



Enhancing civil society's capacity and readiness for sustainability attainment: Rural revitalisation



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Centre for Civil Society and Governance
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Summary of the Impact

Three tiers of integrated impacts in the empowerment of civil society for rural sustainability:

1. **Village community level**: rural communities have re-established socio-economic vibrancy through the engagement of communities of interests
2. **Policy level**: the Hong Kong SAR Government has adopted the collaborative approach and established the Countryside Conservation Office with a HK\$1 billion budget to implement the revitalisation model across Hong Kong
3. **International level**: new action research collaborations with other prestigious universities and Meta in Asia Pacific have been forged to expand the geographic reach of the revitalisation model. International recognitions, including UNESCO Special Recognition for Sustainable Development 2020 – was awarded to applaud the collaborative revitalisation model



Underpinning Research

Communities at the rural-urban nexus have been undergoing social and economic decline due to the encroachment of urbanisation, with policy attention often biased towards urban areas and generally a lack of sustainable pathway.

- At present, 642 villages in Hong Kong and many more villages facing similar challenges in the Greater Bay Area and the Asia Pacific region.
- There has been an outcry for a revitalisation model and approach that can enhance the socio-economic, cultural and ecological assets embedded in rural communities while reconnecting these assets for the sustainability attainment of the wider society.
- Research from the Centre for Civil Society and Governance (CCSG) at HKU has studied and promoted **collaborative governance** as a way to drive revitalisation, urban-rural integration and sustainable livelihoods.
- Underpinning this research is Prof. Wai-Fung Lam's (Director) research on **institutions, self-governance** and how **collaborative action** can be established and sustained through effective institutional designs *[Ref 1,2,3,4 on slide 8 refers]*.



Underpinning Research

These research insights are applied to:

- ‘Sustainable Lai Chi Wo: Living Water & Community Revitalisation – An Agricultural-led Action, Engagement and Incubation Programme at Lai Chi Wo’ project (2013-2017);
- ‘HSBC Rural Sustainability’ project (2017-2023) (the projects).
- The projects rebuilt the social-ecological systems (SES) of the Lai Chi Wo (LCW) village in a manner that was viable and sustainable in the peri-urban context.
- Research demonstrated that robustness and resilience can be attained within the LCW SES through collaborative governance [Ref 5].
- Research stemming from the projects is being adapted and applied to two new projects to further extend its impact in implementing innovative and community-based approaches to rural revitalisation:
 - The *Rural Sustainability Programme: APAC Initiative for Regional Impact and the Sustainable Villages for All (AIRI)*;
 - *Community-based Conservation Management of Forest Village Ecosystem in Mui Tsz Lam and Kop Tong (Forest Village)*.



Underpinning Research

Research conducted by Prof. Lam, Dr. Law (Deputy Director), Dr. Chu (Lecturer) and Dr. Williams (Post-doctoral fellow) operationalises **collaborative governance** to demonstrate how it can be practically and successfully applied to revitalisation projects.

The two key research streams demonstrate:

1. How rural SESs at the peri-urban interface can be empowered to deal with external shocks such as climate change impacts and shifting social/economic patterns;
2. How the linkages between rural SESs and the wider urban system can be strengthened to maintain rural integrity.



Underpinning Research

Stream 1. :

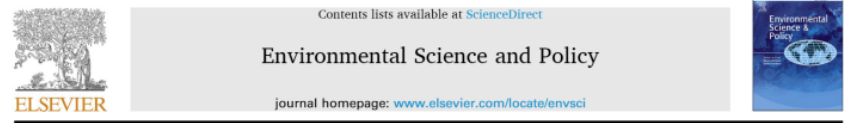
- Elucidated the multifaceted components of rural resilience and robustness—learning and adaptation, social capital and social innovation and polycentric institutional arrangements [Ref 5]- and examined how resilience could be built through collaborative governance.
- An important advance from the research: for such collaborations to be successful, it is necessary for **policy brokers** to promote and sustain **policy learning** among stakeholders in the process of collaboration [Ref 6].
- Insights into the critical link between **collaborative governance**, **institutions** and **SES robustness** [Ref 7].
 - Institutional features supporting collaborative processes, those that enable SESs to cope with external shocks and hence be more robust, are redundancy, modularity, diversity and effective learning.



