see outcome variable 2 for further evidence).

In particular, exceptional outcomes of the “Sustainable Lai Chi Wo” Programme include its influence in policy change and the role it has played in shaping the overall ecosystem for collaborative rural revitalization in Hong Kong. This was accomplished through a multitude of outputs in the forms of educational programs, public engagement activities, organizing and attending seminars/discussion forums/farmers market/exhibitions, and sharing its experience directly or indirectly through mass media.

The impact of this Programme was pivotal in bringing about systemic changes which facilitated future collaborative revitalization programs including, but certainly not limited to, the three post-2017 programs included in this case study.

11) Lessons learned about the conditions for co-creating green solutions

The success of this co-creation effort as embodied in the four programs could not be attributed to any one or two factors, but a complex mix of contextual and local factors with contributions from different organizations and individuals.

However, an effective strategy could be identified to have the effects of (1) maintaining the momentum for collaboration amongst existing collaborators, (2) attracting new organizations, groups and individuals to join the co-creation process, and subsequently (3) motivating support from public authorities. It is important to identify small yet visible milestones, and celebrate these achievements along the way.

(1) Overcoming collective action threshold is not a one-off task. Over time, participants' faith in joint action could easily wane; a lack of time and issues of free-riding could disincentivize collective actions, preventing high-quality collaboration and innovation. Identifying and celebrating small yet visible milestones could not only enable participants to see positive impact of collaboration, but more importantly reinforce their commitment and faith in working with one another. Positive incentives and continued commitment to collaboration are essential for sustaining the momentum of co-creation.

(2) and (3) Making these achievements known to parties beyond the immediate participants of the co-creation process is an important means to legitimize and promote the collaborative approach to government and the wider society, hence soliciting further support and buy-in for the approach. Generating interest amongst communities of interest in the wider society can attract new participants to the co-creation process (in this case of addressing rural decline, it was crucial), and increase policy attention from public authorities which help build the foundation for overcoming political support threshold.

Scoring and analysis of governance factors

1. Perceived importance of biosphere conditions

QCA score:

- 0
- 0.33
- 0.66
- 1

Scoring confidence:

- Low confidence
- Medium confidence
- High confidence

Data sources:

- Interviews
- Documents
- Observations

Please elaborate on the reasoning behind your scoring for this governance factor:

Important for some stakeholders but not others

For those who had a background in ecological conservation and environmental protection, the biosphere condition was a crucial factor motivating them to engage in this collaborative rural revitalization programme. This included the local green groups and the University.

Biosphere conditions are not a major concern for one of the key stakeholder groups in this case - Indigenous villagers. Representatives of Indigenous villagers explained that Indigenous villagers mainly view revitalization as a way of increasing vibrancy and gaining private/public resources to restore or improve village infrastructure and to conserve their culture and heritage. Though Indigenous villagers wanted to ensure the long-term protection of their Fung Shui Woodland, the biosphere condition did not seem to be a key motivating factor for them to engage in co-creating a sustainable model to revitalize the village. The intertwined goals of attracting people to return to rural villages, and exploring economic opportunities for villages appear to be a more prominent driving force for them.

In the “Sustainable Lai Chi Wo” programme, the government played a somewhat supportive role in the periphery. At the time, its approach to rural revitalization was shaped by its recognition of the emphasis of the UNESCO Global Geopark on empowering local communities and meeting local goals while protecting the area’s geological heritage, for example by supporting geotourism. Therefore, the government’s focus was not on the biosphere condition. Its motivation for providing support to the collaborative rural revitalization programme was to fulfill the expectations of the UNESCO Global Geopark framework to help the Indigenous villagers’ meet their goals as stated above.

2. Legislation, programs, and formal goals

QCA score:

0

0.33

0.66

1

Scoring confidence:

Low confidence

Medium confidence

High confidence

Data sources:

Interviews

Documents

Observations

Please elaborate on the reasoning behind your scoring for this governance factor:

The absence of legislation and policy programs to comprehensively support rural sustainability arguably motivated the “Sustainable Lai Chi Wo” Programme. To address this policy gap, Lai Chi Wo was considered appropriate due to its rich natural, cultural and social assets. In particular, being surrounded by different types of protected areas, it could be argued that statutory nature conservation designations helped legitimize the investment of resources from the funder and the university to this revitalization programme. Rural issues in Hong Kong, especially in relation to Indigenous villages, are generally perceived to be irrelevant to the public; only Indigenous villagers and the government have roles to play. As it is easier to argue for the relevance of nature conservation to the wider society, the ecological significance of the Lai Chi Wo area facilitated the justification of the Hongkong Bank Foundation to allocate their resources to revitalizing this village. One of the project owners also explained that the government’s MA scheme (see

above for background information) enabled them to point to the availability of future government support which was considered an important factor for the private foundation to agree to fund the project.

Rather than drawing upon goals or legislations either on local or global levels, the “Sustainable Lai Chi Wo” Programme cited the UNEP’s 5th Environment Report (GEO-5) in its proposal to highlight the need to build sustainable communities to become better prepared for the impact of climate change. It also referenced the rise of international movements and visionary concepts such as the Transition movement, LOHAS and Low Carbon Cities to argue for the importance of partnerships to achieve a common vision of building sustainable communities. These references were much less significant in influencing the design of the project and in supporting the collaborative process.

3. Relative openness of public governance paradigms

QCA score:

0

0.33

0.66

1

Scoring confidence:

Low confidence

Medium confidence

High confidence

Data sources:

Interviews

Documents

Observations

Please elaborate on the reasoning behind your scoring for this governance factor:

Consultation mechanisms (such as advisory committees) are present in many policy domains in Hong Kong. As rural revitalization was not considered a “policy domain”, no consultation mechanism existed prior to 2019 (i.e. during the Design phase and much of the implementation phase). These consultation mechanisms, in general, often have a confined scope of power and responsibilities, as they tend to be dominated by government officials through agenda setting and membership appointments (see GF4).

Regarding the policy area in question, the “MA scheme” (See above for information under “Existing solutions to rural decline/rural development” under section 1 of background information for this case study) is available to facilitate collaborative mode of rural land management and revitalization. However, in terms of whether the government actively create initiatives to facilitate the solicitation of inputs from non-state actors, many stakeholders interviewed point to insufficient governmental support and expressed that the government was not open to their input.

Many interviewees confirmed that government support for the collaborative process, for example in terms of initiating recruitment meetings to gather interested parties to discuss rural development issues, was absent. However, project owners of the “Sustainable Lai Chi Wo” Programme and the bureaucratic actor interviewed mentioned that the Secretary for the Environment arranged meetings with the project owners to discuss the new policies (regarding the establishment of the Countryside Conservation Office and the Countryside Conservation Funding Scheme) before they were announced in the 2017 Policy Address.

