

# Drivers for Sustainable Community Capacity Building: A Case Study of ECO-LIFE Initiatives in Malaysia and Thailand

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## Abstract

The importance of community capacity building (CCB) has long been known but it has specific relevance to the developing world. CCB focuses on enabling all members of the community, including the poorest and the most disadvantaged, to develop skills and competencies so as to take greater control of their own lives. CCB contributes to local development and involves local leadership. Not only can communities be more cohesive but they can also be more resilient and better placed to confront economic and social challenges. Although many community-building projects are generally modest local activities that people pursue with no government support, meaningful and effective CCB can be stimulated and fostered by government agencies and the capacity which communities have already developed. The result is that power becomes increasingly embedded within them. This empirical study discusses two cross-national CCB showcases of good practice where shared value community-development projects were supported by government agencies. More specifically, in light of insightful interviews with community members, it investigates CCB activities, outcomes, and enablers in these two scenarios and explores drivers for sustainable CCB involvement in a community. The research output is resources for the relevant authorities to design and implement strategies to build, rebuild and sustain community capacity. The findings also contribute to the knowledge base about creating shared value with community projects.

**Keywords:** Community capacity building, sustainable community development, enablers of CCB, eco-life initiatives, shared value creation, community volunteerism

## 1. Introduction

The world has been facing major industrial changes. Take for example the 2008 financial crisis and the global recession that followed. It has led to dramatic organization restructures and to the closing of large industrial facilities and a number of other major employment sites. Such developments often combine with steady economic decline. As a result, many towns and regions are looking for new economic purposes, new specializations, greater diversification, and new forms of entrepreneurship. There is, however, a danger that the most fragile locations in the developed and developing world will bear a disproportionate brunt of such recurring slowdowns. Unemployment and business closures are rising fastest in those areas where joblessness and low business activity have been problematic. Furthermore, localities emerging from political conflicts and divisions often remain fragile for generations. Poverty, exclusion and joblessness are inherent in affected communities and tend to be exacerbated at times of economic downturns. The term community has come to mean many different things to many different people.

Portney (2003) defines a community as anything from a small neighborhood, to a group of people who share interests, to a program operated by a governmental or nongovernmental organization, to a rather localized ecosystem or a multistate region encompassing numerous ecosystems. Communities offer a mediating force linking the micro level of the individual and the macro economic, political and cultural structures that shape society (Robertson & Minkler, 1994). The key point is that communities can be protective and reduce the impact that poverty, institutional racism and other sources of structural disadvantage may have. Previous studies have found that strong communities possess the skills, resources and networks to advocate effectively for services, are better prepared to respond to disasters and other uncertainties, and possess the capacity to absorb resulting change (Magis, 2010; Veenstra, 2002). Strong communities can be more effective proponents than individuals in preventing the erosion of existing services due to the skills, resources, and networks they possess and can leverage them in times of need (Magis, 2010; Veenstra, 2002; Barnett and Barnett, 2003; Kearns et al., 2009). The realities in the world today such as those described above are a central part of the rationale for continuing and expanding the work on community capacity building (CCB).

CCB has developed as a concept because of the need for strategies to address major social and economic declines in towns and regions experiencing significant economic change and the consequences of deep-seated and long-term joblessness and benefits dependency. Skinner (2006) defined CCB as activities, resources and support that strengthen the skills, abilities and confidence of people and community groups to take effective action and leading roles in the development of communities. There are, however, debates about the similarities and differences between CCB and community development (Craig, 2007; Verity, 2007). Some writers nevertheless use the terms interchangeably. But some see CCB as a more evolved form of community development. The Scottish Community Development Centre argues that CCB is one of the twin pillars of community development (the other pillar is community engagement). Every society, every community and every person has skills, strengths and the capacity to problem solve, act creatively and work together for the benefit of their communities.

Chaskin (2001) defined community capacity as the interaction of human capital, organizational resources, and social capital existing within a given community that can be leveraged to solve collective problems and improve or maintain the wellbeing of a given community. It may operate through informal social processes and/or organized effort. The fundamental characteristics of community capacity are a sense of community, a level of commitment among community members, the ability to solve problems and access to resources, which are present in some capacity in all communities (Labonte & Laverack, 2001). Community capacity has gained prominence as a prerequisite for successful health promotion programs and as a critical component of resilience in the disaster planning and environmental literature (Hawe et al., 1997; Magis, 2010). The term community capacity is informed by concepts such as community empowerment and competence (Goodman et al., 1998; Smith et al., 2006). Health promoters have sought to build community capacity as a parallel track to the programs they implement, recognizing the approach will empower the communities they work with and encourage support and buy-in beyond the funded life of a program (Hawe et al., 1998).