Building robustness for rural revitalization: A social-ecological system perspective

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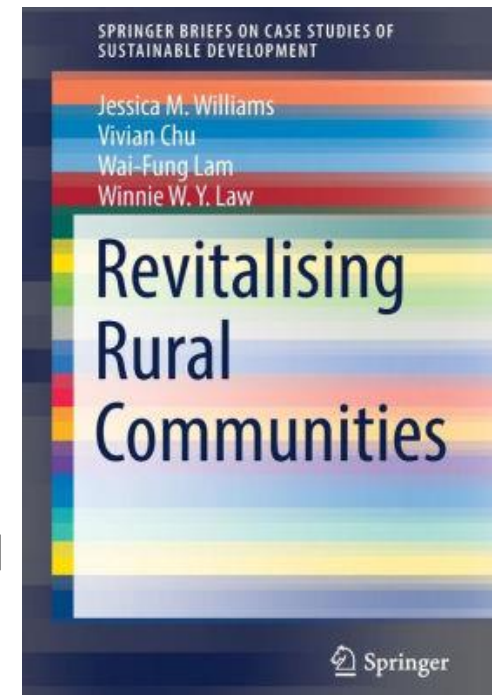
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Advocacy coalitions in rural revitalisation: The roles of policy brokers and policy learning

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Underpinning Research

Stream 2:

- Focuses on the nesting of peri-urban SESs within the wider community through enhancing community capacity.
- It examines how a **“commoning approach”**, where the community is responsible for managing village resources, can help strengthen the linkages between rural SESs and the wider community [Ref 8].



Higher level SES

“Local agricultural SES”
Development constrained by social and economic struggles, ranging from the control of land to market

“Local food SES”
Challenges for entrepreneurs and smaller stakeholders to enter the system
Lack of diversity in the local food system value chain



Problems in rural revitalisation

- “Lai Chi Wo SES”
- Remoteness - limited competitiveness
 - A need to add value to its produce
 - Lack of support and limited market demand for value-added local agricultural produce/products

Commoning approach

- Diversified local food value chain
- Established ‘LoCoKITCHEN’ – an incubation platform for social innovation on local food
- New community of interest able to act collectively to develop and manage the local agri-food system

References to Research

1. **Lam, W.F.** & Chiu, C.Y. 2016. Institutional nesting and robustness of self-governance: the adaptation of irrigation systems in Taiwan. *International Journal of the Commons* 10(2): 953-81.
2. Ostrom, E., **Lam, W.F.**, Pradhan, P., & Shivakoti, G.P. 2011. Improving irrigation in Asia: sustainable performance of an innovative intervention in Nepal. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
3. **Lam, W.F.**, Tang, C.P. & Tang, S.K. 2021. Bureaucratizing Coproduction: Institutional Adaptation of Irrigation Associations in Taiwan. *Water Alternatives* 14(2): 435-52.
4. Wang, R.Y., **Lam, W.F.**, & Wang, J. 2021. Irrigation Management in East Asia: Institutions, Socioeconomic Transformation and Adaptations. *Water Alternatives* 14(2): 319-31.
5. **Williams, J. M., Chu, V., Lam, W.F. and Law, W.W.Y.** 2021. *Revitalising rural communities*. Springer briefs on case studies of sustainable development. ISBN: 978-981-16-5824-2
6. **Chu, V.H.Y., Law, W.W.Y., and Williams, J.M.** 2022. Advocacy coalitions in rural revitalisation: The roles of policy brokers and policy learning. *Environmental Science and Policy*. 136: 9-18.
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7. **Chu, V.H.Y., Lam, W.F. and Williams, J.M.** 2023. Building robustness for rural revitalisation: a social-ecological perspective. *Journal of Rural Studies*. 101. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2023.103042>
8. **Williams, J.M., Chu, V.H.Y., Lam, W.F. and Law, W.W.Y.** (in review) Managing peri-urban social-ecological systems through commoning. *International Journal of the Commons*