Furthermore, 2 (out of 3) representatives of Indigenous villagers interviewed referred to communication channels between them and the government. One of them highlighted how challenging it was to convince

the government to listen to their needs but the suggestion was eventually taken up, and infrastructure support was provided. Therefore, state-society relations can be found for example between the government and Indigenous community representatives, and between the government and professional elites. Such relations have offered opportunities for these actors to express their concerns and needs to the government and to solicit government resources. There is, however, no evidence to suggest that any government initiatives to directly support or stimulate societal actors in this co-creation project.

It is likely that the government did not take a more proactive and open approach to inputs from civil society prior to and in the early stages of this co-creation process due to two key reasons. Firstly, Hong Kong society had a generally low level of awareness and interest towards rural policy issues. Secondly, key stakeholder groups—indigenous villagers and green groups—held contradicting views on the approach that should be taken to manage rural areas and resources.

4. Formalized institutional channels for citizen participation and community mobilization

QCA score:

0

0.33

0.66

1

Scoring confidence:

Low confidence

Medium confidence

High confidence

Data sources:

Interviews

Documents

Observations

Please elaborate on the reasoning behind your scoring for this governance factor:

Limited institutional channels for citizen participation and community mobilization

The Hong Kong government has established various advisory committees and working groups to manage different policy issues. These committees and working groups consist of government appointed business and professional elites and social leaders (Cheung, 2011 and Lam, 2012). While they are established to provide policy advice, their effectiveness in influencing policy formulation has been questioned (Cheung, 2011 and Lam, 2012). Common criticisms relate to the selection of committee members, e.g. the tendency to appoint pro-establishment figures, and that government officials controlled the agenda, as they are chaired by officials (Lam, 2012 and Lee et al. 2012)

There is a Country Parks Ordinance, last updated in 1995, which provides a legal framework for the designation, control and management of country parks and special areas in Hong Kong. However, there is no periodic development or review of management plans, which is found to be useful in other parts of the world (Lau, 2011). Reviews prompt the government to reflect on the principles, visions and strategies which previously guided the development of the management plans (Lau, 2011). Without clear attempts by the government to develop such a management plan, or mechanisms in place to conduct periodic review, there is also no regular platform to solicit inputs from non-state actors.

In the policy area of rural development, research found that public consultation activities organized by the government in the decision-making process of a rural tourism development project in another rural area in HK was ineffective (Mak et al. 2017). The study classifies the level of engagement in this case as

tokenism according to Arnstein’s ladder of citizen participation (e.g. 68.7% of their respondents did not consider themselves to be involved) (Mak et al. 2017).

Through the interviews, some formalized institutional channels for Indigenous villagers to voice their concerns and needs to the government could be identified, but these channels were not widely available to citizens and has had limited impact on the collaborative process. The government holds consultations on particular issues from time to time; but the public are generally unenthusiastic about the consultations as they are skeptical towards the intention of the government to solicit their input in policymaking. Local green groups have, at times, been able to influence environmental and ecological conservation policies, but the opportunities to do so in the area of rural policies had been limited.

5. Mechanism for ensuring top-down government and bottom-up social accountability

QCA score:

0

0.33

0.66

1

Scoring confidence:

Low confidence

Medium confidence

High confidence

Data sources:

Interviews

Documents

Observations

Please elaborate on the reasoning behind your scoring for this governance factor:

Significant efforts were made by the Project owners and facilitators to communicate the intentions, purpose and major principles of the revitalization programme to Indigenous villagers, NGOs, as well as the wider society and the government.

Accountability to local communities and authorities

Meetings between the local community (especially those who live and/or work in the village) and village representatives of Lai Chi Wo and nearby villages take place frequently.

Based on specific problems, for example transport and public hygiene, the Programme team reported the problems to the respective government departments and periodically communicated with them on the latest situation.

A representative of the Hong Kong Countryside Foundation expresses the necessity of catering to the villagers’ needs and concerns, as well as responding to villagers’ objectives when preparing for their future work. They have also found it necessary to be accountable to the government. The government representative also shared that though they do not monitor the progress of the projects, they do try to keep track of the projects’ development.

Accountability to the wider society

Accountability to the wider society is particularly relevant here as Lai Chi Wo is surrounded by areas with high ecological value, and the “Sustainable Lai Chi Wo” Programme was anticipated as a pilot programme to demonstrate the feasibility of collaborative sustainable revitalization for wider application. This is not only to legitimize the Programme and to gain general support but also as the revitalization approach advocated by this Programme is built on collaboration and co-creation, accountability to those beyond the

Lai Chi Wo community helps to inspire further interested parties to become involved in exploring with this revitalization model in nearby or other rural areas in HK. A key focus of the engagement activities to the Programme was to build in members of the public a sense of ownership of the rural areas of the city.

The project facilitators of “Sustainable Lai Chi Wo” Programme and “HSBC Rural Sustainability” have met with and hosted visits at Lai Chi Wo for numerous organizations, including representatives of Heung Yee Kuk² over the course of the past 10 years to explain the progress of the Programme.

Meetings have also been conducted with various relevant organizations such as the Hong Kong Heritage Society, Hong Kong Institute of Planners, Hong Kong Institute of Architects and Hong Kong Professional Green Building Council, Consulate Generals in Hong Kong, as well as farmers, environmentalists and concern groups on farming and ecology on the respective aspects of revitalization work.

The project facilitators also explained the importance of using media and social media to explain the intentions and vision of the revitalization Programmes to the public. This was particularly necessary in the beginning of the “Sustainable Lai Chi Wo” Programme as different stakeholder groups in the society had developed misunderstandings towards the purpose and goals of the Programme.

As the project progressed, irregular but frequent ‘reporting’ of progress and sharing of the work of the Programme through media helps to attract more interested individuals and groups to contribute and sustain the revitalization efforts in Lai Chi Wo and other rural areas. This addresses the problem of lack of manpower in villages, and non-Indigenous people fearing that they are not welcomed in villages. Greater public attention and interest in rural revitalization help to motivate the government to divert public resources to this policy area and to consider policy change. Therefore, the significance of the accountability mechanisms in place here is not only because it helps to improve the co-creation process per se, but also as a prerequisite for co-creation to take place. If the Programmes were unable to gain public legitimacy, the availability of active participants and other resources towards collaborative rural revitalization would be greatly hampered.

6. Strategic agenda-setting by means of translation

QCA score:

0

0.33

0.66

1

Scoring confidence:

Low confidence

Medium confidence

High confidence

Data sources:

Interviews

Documents

Observations

² This is a statutory advisory body representing the interests of Indigenous villagers in HK, and has a seat in the Legislative Council, and a number of seats in the Election Committee for the Chief Executive of Hong Kong (Ng, 2016)

Please elaborate on the reasoning behind your scoring for this governance factor:

The UNSDGs were mentioned in the proposal for HSBC Rural Sustainability (2017-2022) to legitimise the design and focus of the Programme on incubating socio-economic models for rural revitalization.