### ***Study Objectives***

Since the two authors are based in Malaysia and Thailand, a case of good CCB practice has been purposefully selected in each national setting: one at a workplace and the other at an education institute. Although the two cross-national cases are in different contexts, they share being value community projects. Both projects are eco-life initiatives in eco-farming, composting, recycling and sustainable organic gardening. Eco-life is a concept of living which is environmentally friendly and pursues activities that will keep the balance of the Ecosystem.

A quick browse on the internet reveal terms like green, natural, minimalism and eco-living have been gathering significant popularity in recent years. Greenhouse gases (GHG) emitted by human activities are considered one of the major causes of climatic change (Smith, 2006). Developing countries are projected to be responsible for approximately 61 % of global GHG emissions by the year 2030 (Koh et al., 2011). As rapidly developing countries, Malaysia and Thailand rank among the top 40 GHG emitting countries (EU EDGAR database). Among GHG mitigation approaches, the Low Carbon Society (LCS) approach is a holistic idea that calls for behavioral changes among people. Its goal is to reduce GHG emissions to levels that can be naturally absorbed (MOEJ, 2007).

The LCS approach is particularly relevant for urban areas which have GHG emitting sectors in greater numbers. There are several arguments to support the notion that local government bodies managing urban areas have a leadership role to play in transforming urban societies to low carbon societies (APEC, 2010). LCS strategies are best implemented through local government as they can solve problems that arise due to local circumstances more efficiently. They have an official administrative duty to manage their city and work closely with local population (Larsen & Gunnarsson-Ostling 2009; Orlansky 2000).

The two projects are located in cities where major sources of GHG-emitting activities are found. Both projects have been selected as CCB showcases supported by local government agencies and both have attained self-sustenance. All project leaders and supporters are volunteers with no personal tangible benefits from their involvement in CCB activities. The research objectives are to investigate:

1. the CCB activities at the communities;
2. the outcomes of CCB at the communities; and
3. the enablers of CCB at the communities.

It is the aim of this study to determine from the research findings the contributions of CCB to the community and provide a richer picture of the motivations of community members and their continuous involvement with CCB activities.

## **2. Conceptual Background**

### ***Community Capacity Building***

Building community capacity is the national priority of many nations facing adverse economic situations and prospects. Many neighborhoods require economic and social strategies to build, or rebuild local communities and economies. There are also places where capacity building strategies can help to build economic and social assets during long-term growth phases (OECD, 2009). By building capacity, communities will generally be in a better position to meet the challenges of crisis and be more resilient to economic downturns. Better jobs, increased levels of entrepreneurship, positive social capital indicators, business performance and sustainability are all potential indicators of the resilience which increased community capacity can bring to local areas.

However, there are also major tensions between national, regional and local governments to develop strategies that build, rebuild and preserve economic and social infrastructure in communities (OECD, 2009). Balancing national and local priorities is always difficult but in the present economic and political circumstances it is an even greater challenge. CCB has been used as political rhetoric (Craig, 2007). The term “community development” is applied uncritically to a very wide range of activities, many of which have little to do with development. Another fundamental critique of CCB is that it is based on the notion of communities being deficient in skills, knowledge and experience instead of focusing on the capacities that they do have (Craig, 2007). It is a missed opportunity to recognize and capitalize on the ‘core-strengths’ of the communities.

Nevertheless, there is still a widespread appetite amongst governments to act decisively at both local and national levels in the current macro environment. There is a need to find an appropriate balance between these sometimes competing objectives. The priorities at all spatial levels are to build community capacity, to rebuild capacity in deprived cities and regions, and to sustain such activity in difficult economic times. Jobs, entrepreneurship and business performance are key tangible areas to which CCB can contribute, and this is accompanied by more intangible factors including increased social capital and social cohesion.