(**Bold** denotes CCSG's researchers)

Knowledge to be Exchanged

CCSG

Exchanged knowledge on:

Social–ecological systems

Biodiversity and ecology

Sustainable agricultural practices

Collaborative governance

Community self governance

Institutional/
organisational forms and structures

Social innovation and entrepreneurship

Knowledge flows of incubation, co-learning, co-creation, co-production

Communities of interest

NGOs

best practice in habitat management and nature conservation measures

Public

Technological know-how and business knowledge to devise solutions to rural issues

Villagers

within the local villages, abroad and the wider Indigenous community, shared cultural knowledge and social practices

Corporations

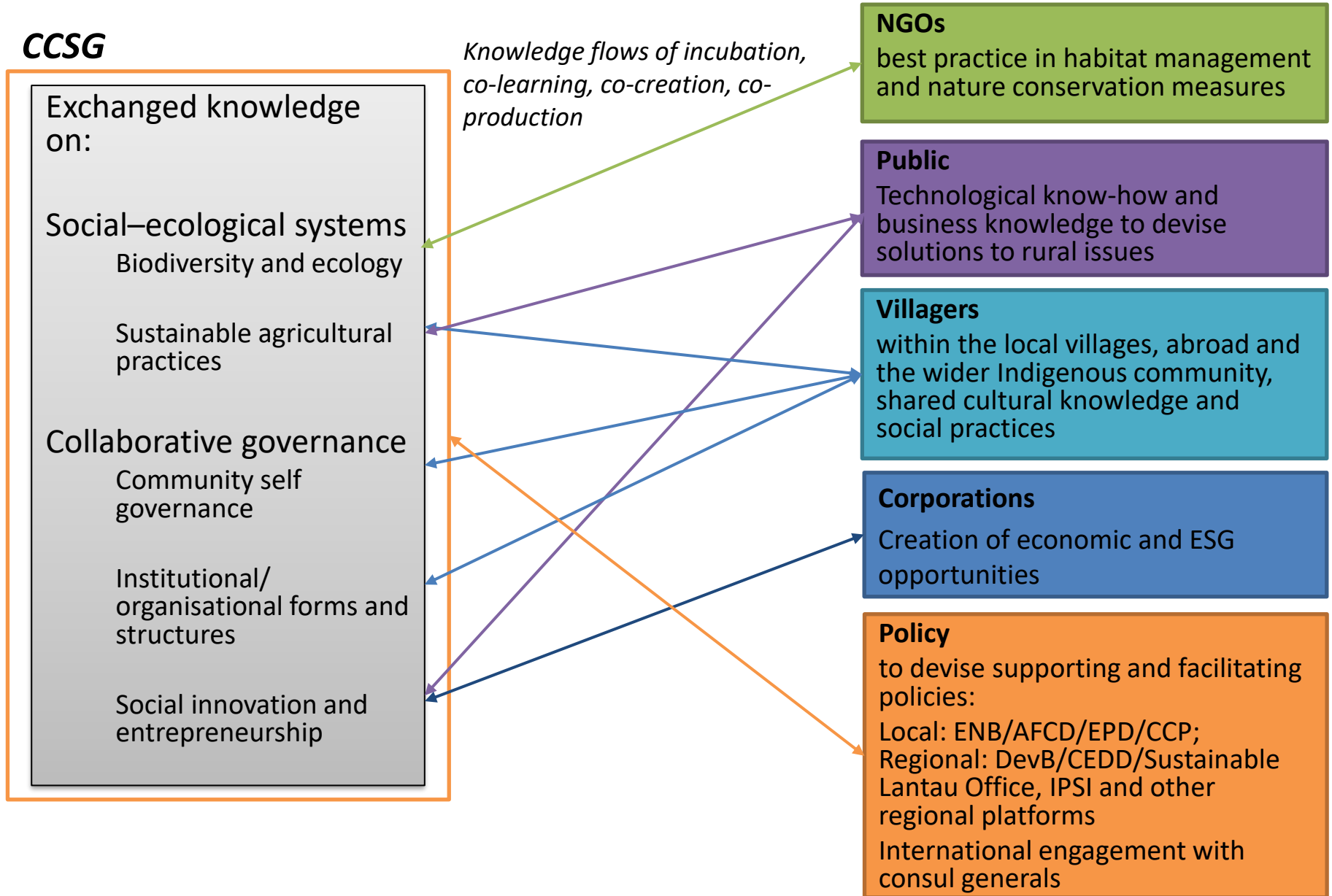
Creation of economic and ESG opportunities