However, they have not been further adapted or translated to local contexts beyond this, and they did not have any significance in attracting other local actors to join the collaboration. Only some interviewees were aware or familiar with the SDGs. Though the objectives of the projects are certainly aligned with UNSDGs, it appears that the translation of UNSDGs to the local context was not a strategy employed by the project owners or facilitators.

7. Construction of narratives about successful multi-actor collaboration

QCA score:

0

0.33

0.66

1

Scoring confidence:

Low confidence

Medium confidence

High confidence

Data sources:

Interviews

Documents

Observations

Please elaborate on the reasoning behind your scoring for this governance factor:

Negative narrative

Indigenous villager representatives shared that, in general, Indigenous villagers did not have an awareness or understanding of a collaborative approach to village revitalization; in fact, some saw waiting for a developer to “develop” the village (usually through real estate projects) as the only alternative to rural decay. Many villagers at Lai Chi Wo wanted to conserve their village as far as possible and knew that selling to developers would mean losing their village. One of the “Sustainable Lai Chi Wo” Programme initiators explained that these negative examples of rural villages being replaced by commercial development deterred villagers of Lai Chi Wo and motivated them to accept a different approach.

Positive narrative

The case of Choi Yuen village led the wider Indigenous communities to realize that valuable resources from the society could be made available to protect their villages. In the Choi Yuen village case, internal and external resources were leveraged in 2011 to protect the village after the government had decided to remove it, without relocation plans, to make way for the Express Rail Link between Hong Kong and mainland China (Ng, 2022). Though destroyed, the village was eventually rebuilt due to the advocacy of active agents, their knowledge, skills and power, helping to boost community resources and empowered the local community to resist and pursue a more positive outcome (Ng, 2022). The project facilitator identified the Choi Yuen village incident to have prompted societal interest in protecting environmental and cultural assets in rural areas. Another Indigenous villager interviewee opined that 90% of the Lai Chi Wo villagers were paying attention to this incident, even those who were living abroad, and that this case has inspired them to be more open-minded about allowing young actors to enter the village to farm. In general, Indigenous villagers form tight-knit communities by clans and lineages, and are cautious of external influences to localized practices, cultures and customs. The positive narrative of the Choi Yuen

village case is therefore important to pave the way for the collaborative rural revitalization programme to be initiated in Lai Chi Wo.

8. Building or harnessing institutional platforms and arenas

QCA score:

- 0
- 0.33
- 0.66
- 1

Scoring confidence:

- Low confidence
- Medium confidence
- High confidence

Data sources:

- Interviews
- Documents
- Observations

Please elaborate on the reasoning behind your scoring for this governance factor:

A variety of institutional platforms were established to support collaboration across organizations as well as co-creation with the Lai Chi Wo community and communities of interest from the wider society. These platforms not only served as communication channels for different combinations of stakeholders to engage in discussion and deliberation; in many instances they were the venues in which consensus was built and conflicts resolved.

For example, every year (except during COVID), the “Sustainable Lai Chi Wo” Programme owners and facilitators attended the annual Indigenous villagers’ meeting to engage with Indigenous villagers who are less active in the revitalization process. Updates on the progress of the revitalization programme are provided and sometimes feedback is received.

Regular work meetings between the key organizations were frequent during the “Sustainable Lai Chi Wo” Programme as they were collaborating more closely then. Conservancy Association felt that across the organizations the “monthly meetings were effective in updating the overall progress of the project and discuss challenges; particular work discussions and briefings were useful to gather ideas and clarify specific role of each stakeholder. The use of e-communication channels (e.g. Whatsapp group) allowed instant update and discussion of pop-up and emergency issues” (“Sustainable Lai Chi Wo” Programme Final report). Since 2017, the organizations have maintained the pattern of meeting once every 3-4 months, to coordinate between their new initiatives, identify emerging threats and opportunities and discuss possibilities for synergies in addressing such threats and/or exploiting such opportunities.

Some more formal meetings are coupled with frequent informal discussions between various representatives of major organizations and community members at Lai Chi Wo. Community members refer to several active Indigenous villagers and individuals who have either moved to live and/or work in Lai Chi Wo (e.g. farmers or artists) as a result of revitalization efforts that began in 2013.

As a part of the “MA” Programme, Hong Kong Countryside Foundation took over the responsibility from HKU-CCSG and hosted the community farmers’ meetings. This is a decision-making platform where small farming groups and representatives of organizations which operate farms at LCW meet regularly to discuss maintenance work, formulate and discuss community rules, plan collaborative marketing and promotion

events, identify potential risks and discuss preventive or mitigation measures as well as resolving disputes between farming groups etc.

In the “Forest Village” Programme, the incubation of a community of multi-skilled volunteers are included in gatherings with villagers, and their contribution is recognized by the village representative and other villagers. They are included in Whatsapp communication, and the “Forest Village” Programme organizes informal gatherings periodically and share updates on the progress and plans for the revitalization programme, and feedback is invited.

Other than meetings, digital platforms such as Facebook and Whatsapp groups had been found to be particularly useful for information dissemination. For example, both have been used to update LCW Indigenous villagers on the revitalization progress at the village. Whatsapp groups amongst LCW community members enabled everyone to raise concerns and, when necessary, to set up physical ad-hoc meetings to address any issues that persist. As a further example, Whatsapp is also an important tool used to support the “Forest Village” Programme’s work in maintaining the community of volunteers. As the village representative is also active in this group, the volunteers express their views on issues such as management approaches adopted to village farmland.

Interviewees have suggested that although the various Whatsapp groups have not been effectively used for conflict resolution, they serve important functions in terms of information dissemination and inclusiveness by enabling all actors to raise issues that concern them for discussion. Specific institutions such as the community farmers’ meetings have been more effective in resolving conflicts. Throughout the collaborative revitalization process, different semi-formal and informal platforms have facilitated learning across stakeholder groups, for example on traditional practices in the village. Non-Indigenous community members have emphasized the importance of learning about traditions and Indigenous wisdom, and the incorporation of such practices/wisdom to address problems.

9. Provision of access to blended financing

QCA score:

- 0
- 0.33
- 0.66
- 1

Scoring confidence:

- Low confidence
- Medium confidence
- High confidence

Data sources:

- Interviews
- Documents
- Observations

Please elaborate on the reasoning behind your scoring for this governance factor:

The “Sustainable Lai Chi Wo” Programme was a pioneering initiative for a foundation to support a long-term revitalization effort in Hong Kong. There were no specific requirements from this funder, - the Hongkong Bank Foundation - that relates to the collaborative process of the Programme. However, flexibility in the funding criteria provided the necessary autonomy for HKU-CCSG to integrate multi-actor collaboration into the Programme. Given the multi-faceted nature of sustainable rural revitalization and

its novelty in the Hong Kong context, the contribution of different actors, and the time and resources needed to co-create various solutions were crucial.