### ***Social Capital***

Social capital has a variety of definitions. Dekker and Uslaner (2001) determined that social capital is about the value of social networks, bonding similar people and bridging between diverse people, with norms of reciprocity. Fukuyama (1995) defined social capital simply as the existence of a certain set of informal values or norms shared among members of a group that permit cooperation among them. Social cohesion brings about shared purpose which is essential to successful community development where people within a community converge and develop a sense of togetherness. This corresponds to an age-old sociological wisdom about society being the product of social interaction. The commonalities of most definitions are that they focus on social relations that have productive benefits (Claridge, 2004). Social support and community connectedness are key determinants of both mental and physical wellbeing and many researchers have applied the concept of social capital and social cohesion to gain insight into the nature of collective social relationships (Kawachi et al., 2004; Szreter & Woolcock, 2004).

### ***Community Capacity Building Activities and Outcomes***

British Columbia Healthy Communities Society (BCHCS) posits that capacity building involves a number of activities, including:

1. *Community Learning*: Learning in community develops over time as people share common pursuits and goals. As conditions shift and new issues emerge, thriving communities are able to learn quickly and draw upon local experiences to create local knowledge.
2. *Expanding Community Assets*: Healthy communities foster the development of both tangible and intangible assets.
  - Tangible assets: financial capital, physical capital (e.g., infrastructure) and organizational development.
  - Intangible assets: social capital (relationships and networks), human capital (e.g., skills, knowledge and confidence), shared goals and values, and leadership
3. *Community Collaboration*: As communities increasingly “connect the dots” between issues, they also need to increase capacity to think and act in collaborative ways that seek and expand common ground, shape a desired future, and encourage joint ownership over the issues at hand. Successful collaborations require time to build trust, relationships, and agreements about what to do together and how to choose to do things.

Table 1 shows the list of common types of nonprofit making capability building activities developed by McNemara (2006)

**Table 1:** Common Types of Capacity Building Activities ((Adapted from McNemara, 2006)

1. Assessments	2. Leadership Development
3. Board Development	4. Management Development
5. Business Planning	6. Marketing and Promotions
7. Business Development	8. Mergers
9. Collaboration Planning	10. Network Opportunities
11. Conflict Resolution	12. Peer Learning
13. Convening	14. Organizational Development
15. Earned-Income Development	16. Program Design
17. Evaluation	18. Project Management
19. Facilities planning	20. Quality Management
21. Financial management	22. Risk Management
23. Funding	24. Research
25. Fundraising	26. Referrals
27. Information Technology	28. Strategic Planning
29. Legal	30. Team Building
31. Meeting management	32. Staff Selection and Development

### ***CCB Measurement Concepts***

Today, CCB is included in the programs of most international organizations that work in development, including the World Bank, the United Nations and non-governmental organizations such as Oxfam International. The Aspen Institute (1996) identifies three simple measurement concepts for CCB: outcomes, indicators and measures, and defines them as follows:

- An outcome is a major change in the lives of people and/or their community, which proves that CCB is happening.
- An indicator is an actual activity or capacity that we can measure or assess in some way that shows that an outcome is being achieved.
- A measure is the actual bean-counting, or some kind of analysis that must be done in order to measure an indicator.

### ***CCB Outcomes***

The bottom line for CCB is its outcomes. Table 2 shows the eight outcomes listed by the Aspen Institute (1996).

**Table 2:** Community Capacity Building: Eight Outcomes (Adapted from Aspen Institute 1996)

<b>Outcome</b>		<b>Rationale</b>
1	Expanding, diverse, inclusive citizen participation	In a community where capacity is being built, an ever-increasing number of people participate in all types of activities and decisions. These folks include all the different parts of the community and also represent its diversity.
2	Expanding leadership base	Community leaders that bring new people into decision-making are building community capacity. But the chance to get skills and to practice and learn leadership are also important parts of the leadership base.
3	Strengthened individual skills	A community that uses all kinds of resources to create opportunities for individual skills development is building community capacity in an important way. As individuals develop new skills and expertise, the level of volunteer service is raised.
4	Widely shared understanding and vision	Creating a vision of the best community future is an important part of planning. But in community capacity building, the emphasis is on how widely that vision is shared. Getting to agreement on that vision is a process that builds community capacity.
5	Strategic community agenda	When clubs and organizations consider changes that might come in the future and plan together, the result is a strategic community agenda. Having a response to the future already thought through community wide is one way to understand and manage change.
6	Consistent, tangible progress toward goals	A community with capacity turns plans into results. Whether it is using benchmarks to gauge progress or setting milestones to mark accomplishments, the momentum and bias for action come through as a community gets things done.
7	More effective community organizations and institutions	All types of civic clubs and traditional institutions – such as churches, schools and newspapers – are the mainstay of community capacity building. If clubs and institutions are run well and efficiently, the community will be stronger.
8	Better resource utilization by the community	Ideally, the community should select and use resources in the same way a smart consumer will make a purchase. Communities that balance local self-reliance with the use of outside resources can face the future with confidence.