Policy

to devise supporting and facilitating policies:

Local: ENB/AFCD/EPD/CCP;
Regional: DevB/CEDD/Sustainable Lantau Office, IPSI and other regional platforms

International engagement with consul generals



Knowledge to be Exchanged

- Knowledge was generated through stakeholder meetings, engagement processes, immersion in local context, research and collaborations with experts.
- Curated and disseminated through:
 1. **Building collaborations with and among the local and wider communities**, through shared space and platforms (slide 11 refers)
 2. **Engaging wider audiences** through social media, newsletters, project videos, news reports/interviews (slide 12 refers)
 3. **Building professional community and advancing the global community** through research, including journal articles, outreach publications and academic courses (slide 13 refers)

Result: Action project → Community approach → Policy impact

Building collaborations with and among the local and wider communities

- **Sustainable Agriculture:** Scientific and technical know-how integrated with local knowledge to rejuvenate farming in a socially and environmentally conscious manner
 - Restored 6ha farmland, 3 dous farm incubation scheme, farm apprentice, farmers market, introduction of agroforestry, agro-tourism
 - Increased from 0 to 18 households at LCW, spinning off 16+ houses under restoration
- **LoCoKitchen:** Socially inclusive innovation platform for knowledge exchange on local agro-food production
 - Products (5) and brands (3) incubation, OEM (Original Equipment Manufacturer)/ODM (Original Design Manufacturer) service
- **Incubation projects:** rural knowledge combined with technological and business support to create community-based solutions for rural areas
 - Result: Rural Start-up Scheme (10 projects), Co-creation Scheme (7 projects, 209 events, 2,500 participants, 3 Village Fests), 2 Rural Sustainability Hackathons (100+ participants)



永續發展 實驗坊 2020

Sustainability Hackathon 2020

主題：香港永續糧食系統

- 提升糧食保障
- 改善食農教育
- 透過食物文化增強社會凝聚力
- 減少剩食及回收廚餘

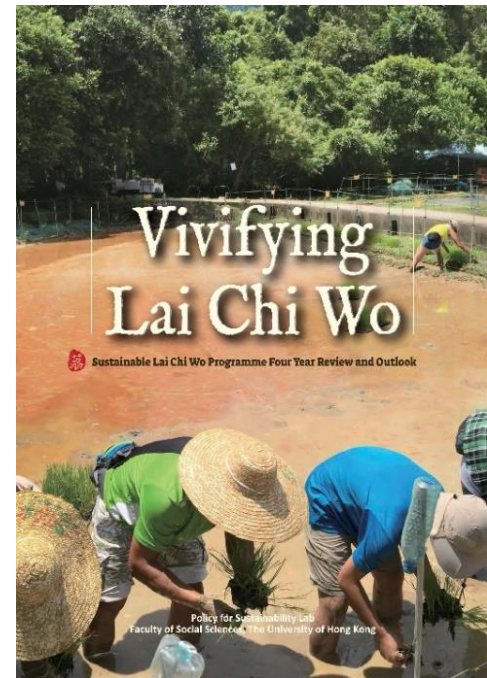
2020年8月21-23日 | 及8月 29日
深水埗YHA美荷樓青年旅舍地下多用途室