The funder explained that they appreciated the level of complexity involved in designing and implementing this revitalization programme and were aware that the input of a range of resources was needed and different parties must be involved for the success of the Programme. One of the community members also reflected that most funders tend to take a different approach, setting rigid funding criteria and expecting the funded parties to deliver results within a very short period of time. This interviewee opined that it was very lucky that the Hongkong Bank Foundation offered so much freedom with a large amount of funding.

The “Sustainable Lai Chi Wo” Programme’s owners and facilitators confirmed that the funder offered them a lot of flexibility on the Programme design, deliverables, and reporting requirements. This enabled them to engage in co-creating the revitalization approach and activities with partnering organizations and community members.

10. The capacity to leverage support from authorities to enable local collaboration

QCA score:

0

0.33

0.66

1

Scoring confidence:

Low confidence

Medium confidence

High confidence

Data sources:

Interviews

Documents

Observations

Please elaborate on the reasoning behind your scoring for this governance factor:

Positive relations have been developed over time between the major organizations and the government. The “Sustainable Lai Chi Wo” Programme’s facilitator felt that the relevant government bureau and departments have provided substantial help to solve specific obstacles such as writing support letters to substantiate their application to other government departments. She believes that the government could see the values of the experimental approach taken by the Programme as they were the pioneers in developing a collaborative approach to sustainably revitalize rural villages, as well as their background as researchers who could build up a knowledge base that could be useful for the government’s future work.

One of the representatives of LCW explains that it used to be very difficult to leverage support from authorities prior to the “Sustainable Lai Chi Wo” Programme. The attention that had been drawn to the village since this Programme as well as the tangible results of the revitalization activities, meant that they have found it more effective when approaching the government to seek their support, for example, in upgrading the pier.

The government’s role in helping to tackle obstacles such as infrastructure/transport was undoubtedly fundamental. The positive relations mentioned previously, coupled with increased public and government attention on rural conservation, meant that the relevant authorities are more inclined to help address

infrastructure constraints and public service issues than before (e.g. waste collection). If these physical hurdles for implementation could not be resolved, the collaborative process that underlies the Programs would be hindered.

11. Inclusion and empowerment of relevant and affected actors

QCA score:

- 0
- 0.33
- 0.66
- 1

Scoring confidence:

- Low confidence
- Medium confidence
- High confidence

Data sources:

- Interviews
- Documents
- Observations

Please elaborate on the reasoning behind your scoring for this governance factor:

Inclusion of relevant actors from the wider society

As mentioned in the case summary, in the local context, members of the public (non-Indigenous population) generally feel excluded from rural affairs.

By contrast, all four programs have included initiatives to engage the wider society and to create new roles that could be played by interested groups and individuals. For example, groups and individuals from outside of the village were recruited through different schemes in the “HSBC Rural Sustainability” Programme, such as the Farmer Apprenticeship Scheme and Rural-in-action Start-up Scheme (Williams et al. 2021). The schemes were made available to the public, and site visits to the village were organized during the application period to welcome interested parties with little or no knowledge of LCW. Further support is provided for the participants of the scheme to become part of the community. For example, those wishing to rent a village house as lodgings or to set up their own workshop are introduced to Indigenous villagers who wish to lease their house (Williams et al. 2021).

As a further example, the “Forest Village” Programme recruited and incubated individual volunteers on a variety of themes such as nature conservation and the construction/restoration of ancient trails connecting Mui Tsz Lam with neighboring villages. This community of multi-skilled volunteers are included in gatherings with villagers, and their role and contribution are recognized by the village representative and other villagers.

Empowerment

In a village setting, Indigenous villagers usually have their own governing bodies inherited from historical times. In this case, although the traditional village management committee only included Indigenous villagers, the Programs have created and sustained other platforms for discussion and co-management that included non-Indigenous members of the community.

The incubation and empowerment of communities of interest was designed into all four revitalization Programs, and the strategies included giving these individuals/groups an identity, such as community farmer, volunteer (e.g. Friends of Mui Tsz Lam in the “Forest Village” Programme), new settler, resident

artist. The creation of these identities is coupled with opportunities for their contributions to the village to be recognized by Indigenous villagers. For example, by organizing informal gatherings and sharing the work that is accomplished by the volunteers, and/or explaining the objectives of an artists' project to conserve and raise awareness of Indigenous cultural assets. Interviews with some of the new settlers and artists revealed the importance of such opportunities and the changes they experienced, that once Indigenous villagers began to see their contributions to the village and develop a better understanding of why they want to come and live/work in the village, they are very welcoming and supportive (Chu et al. 2023a).

Empowering non-Indigenous individuals to become members of the community at LCW is crucial due to the limited number of Indigenous villagers actively living and/or working at the village. This enhances the collective capacity of the village to engage in collaborative management of natural resources and co-creation of solutions to address evolving problems.

For example, community members of LCW (non-Indigenous and Indigenous) are playing key roles in upholding a few co-created solutions alongside major organizations such as the Lai Chi Wo farmers' market and brand (further incubated under the "HSBC Rural Sustainability" Programme) and non-traditional village festivals (such as the Lai Chi Wo Harvest Fun Fairs under the "MA" Programme) which are integral to maintaining the sustainability of the village.

12. Clarification of interdependence vis-à-vis common problem and joint vision

QCA score:

0

0.33

0.66

1

Scoring confidence:

Low confidence

Medium confidence

High confidence

Data sources:

Interviews

Documents

Observations

Please elaborate on the reasoning behind your scoring for this governance factor:

Interdependence as a key motivating factor

Key stakeholders were aware that the sustainable revitalization of the village could not rely on their own efforts alone, and that the roles played by other stakeholder groups were necessary. As the goals and visions of the stakeholder groups differed, rather than having a joint vision, there is, at most, a loose alignment.

Significant efforts were required, on the part of the initiators and owners of the "Sustainable Lai Chi Wo" Programme for the collaboration process to begin, to persuade different actors that their goals were not, as they previously perceived, diverging but could be achieved simultaneously. Namely, nature conservation and village (re)development tended to be understood as competing goals which prevented green groups and Indigenous villagers to find ways to collaborate in finding a revitalization approach that could be accepted by both (Chu et al. 2022). Allowing them to see that a collaborative approach could be adopted which revitalizes cultural and natural assets of the village, protects the wildlife and creates

economic opportunities helped them understand that their respective goals could be achieved by working together. Therefore, the successful alignment of their goals was a prerequisite for collaboration to commence and for co-creation to take place at a later stage.

Many interviewees believed that not sharing a common vision did not matter in the co-creation process, because they were aware of the interdependence between different groups/interests in order to achieve their goals. It was this awareness that drove them to work with one another.