These outcomes highlight the CCB processes and provide an indication of some of the things that could be done when working with a community. The focus is on:

- Building the skills and confidence of individuals and groups
- Enhancing community decision making and problem solving processes
- Creating a common vision for the future
- Implementing practical strategies for creating change
- Promoting inclusion and social justice.

### **3. Methodology**

A case study is adopted as the preferred research strategy for this study as the approach emphasizes detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events and their relationships, leading to the observation of new insights. As Yin (1984) posited, the approach excels at bringing understanding of complex issues such as CCB and can add to what is already known through previous research. Data were collected by the authors from observations and in-depth semi-structured interviews with project leaders, supporters and volunteers during site visits. In addition to gathering data on site operations, the observation method provided the authors with a way to check for non-verbal expressions of feelings, look up definitions of terms that respondents used in interviews and gave the authors the opportunity to observe situations respondents described first-hand. This is especially relevant to establish awareness of distortions or inaccuracies in description provided by the respondents who might have different understanding levels of the research concepts.

Investigations on CCB activities are guided by BCHCS' activities related to community learning, expanding community assets and community collaborations. The investigations on outcomes focused on four out of the eight CCB outcomes listed by Aspen Institute (1996). These four outcomes were purposefully selected based on their relevance to the CCB's rather localized project scale and less formalized organizational context. The four CCB outcomes investigated in this study consist of:

- Outcome 1: Expanding, diverse, inclusive citizen participation
- Outcome 2: Expanding leadership base
- Outcome 3: Strengthening individual skills
- Outcome 4: Widely shared understanding and vision

The indicators and measures of these four CCB outcomes are appropriately adapted for the case scenarios. The interview questionings were guided by these outcomes with their adapted indicators and measures. However, the following two additional open-ended questions were added: 1) What do you think are the enablers of capacity building in your community? 2) Why are you committed to the success of the building capacity in your community?

This research study applies the processes and tools of the grounded theory to analyze the data collected from the semi-structured interviews and observations and to generate common CCB enablers and drivers in the two case studies.

### **4. Case Discussion and CCB Outcome Findings**

Two community projects are discussed: (1) Eco-life Initiatives at SJKC Woon Hwa and (2) Laksi Rooftop Garden and Learning Center.

#### **4.1 Community Project One: Eco-life Initiatives at SJKC Woon Hwa**

This community project is at a national Chinese primary school setting in the state of Johor, Malaysia. At the time of the study, the school had over 800 students and 45 teachers. The project was run by project leaders, students, supporters, all of whom are volunteers.

### ***CCB Idea Inception***

When the Principal was transferred to SJKC Woon Hwa, in 2015, she noted that her students were passive, reserved and lacked enthusiasm with out-of-classroom activities. She decided to champion a green initiative with a vegetable and fruit farm in the school compound. She got teachers and students involved in the project. She believed that the initiative would not only get the students to learn about green living environment, plant and nature, it would also improve the communication and interactions amongst students and with the teachers. Vegetables and fruits harvested from the farm were first offered to the school canteen operators to encourage farm-total menu using locally source ingredients. The balance was sold to parents and residents in the neighborhood (in this day and age, food comes in boxes and shrink-wrap). Many people have lost their connection with food. The initiative was intended to encourage the community to have an improved awareness of food sources leading to a greater appreciation for food. The school managed to rake in over RM20,000 (US\$4,800) in profits within a year.