Engaging the wider community

- Social media to engage members of the public include:
 - **370+ publicity items** in newspapers, radio channels, television programmes, online, etc.
 - **8** Project videos
 - Programme photo story book, *Vivifying Lai Chi Wo* (2017)
 - **7** issues of *Rural Sustainability* newsletters published since 2018
- **108,600+** visitors to project events/market booths/exhibitions/shows/social media platforms/outside presentations
- **5,239.5** volunteer days
- 2013-2017 LCW Programme trained:
 - **83** Leaders
 - **443** Teachers and **8,606** students
 - **5,713** members of the public
 - **825** underprivileged families
- 2017-2023 Rural Sustainability trained:
 - **300+** local farmers and community producers
 - **6,200+** Fellows and professionals
 - **50+** interns



Building and advancing global and professional communities

- Academic talks and conferences, including:
 - 3 Regional roundtables (2016, 2017, 2022)
 - 5 Conference presentations
- Talks and discussions with policymakers
 - 2 Sharing sessions and 2 field studies with officials from Countryside Conservation Office and Sustainable Lantau Office
- Academy for Sustainable Communities:
 - Trained **5,160** professionals, students and public
 - Trained **713** fellows
 - **63,000+** public participants engaged in exhibitions and shows
- Journal and outreach publications, including:
 - 8 E-studies/cases
 - Outreach articles
 - **Sustainability Impact Assessment: Framework and Report on HSBC Rural Sustainability**
 - **Report of Biodiversity Monitoring and Habitat Management Plan** with comprehensive ecological database (Hau, Lo & So 2018).
 - **Hydrology Monitoring Report** for Lai Chi Wo (Xu et al. 2018)
 - 2 academic book/chapter, 5 journal articles (published/review), 2 conference papers



環境及生態局
Environment and Ecology Bureau



鄉郊保育辦公室
Countryside
Conservation
Office



土木工程拓展署
CIVIL ENGINEERING AND
DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

可持續大嶼辦事處
SUSTAINABLE LANTAU OFFICE

Engagement: Process



ACADEMY for 永續社區學院
SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES
The University of Hong Kong - Centre for Civil Society and Governance

- **Training through The Academy For Sustainable Communities**
 - Provides **8** curriculum-based course and **6** short courses aimed at school teachers, community workers, conservationists, government officials, corporate members, retirees etc. who are interested in putting sustainability in action. Notable courses include:
 - *Certificate in Sustainable Communities, supported by professional institutions*
 - *Seed to Cup: Certificate in Sustainable Coffee Value Chain 2022/2023, with Coffee Lab Asia*



- **Incubation** –Enabling social innovation for sustainability through workshops, competitions, mentoring and learning sessions
 - Approx. 17 projects incubated
- **Stakeholder meetings and platforms** – continual engagement with communities of interest and experts
 - E.g. Farmers Markets, Village festivals, collaborations with Conservancy Association, Hong Kong Countryside Foundation, Produce Green Foundation
- **Sustainability Impact Assessment**
 - Framework and Report on HSBC Rural Sustainability – developed with experts, based on experience and shared with interested parties

Engagement: Innovativeness

Rebuilding different village systems through engagement:

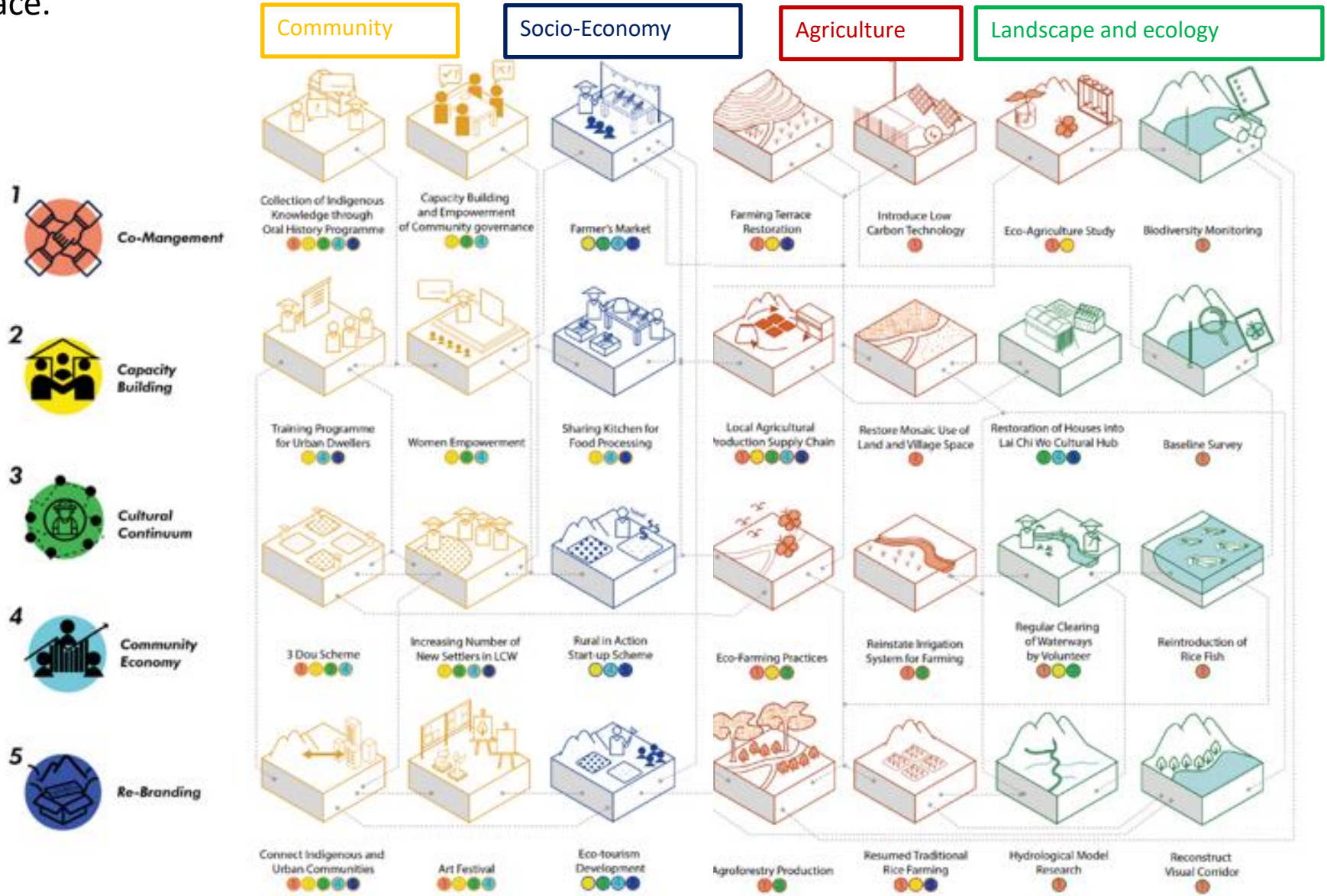
- ***Social-ecological systems***- creation of community and communities of interest through broadening understandings of community → beyond the in situ village community to engage and include the wider community
- ***Governance systems*** – innovative arrangements to engage Indigenous villages and wider public in revitalisation, e.g. reforming lease arrangements on village housing to engage with local owners, creation of social enterprises (HakkaHome and FarmShare) to engage village community in governance practices
- ***Economic systems*** – different incubation approach and platforms to engage communities, build markets and economic opportunities to create sustainable income streams (e.g. LoCoKitchen is the first social innovation platform for local agri-food)



香港首個
食農創新培育平台
The first incubation platform
for social innovation on local food

Impacts: Summary

28+ major actions carried out at LCW and the downtown area during the Project period. They were carefully designed to achieve the project objectives and long-term sustainability of the place.