13. Trust-building and conflict mediation

QCA score:

0

0.33

0.66

1

Scoring confidence:

Low confidence

Medium confidence

High confidence

Data sources:

Interviews

Documents

Observations

Please elaborate on the reasoning behind your scoring for this governance factor:

Major organizations working on the revitalization programs have played key roles in supporting the building of trust the mediation of conflict, especially amongst members of the local community. The building of social capital within the local community which includes Indigenous and non-Indigenous members, various Programme's owners and facilitators, has been found to be important in supportive the co-creation process. It was suggested by interviewees that social gatherings, for example celebrations of villager's birthday and festivals, help to build and maintain trust and social capital.

Under the "MA" Programme, Hong Kong Countryside Foundation hosts the Community farmer meetings (mentioned in GF8) which offers a regular platform for collaborative governance of agricultural and related activities at LCW. The types of conflicts it has been used to resolve include issues related to the management of communal areas, which has proven to be particularly contentious. Sometimes, several rounds of meetings are required to resolve a particular issue. For example, the management of boundary areas and electric fences, of which the farmers have mutual responsibility and concerns over free-riding regarding the maintenance of such communal resources (Chu et al., 2023b).

The community of volunteers incubated by the "Forest Village" Programme are included in Whatsapp communication with the village representative, and the "Forest Village" Programme organizes informal gatherings periodically and share updates on the progress and plans for the revitalization programme, and feedback is invited.

As the village representative is also active in this group, the volunteers express their views on issues such as management approaches adopted to village farmland. When conflicts could not be resolved through Whatsapp discussions, they are followed up by face-to-face discussion if necessary.

As explained by the interviewees, trust was built through constant interaction and the experiences of working with one another to resolve problems that the actors collectively face. Some of the most important ways to build trust, they shared, were (i) the alignment of values (where possible), (ii) various organizations and stakeholder groups keeping each other informed of activities and issues. (i) mostly relates to the collaborating organizations, where the alignment of sustainability values helps to build a foundation of trust for future collaboration whereas (ii) relates to all parties.

In summary, trust-building and conflict mediation take place regularly and are important for the implementation of collaborative revitalization activities, however, it was difficult to identify specific evidence of positive experience with trust building or conflict mediation that enhanced the willingness of project participants to collaborate and innovate.

14. Use of experimental tools for innovation

QCA score:

0

0.33

0.66

1

Scoring confidence:

Low confidence

Medium confidence

High confidence

Data sources:

Interviews

Documents

Observations

Please elaborate on the reasoning behind your scoring for this governance factor:

Several experimental tools and principles were fundamental to the collaborative revitalization approach, such as adaptability and flexibility in the design and implementation of revitalization activities. Interviewees shared that the revitalization approach and solutions had to be constantly adjusted especially during the “Sustainable Lai Chi Wo” Programme. The Programme owners and facilitators emphasized the importance of holding discussions with different parties, such as landlords and environmental NGOs and experts. Mediation was also thought to be crucial to incorporate the views and concerns of different parties.

Knowledge sharing and learning could also be considered a relevant tool or process preceding experimentation and innovation. To enhance creativity in the co-creation processes, it was necessary to introduce and engage new stakeholders to the villages. For example, several rounds of the Rural-in-action Start-up Scheme was designed as a part of the “HSBC Rural Sustainability” Programme, offering funding to ten start-up projects which foster rural-urban interactions and collaborations for the development of rural areas.

The blending of traditional and modern knowledge and practices was a common source of innovation. There is considerable evidence pointing towards knowledge exchange across different stakeholders in the areas of farming practices, Hakka culture and art facilitated through the Programmes. From the interviewees’ sharing, it is apparent that knowledge exchange takes place very naturally and frequently amongst the community members. In terms of knowledge acceptance, however, there is mixed views. Some non-Indigenous community members felt that Indigenous villagers were generally interested in new

knowledge and practices. It was considered that, to an extent, they tend to be supportive of adopting practices such as new natural resource management practices, unless it relates to the village's *Fung Shui* (Chu et al. 2023a).

15. Ongoing critical self-reflection and learning (i.e., process and/or developmental evaluation):

QCA score:

0

0.33

0.66

1

Scoring confidence:

Low confidence

Medium confidence

High confidence

Data sources:

Interviews

Documents

Observations

Please elaborate on the reasoning behind your scoring for this governance factor:

There have been ongoing reflections at different junctures in different projects; although the actors in general did not put too much emphasis on reflections and were somehow ambiguous regarding the implications of reflections for learning.

At the end of the "Sustainable Lai Chi Wo" Programme, in 2017, HKU-CCSG collected feedback from community members through focus group meetings and partner organizations were invited to fill in a brief report with questions on the collaborative approach and the extent to which the programme objectives have been met (some relevant sections are quoted below in the outcome variable section).

The "HSBC Rural Sustainability" Programme conducted a sustainability impact assessment where co-creation participants' views were collected, and the report was published in May 2023 (Chu et al. 2023a). It is yet to be revealed whether the assessment process or findings will contribute to improving future co-creation initiatives.

Otherwise, there is no formal collective evaluation process. As different revitalization programs have been implemented in Lai Chi Wo and nearby villages since 2017, interviewees felt that it is not practical to conduct, formally or informally, a collective evaluation or reflection exercise as each programme takes on a slightly different role in the revitalization process and has its own defined goals and objectives. They feel that it makes sense for each programme to conduct evaluations on its own and express that they have had informal discussions with other stakeholders about the effectiveness of the revitalization of Lai Chi Wo. However, most of the interviewees were unable to recall any specific discussions or the content of such discussions, and could not explain how these conversations that they think must have taken place casually at some point have played a role in driving the project forward.

16. Exercise of facilitative leadership:

QCA score:

- 0
- 0.33
- 0.66
- 1

Scoring confidence:

- Low confidence
- Medium confidence
- High confidence

Data sources:

- Interviews
- Documents
- Observations

Please elaborate on the reasoning behind your scoring for this governance factor:

Facilitative leadership was performed by selected Indigenous villagers and representatives from key organizations. There is no hierarchy between them and instinctively selected Indigenous villagers have taken up the roles of liaising with other Indigenous villagers, while organizational representatives tended to liaise with non-Indigenous participants addressing conflicts or misconceptions/misunderstandings. They would also use their respective networks to promoting awareness, introducing new parties and individuals to the co-creation process.

Several representative members of Indigenous villagers in the area shared examples of the ways in which they persuaded other Indigenous villagers (and sometimes non-Indigenous members) to support the collaborative revitalization approach and/or particular revitalization activities. Explaining the reasons behind different strategies and management approaches was also a key task that seems to be constantly performed by these representatives. Through these efforts, they have contributed to building trust between Indigenous and non-Indigenous members of the community. Later in the co-creation process, as more Programme were implemented in the area, the coordinating roles of these representatives became even more important.