### ***Progress***

With the initial success, the farming project scope was expanded in 2016. The farm began producing microorganism mud-balls as well as fertilizers from food waste, eliminating the need for pesticides and chemical fertilizers. The idea of 'going green' has become the mainstream of the project and eco-friendly fertilizer plays a big part in the transition from initial conventional agriculture to sustainable farming in the school. While the farming project gathered momentum in the school, the school has also picked up speed in their performance with the Eco-life Challenge initiated by the regional development authority. The challenge began in 2014 with the purpose of educating and encouraging the community in the state to lead a low carbon lifestyle by saving water and electricity as well as managing waste wisely. The program attracted over 400 schools and 40,000 students from the state.

A key objective was to foster low carbon society awareness among primary students, teachers and their families through school education in the state. Another key objective was to disseminate knowledge, awareness and practice of low carbon society among community in the state through primary students and teachers. Teachers were selected from each school to be trained on low carbon society and eco-household accounting activities on the use of electricity and water in the school. With the knowledge, the teachers in turn educated their students and engaged them in the measuring of carbon reduction effort made in the school. The performance was formally evaluated by official committee. SJKC Woon Hwa was selected as one of the 15 best schools for the challenge. As a reward, a group of students and teachers from the school were invited on an education trip to Kyoto, Japan where the idea of the Ecolife Challenge was conceived. The intention was to inspire the teachers and students with the opportunity to present what they have learned about low carbon initiatives in the region and what they could contribute to the development of a low carbon society. Since their return from the trip, the teachers and students have been invited by various other schools in the state to disseminate knowledge and sharing of good practices. The recognition has motivated the teachers and students to continue with their active involvement in championing low carbon society.

In October, 2017, SJKC Woon Hwa expanded the boundary of influences from school communities to educate members of the general public on environmental issues. An eco-centre was established in the school in collaboration with the regional development authority and a construction and engineering private entity. The private entity is building green homes and environmental sustainability is a key value of the organization. The collaboration is a corporate social responsibility initiative. The center was set up to provide information to visitors and raise awareness of the need to develop environmentally-friendly habits. The center housed exhibitions covering various topics on the impact of household waste, water pollution effects



and the importance of conservation and recycling. There was also a station for visitors to pledge for a change of habits. The aim was to instill a sense of personal responsibility for environmental degradation and provide ideas on how to make a difference for environmental sustainability. The center has received constant positive media coverage and encouraging responses from both domestic and foreign visitors since its opening.

### ***Fieldwork***

Site visits were made in the period November 2017- November 2018 with representatives from the regional development authority. In depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with various respondents. Sit-down interview sessions were held with the Principal, the General Manager of the private collaborator for the eco-center and the 2 project leaders. Interviews were also conducted with the project leaders, 20 students and 4 volunteers during the tour of the school, the eco-center and farms. In addition to the investigation on the 4 CCB outcomes, the discussions also explored the passion and support for the various green initiatives from the various groups of respondents. Students were the tour guides of the eco-center. They provided informative introduction and demonstrations for each exhibition. Various recycling ideas were observed around the school compound. Planter pots and hanging plants in recycled materials added colors and creativity along the corridors of the buildings. Parents volunteered and demonstrated the production process of eco-friendly fertilizers with enthusiasm. The vegetable and fruit farm were sectionalized into small plots. Project leaders explained how all students in the school had responsibility for taking care of plants as well as the vegetable and fruit farm in the school. Students were observed watering and fertilizing during the class breaks and after school. Project leaders informed that although students were assigned specific green duties in the school, every student helped out one another in ensuring the farm and plants were well care for and the eco-center's message of environmental sustainability was communicated clearly to all. Teachers and parents were seen mentoring the students. Students were observed sharing knowledge with each other. All respondents were proud of the school's accomplishments with the green initiative started by the Principal. They also spoke proudly of each other's contributions to the success.

### ***- Outcome 1: Expanding, Diverse, Inclusive Citizen Participation***

From the perspective of the private collaborator of the eco-center, it is not easy being green as responding to environmental problems has always been a no-win proposition for businesses. The renewed interest in environmental management bringing increased profitability for business has widespread appeal. However, whether the new vision of ultimate reconciliation of environmental and economic concerns makes business sense, it is a topic intensely debated by industry experts (Camilleri, 2015; Marshall, 2018; Evans, 2013; Walker, 2014). The General Manager was aware of the skepticism about the value of a corporate environmental commitment and acknowledged that economic forces at work in the industry were making it difficult to integrate environmental excellence into a business strategy. However, in his words:

“Reconciliation is not a choice. A strong global economy is sustainable only if it integrates economic, social, and environmental well-being. Our organization chooses to address this challenge with a far-sighted program and innovative, creative solutions. We believe schools play a vital role in preparing students from young to meet the sustainability challenges of the future. These students are the future business leaders who will play an integral role in making our planet more sustainable and healthy.”