Impacts Achieved

This case of rural community revitalisation demonstrates **practical strategies to empower civil society for sustainability impact**

Impact 1. Community Revitalisation

The approach taken to rural revitalisation was grounded upon collaborative governance, an action model with a focus on “*consolidating actions of the Community, by the Community and for the Community*”

- This included activities and programmes co-created with relevant communities of interests:
 - E.g. agricultural rehabilitation and food system development, start-up incubation, cultural reinvention, and biodiversity monitoring.
- Urban-rural interactions and the socio-economic foundations of the village community have been re-established through the revitalisation activities.
 - A total of 11 farms adopting eco-farming methods have been established; 9 smallholder farms, facilitated and supported by the project’s collaborative model.
 - The village has re-gained 18 residential households, including 7 returning indigenous families, 8 new settler-households and 3 bases of different revitalisation project teams.
- The project has also facilitated the establishment of two social enterprises, HakkaHome and FarmShare, to develop and manage socio-economic opportunities resulting from successful community revitalisation.

Impacts Achieved



Impact 2. Policy Innovations

The success of the rural revitalisation projects is recognised as an alternative sustainable development path to the conflict between development and conservation with an inclusive and integrative orientation.

Local Policy Impacts

- LCW rural revitalisation model referenced in the Government's long-term planning and development strategy—**HK2030+** (2016)—and in the **first Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan** (2016), the **2017 Policy Address** of the HKSAR Government formally endorsed the revitalisation model initiated in LCW for all rural villages in Hong Kong, **2021 Northern Metropolis Development Policy Address** mentioned LCW in the “development of sustainable eco-recreation/tourism”.
- Government established the **Countryside Conservation Office** with a HK\$1 billion budget to expand on the model's current impact.
- As of December 2022, 33 revitalisation projects in over 15 rural communities have been supported by the Countryside Conservation Funding Scheme, with approximately HK\$165M of public funds being invested.
 - Of the 33 projects, 15 are research projects that expand knowledge on a range of subjects, including rural commoning, participatory action research, innovation and appropriate technology. CCSG's Forest Village project is also supported by this Scheme.

National Policy Impacts

- The revitalisation success of LCW won the 2022 National Public Administration Postgraduate Student Case Study's grand award. Research students from Tsinghua University conducted an in-depth case study of LCW Village's revitalisation model, drawing insights from the project's collaborative and participatory governance model.

Impacts Achieved

Impact 3. International Recognition

- The revitalisation project was awarded the prestigious Special Recognition for Sustainable Development in the 2020 UNESCO Asia-Pacific Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation.
 - The Jury applauded the project's pioneering approach to rural sustainability, which *“transforms notions of heritage practice from its conventional focus on material conservation to encompass living heritage in all its manifestations... the project demonstrates the importance of interweaving nature and cultural heritage in setting a new urban-rural sustainability agenda for Hong Kong SAR and beyond”* .
- UN Habitat awarded the revitalisation project with the 2021 Asian Townscape Award
- The projects' social and nature-based solutions have been listed in UNDP's global database, showcasing the value of these community-based solutions.
- Granted UN International Partnership for Satoyama Initiative membership in recognition of contributions to rural sustainability.



Impacts Achieved

Impact 4. New Collaborations

New collaborations among civil society stakeholders were formed as a result of this project.

- The Hongkong Bank Foundation donated HK\$10M to the project team to scale-up the impact of the knowledge and benefits of rural revitalisation in the Asia Pacific. Building on a “*Network of Networks*” approach, a regional consortium convened by CCSG was formed, with **Tsinghua University, Asian Institute of Technology, National Chengchi University** and **The University of Hong Kong** as the founding intermediaries. This regional consortium launched the AIRI Project in October 2021.
- Meta invited CCSG to host its ***Tech for Good Public Policy Research Initiative*** for Asia Pacific. Major components of the Initiative include capacity building workshops for civic organisations, teaching and learning curriculum, scholarship for students in sustainability leadership, and research grants for the region’s universities and think tanks.