In addition to managing conflicts, building trust and aligning goals (Chu et al., 2022), the “Sustainable Lai Chi Wo” Programme owners and facilitators played an additional facilitative leadership role that advances collaboration and co-creation between the village and the wider society. Through the “HSBC Rural Sustainability” Programme, they continue to persuade and support the villagers to organize activities, gradually helping to develop their capacity to collaborate with different parties to organize events and/or activities in LCW.

Outcome variable: Successfully co-created green transitions

The outcome variable ‘co-created green transitions’ will be scored in two parts. First, ‘co-creation’ will be scored based on an assessment of whether the participants in the initiative, project or process engaged in collaborative problem-solving that fostered creative ideas and innovative solutions (data will consist of survey data combined with interviews and documents). Next, ‘green transitions’ will be scored based on an assessment of whether the initiative, project or process has fulfilled or is expected to fulfill its green goals, ambitions and aspirations (data will consist of survey data combined with interviews and internal and/or external evaluation reports, including scientific publications).

The scoring of this variable is done in two parts:

1. Is the developed solution based on collaborative problem-solving spurring creativity and innovative solutions?
2. Does the developed solution engender a green transition?

This scoring should be conducted based on both the survey and complementary green outcome evaluations. Please consult Sections 4.4 and 6.10 in the Research Protocol for more details.

1. Is the developed solution co-created?

QCA score:

- 0
- 0.33
- 0.66
- 1

Scoring confidence:

- Low confidence
- Medium confidence
- High confidence

Data sources:

- Survey
- Interviews
- Documents
- Observations

Please elaborate on the reasoning behind your scoring for this part of the governance factor, including the data sources used for the scoring.

A series of survey questions focus on the presence of collaborative problem-solving (1), the fostering of creative and innovative solutions (2-6), the support for process, outcomes and the level of engagement (7-12), and the attainment of goals that are robust and serve to enhance sustainability (13-15).

	Strong. dis.	Dis.	Slight. dis.	Neither agr/dis	Slight. agree	Agree	Strong. agree	Mean
1. Problem-solving mobilized different experiences, and/or ideas and/or forms of knowledge to develop new perspectives	-	-	-	-	9.5	28.5	61.9	2.52
2. Through the collaborative problem-solving process, different experiences and/or ideas and/or forms of knowledge have been mobilized to search for unconventional solutions	-	-	-	-	9.5	42.8	47.6	2.38
3. The collaborative problem-solving process mobilized different experiences, and/or ideas and/or forms of knowledge to search for solutions that go beyond standard/text-book solutions	-	-	-	4.7	9.5	47.6	38	2.19
4. The co-created solution breaks with established practices	-	4.7	-	4.7	23.8	47.6	19	1.66
5. The co-created solution disrupts conventional wisdom	-	9.5	14.2	9.5	38	23.8	4.7	0.66

6. The co-created solution offers new ideas to address the green transition problem	-	-	-	-	9.5	52.3	38	2.28
7. I'm supportive of the co-created solution	-	-	-	-	-	19	80.9	2.80
8. I'm content with the overall collaborative process of the project	-	-	4.7	-	47.6	38	9.5	1.47
9. I feel the multi-actor collaboration process was a prerequisite for the success of the project	-	-	-	-	4.7	38	57.1	2.52
10. I'm satisfied by the results of the co-creation effort in terms of expected impact on the welfare of the community	-	-	4.7	4.7	33.3	52.3	4.7	1.47
11. The collaborative interaction in the project has led to an innovative solution	-	-	-	-	14.2	71.4	14.2	2
12. The actors involved in the project are engaged in collaborative interaction that stimulated creative problem-solving	-	-	9.5	4.7	14.2	57.1	14.2	1.61
13. The co-created solution meets the proposed goals of the project	-	4.7	4.7	4.7	33.3	47.6	4.7	1.28
14. The co-created solution will be durable and robust in the long run	-	4.7	14.2	14.2	14.2	28.5	23.8	1.19
15. The co-created solution is expected to significantly improve sustainability for the whole community	-	-	-	-	9.5	42.8	47.6	2.38

N = 21

It should be noted that all respondents were supportive of the co-created solution, see Q7, (“co-created solution” is defined in this case study as “a collaborative approach to rural revitalization in HK”, so it was rephrased as such in the execution of the survey), and agreed that multi-actor collaboration is a prerequisite for the success of the projects (Q9). There is also strong agreement on the first three questions related to the collaborative problem-solving process leading to the development of new perspectives, and that different experience and knowledge have been used to search for unconventional solutions.

More diverging views could be found with regards to questions on whether or not the co-created solution breaks with established practices (Q4) and/or disrupts conventional wisdom (Q5). Interviewees and survey respondents explained that given the context of revitalizing Indigenous villages, the conservation of traditional practices and the interactions between “new” and traditional knowledge were crucial to the collaboration process and the success of the co-created solution. This explains why Q5 had the lowest mean score.

When preparing the final report for the “Sustainable Lai Chi Wo” Programme, HKU-CCSG invited collaborators Hong Kong Countryside Foundation (HKCF), Produce Green Foundation and Conservancy Association (CA) to conduct an internal evaluation to review the effectiveness of the partnership model. A summary was provided in the report where *“all partners agreed that a complementary and multi-disciplinary project team has to be a core part of the key success factors for the Programme’s implementation”*.

Both HKCF and CA commented on the complementarity between the organizations which HKCF thinks help *“to generate synergy beneficial to the project”*, and CA agreed that *“the right partners were selected for the project”*.

Further momentum for co-creation to take place across different revitalization programs in Hong Kong was generated through the “Sustainable Lai Chi Wo” Programme. It has successfully raised the awareness of a collaborative approach to revitalizing villages amongst the Indigenous villager community and the wider society. As stated in its final report the Programme has inspired village representatives from other villages and Heung Yee Kuk (see footnote 1 on P11) to consider adopting this approach to other villages in Hong Kong. *“With the proactive stakeholder engagement and high media exposure, the Hong Kong society has become aware of the Programme and is positive and supportive towards the Programme’s vision and objectives. Many individuals and organizations have approached the team seeking volunteering and collaborating opportunities.”*

Throughout the “Sustainable Lai Chi Wo” Programme, Independent Professional Agency (IPA) was engaged to comment on and provide advice on the progress of the Programme. Dr. Eric Tsang’s (IPA) final evaluation Report highlighted knowledge sharing and effective cross-sector collaboration as key attributes to the success of the Programme *“Thanks to the hard work of the team, local engagement was successful in terms of the number of villagers engaged and their qualitative feedback. This kind of rapport is always very important in this kind of activity. As I said before, local wisdom and knowledge are of paramount importance towards the success of a sustainable community”* *“The project is a textbook example of a local engagement project on sustainable community building which I think also addresses global issues such as climate change and importance of indigenous knowledge.”*

The combination of revitalization programs based in Lai Chi Wo, Mui Tsz Lam and Kop Tong that were developed and implemented after the “Sustainable Lai Chi Wo” Programme can also be considered as early outcomes of the co-creation process:

From the internal evaluation report by HKCF on the “Sustainable Lai Chi Wo” Programme, their response to the question of ‘Did we lay down a good succession arrangement and what are they?’ was *“Yes. The*

partners identified well ahead of the termination of the project what should be done to sustain the momentum generated by the project... All these were done in good time which enabled the seamless transition to a suite of new projects that would together succeed the original HSBC-supported project."

Under the "MA" Programme, the HKCF continues to lease farmland for resumption of agriculture, and to maintain rapport with villagers. Together with CA, they work on engaging with community farmers and support them in implementing eco-friendly farming practices. For example, they signed agreements with community farmers for butterfly-friendly enhancement work to be carried out (such as selective weeding, mix-ed planting) and measures to prevent the import of common invasive species into LCW ("MA" Programme report – 2017-2019). Their work has been effective in changing farmland functions to increase the area of farmland that can be categorized as ecological wetlands. New species of butterflies and odonates were recorded ("MA" Programme report – 2019-2021). The report concluded that the conservation of various farmland habitats through eco-friendly farming and management has enhanced the biodiversity of Lai Chi Wo.

The "MA" Programme has also been working with community farming groups and volunteers to implement conservation works on irrigation channels and the maintenance of these channels. The management approach for the irrigation channels had been co-created through discussions between HKU-CCSG, several government departments and offices, a local green group, hydrological and ecological experts as well as Indigenous villagers (Chu et al. 2022). HKCF and CA have further developed irrigation management practices based on this co-created approach, which is implemented and maintained with the community farming groups and volunteers. Specific measures include creating eco-ponds and water channels in wet fields to provide shelter and channels to protect Rice fish and other water animals during dry season ("MA" Programme report – 2019-2021).

The "MA" Programme has also incorporated ideas similar to crowd-farming, which allows people to adopt, for example, a fruit tree, and receive updates and direct delivery of the harvest in return. In the "MA" Programme, members of the public are invited to adopt a Roselle plant where the 'adoption programme' also includes a few farming experience sessions allowing the adopter to better understand the principles behind eco-farming and promote community supported agriculture.

The co-created solutions developed through the "Sustainable Lai Chi Wo" Programme has inspired policy change which enabled the scaling of a new collaborative approach to rural village management. The Programme was explicitly referenced in the Policy Address (2017) during which the government announced the establishment of the Countryside Conservation Office and set aside 1 billion HKD for the Countryside Conservation Funding Scheme.

The collaborative revitalization approach adopted at LCW has been positively portrayed and received amongst Hong Kong's Indigenous community. It was suggested through interviews and documentation of visits and experience sharing offered by LCW's Indigenous villagers and HKU-CCSG that their collaboration has had a motivating effect on inspiring other Indigenous village communities to engage in collaborations with other organizations to revitalize their villages.

2. Does the developed solution engender a green transition³?

QCA score:

- 0
- 0.33
- 0.66
- 1

Scoring confidence:

- Low confidence
- Medium confidence
- High confidence

Data sources:

- Survey
- Interviews
- Documents
- Observations

Please elaborate on the reasoning behind your scoring for this part of the governance factor, including the data sources used for the scoring:

A series of survey questions focus on whether the project has produced or is expected to produce a green transition aiming to avoid a worsening of the status quo, maintain the status quo or improve the status quo.

The project:	Yes	No	Don't know
...did not produce any green transition solution	0	100	0
...is expected to produce/has produced a green transition solution aiming to avoid a worsening in the status quo	47.62	52.38	0
...is expected to produce/has produced a green transition solution aiming to maintain the status quo	10	90	0
...is expected to produce/has produced a green transition solution aiming to improve the status quo	100	0	0

n = 21

All survey respondents agreed that the projects produced green transition solution and that the solution aims to improve the status quo.

The green outcome goals of all four Programs can be summarized as community revitalization and environmental enhancement, rebuilding human-nature relationships, adopting whole catchment management approach, experimentation of sustainable farming practices, advocating sustainable production and consumption practices, incubating environmental education hubs in rural villages. Supported by the progress reports of the programs, questionnaire and interviews with all stakeholders, these green outcome goals have all been met to varying extents.

³ By "green transitions", we mean objectives and aspirations that correspond to at least one of the Green SDGs (SDG 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15). The project does not have to refer explicitly to the green SDGs, but the project's green objectives

When preparing the final report of the “Sustainable Lai Chi Wo” Programme, HKU-CCSG invited Hong Kong Countryside Foundation, Produce Green Foundation and Conservancy Association to conduct an internal evaluation to review the effectiveness of the Programme, they found that *“Generally speaking, all partners agreed that the objectives set were achieved”*.

HKU-CCSG also reports that *“the agricultural rehabilitation in Lai Chi Wo has enhanced the biodiversity and wetland functions of the village”* *“The education activities have also provided opportunities to reconnect human and nature. The village lifestyle and rural learning experience have been invaluable in helping people to rediscover ways to live harmoniously with Nature.”* *“The whole catchment research approach enables a better understanding of the rural environment in Lai Chi Wo and provides useful data for agricultural and environmental management. The hydrological monitoring can help tackle hydrological issues such as flooding and potential seasonal drought which are becoming more frequent under climate change. It provides useful reference for the planning of farming activities and biodiversity management strategies.”*

The incubation of environmental education hub has not only been developed in LCW but has been extended to Mui Tsz Lam and Kop Tong through the “Forest Village” Programme. Evidence includes a constellation of new initiatives such as setting up butterfly gardens (cultivating butterfly food and nectar plants) and organizing Carbon Stock camp and Insect Blitz for the public which also inspire discussions on the role of citizen science in rural revitalization. The “Forest Village” Programme continues to offer volunteer training programs, resident camp training, and collaborate with different organizations to offer regional sharing and visiting opportunities (e.g. with Wu Zhi Qiao Foundation in September 2023) to extend the impact of the co-created green transition solution to rural decline.

Under the “MA” Programme, HKCF and CA work with community farmers and support them in implementing eco-friendly farming practices. The “MA” Programme finds that though the occurrence of target wildlife fluctuated largely with seasons, they remained rather stable on a yearly basis. New species of butterflies and odonates were recorded (“MA” Programme report – 2019-2021). The report concluded that the conservation of various farmland habitats through eco-friendly farming and management has enhanced the biodiversity of Lai Chi Wo.

Green outcome goals related to nature conservation were integral to the “Sustainable Lai Chi Wo” Programme. As evidence of the realization of such goals, two “MA” Programs have been approved by the government (see Table 2 in the first section). This demonstrates that the government recognizes the need to protect the natural habitat at Lai Chi Wo, Mui Tsz Lam and Kop Tong as well as the value of adopting a collaborative management approach.

Please list all the informants you have interviewed for the case study (list project role + interview date):

We interviewed 21 individuals in person. All of the interviews were conducted in Cantonese. Transcripts were then produced in Chinese and translated to English by a research assistant, which were checked by one of the authors of this case report. The informants are listed anonymously.

Project role	Representative from	Date
PF	LCW village	2 May
O/PF	The University of Hong Kong	26 Apr
O	The University of Hong Kong	14 Aug
PP	The University of Hong Kong	14 Aug
O	The University of Hong Kong	8 Aug
O/PF	Hong Kong Countryside Foundation	1 Aug
PP	MTL village	7 Aug
PP	LCW village	4 Aug
F	Hongkong Bank Foundation	4 Aug
BA	Hong Kong Government	2 Aug
PF	Hong Kong Countryside Foundation	1 Aug
PF	Conservancy Association	2 Aug
BA	Hong Kong Government	10 Aug
PP	Advisory Committee on Countryside Conservation	22 Nov
PF	The University of Hong Kong	5 Dec

Please list all the observations you have made (type of meeting/workshop/etc. + observation date):

As mentioned particularly in GF8 and GF13, formal meetings tend to be coupled with frequent informal discussions between various actors in the co-creation process. Interviewees explained that the co-creation process take place across many distributed and informal venues. For example, other than informal gatherings where trust-building and informal reporting of project progress (accountability) take place, ad-hoc meetings may be arranged for conflict resolution as issues arise. While this creates challenges for observations to be made, this case study benefits from a rich collection of data accumulated across the four programs.

Records of meetings could be found in various programs' progress and impact evaluation reports, many included summaries of what was discussed. Minutes from the Community farmers' meetings were also obtained. Raw interview data and focus group meeting minutes collected in the process of programme evaluation form part of the evidence for this case report. These are supplemented by programme related publications listed below.

Please list all the documents you have analyzed (document name + source + year):

Key documents on the 4 Programs:

Chu, V. H. Y., Lam, W.-F., & Williams, J. M. (2023a). Building robustness for rural revitalization: A social-ecological system perspective. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 101, 103042-.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2023.103042>

Chu, V. H. Y., Lam, W. F., Law, W. W. Y., Yiu, S. (2023b) *Sustainability Impact Assessment: Framework and Report on HSBC Rural Sustainability*, Centre for Civil Society and Governance, The University of Hong Kong.

Chu, V. H. Y., Law, W. W. Y., & Williams, J. M. (2022). Advocacy coalitions in rural revitalisation: The roles of policy brokers and policy learning. *Environmental Science & Policy*, 136, 9–18.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2022.05.006>

'Forest Village: Mui Tsz Lam and Kop Tong Sustainable Village Programme' Biannual Progress Reports (Feb 2021-Jul 2021) (Aug 2021-Jan 2022) (Feb 2022-Jul 2022) (Aug 2022-Jan 2023) (Feb 2023- Jul 2023)

Law, W. W. Y., Yiu, S. I. S., & Chick, H. L. (2018). *Vivifying Lai Chi Wo: Sustainable Lai Chi Wo Programme Four Year Review and Outlook*. Policy for Sustainability Lab.

'Living Water & Community Revitalization – An Agricultural-led Action, Engagement and Incubation Programme at Lai Chi Wo' Proposal, The University of Hong Kong, 2013

'Living Water & Community Revitalization - An Agricultural-led Action, Engagement and Incubation Programme at Lai Chi Wo' Final report, The University of Hong Kong, 2017

'Management Agreement Scheme at Lai Chi Wo Enclave' completion report 2017-2019, The Hong Kong Countryside Foundation, 2020

'Management Agreement Scheme at Lai Chi Wo Enclave' completion report 2019-2021, The Hong Kong Countryside Foundation, 2022

'Sustainable Lai Chi Wo' Proposal, The University of Hong Kong, 2017

General resources

Chan, S. C. (1998). Politicizing tradition: The identity of indigenous inhabitants in Hong Kong. *Ethnology*, 39-54.

Cheung, P. T. (2011). Civic engagement in the policy process in Hong Kong: Change and continuity. *Public Administration and Development*, 31(2), 113-121.

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Hayes, J. (2006). *The great difference: Hong Kong's new territories and its people 1898-2004* (Vol. 1). Hong Kong University Press.

Home Affairs Department (2023) Existing Village/Market Town Boundary Map 2023 to 2026 Resident Representative Election, The Hong Kong Government

https://www.had.gov.hk/rre/eng/rural_representative_elections/village_map/index.htm?year=23-26

Hong Kong Government (2004) Press Release: Designation of Lai Chi Wo Special Area.

<https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/200412/15/1215104.htm>

Lam, J.T.M., (2012) District Councils, Advisory Bodies, and Statutory Bodies. in Lam, W.M., Lui P.L., Wong, W. (eds) *Contemporary Hong Kong Government and Politics*. Hong Kong University Press, Expanded 2nd Edition.

Lee, E.W.Y., Chan, E.Y.M., Chan, J.C.W., Cheung, P.T.Y., Lam, W.F., & Lam, W.M. (2012). *Public Policymaking in Hong Kong: Civic Engagement and State-Society Relations in a Semi-Democracy* (1st ed.). Routledge.

<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203066492>

Ng, K.C. (2016) The Heung Yee Kuk: how a village governing body became an empire of rural leaders.

The South China Morning Post <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/2018713/heung-yee-kuk-how-village-governing-body-became-empire-rural-leaders>

Ng, M. (2022) Resistance and Resilience: A Case Study of Rebuilding the Choi Yuen Village in Hong Kong. In I. Cho, B. Kriznik, & J. Hou (Eds.), *Emerging Civic Urbanisms in Asia: Hong Kong, Seoul, Singapore, and Taipei beyond Developmental Urbanization* (Asian Cities, pp. 71-94). Amsterdam University Press.

doi:10.1017/9789048553051.003

Tang, B., Wong, S., & Lee, A. K. W. (2005). Green belt, countryside conservation and local politics: a Hong Kong case study. *Review of Urban and Regional Development Studies*, 17(3), 230–247.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-940X.2005.00103.x>

World Wildlife Fund Hong Kong. (2014). Fixing the holes: the need to repair Hong Kong's country park system. Country Park Enclaves Investigation Report

Please note the response rate for the survey/measurement of outcome variable:

All interviews were conducted in person, and all interviewees completed the survey.

Additional stakeholders with different background and roles in the revitalization projects were invited to complete the survey.

A total of 21 individuals completed the survey.

The survey was administered either in person, over zoom or telephone.

The response rate for the survey was 100%.