The green initiative championed by the principal in the school began with a limited focus but developed into a green cultural movement over three years. It was met with excitement from not only the students and teachers; janitors, security guards and parents became volunteers. The initiative has brought a sense of belonging to the community and members

have grown closer with a common purpose. The students were excited with the selling of the farm produce to their families and involving their family members in the green initiative programs. Parents, who were industry experts and specialists, volunteered advices and provided training on organic farming practices to the teachers, students and other volunteers. The good practices have radiated to the school neighborhood and local vendors of farm supplies who are now sharing expertise on organic composting. Today, every teacher and student in the school is involved with the 'green movement'.

- ***Outcome 2: Expanding Leadership Base***

This case clearly illustrates how environmental education helps build creative thinking and relationship skills and fosters leadership qualities. The teachers, students and volunteers have learned about the resources the school consumed through participation in the Eco-life Challenge. They were involved in ideas generation to make consumption more sustainable. They were educated on the environmental toxic issues with the establishment of the eco-center. They were involved in championing recycling and minimizing environmental pollution. They learned about farming and food systems. They took personal initiatives to grow their own food. It is obvious that strong personal leadership and team leadership have developed in the learning and involvement process. The school has become 'environmentally focused resources' for future generations. The green initiative has encouraged students to live a "greener" lifestyle, at home and at school. This has sowed the seeds for a change of attitudes. Teaching students at a young age to be environmentally aware builds lifelong habits that could potentially make a dramatic difference in the future of the earth when they become industry leaders.

- ***Outcome 3: Strengthening Individual Skills***

The study reveals that the school has generated personal growth and skills development among community members through their active involvement in environmental education and green initiatives. This findings support previous studies on the benefits of environmental education (Archie, 2003; The NEEF, 2000; The NAAEE & NEEF, 2001; The NEEP, 2002). Environmental education is often lauded by educators as an ideal way to integrate academic disciplines, stimulate the academic and social growth of young people, and promote conservation of the natural environment (NEEF, 2000). Research shows that schools that adopt an environmental focus demonstrate better academic performance across the curriculum. Environmental education offers an enriching way for both students and teachers to connect their appreciation of the natural world to academics. Environment-based education also emphasizes specific critical thinking skills central to good science—questioning, investigating, forming hypotheses, interpreting data, analyzing, developing conclusions and solving problems (Archie, 2003; The NEEF, 2000).

Students who study environmental education develop and practice various leadership skills including working in a team, listening and accepting diverse opinions, solving real-world problems, taking long-term view, promoting actions that serve the larger good, connecting with the community and making a difference in the world. Sometimes traditional instruction is the most practical approach to covering broad content. However, using outdoor settings can infuse a sense of richness and relevance into a traditional school curriculum. When students learn through a problem-based approach – a key strategy in environment-based education – they gain a better understanding of what they learn, retain it longer, and take charge of their own learning – all key skills for success in a rapidly changing world. (The NEEF, 2000; The NAAEE & NEEF, 2001; The NEEP, 2002).

#### - *Outcome 4: Widely Shared Understanding and Vision*

During her interview, the Principal made the following statement:

“I was frustrated by what I saw around me when I first joined the school; lights left on, windows open with the air-conditioning on, recycling boxes not being emptied and litter everywhere. There was just a lack of awareness among the students and some teachers about environmental issues. The topic was covered in class, but they did not really see the practical applications of how you involve it in everyday life.”

The Principal created a new role for herself as sustainability coordinator at the school. The environmental education began with encouraging teachers and students to think of the school as a sustainability laboratory and create solutions to sustainability issues they identify in the school. “I knew it could not just be me; it had to revolve around the students and teachers as partners,” she said. “I supported them but they came up with ideas of what they wanted to do around the school, presented their proposals to the management and subsequently led the projects. It worked really well and they got a lot out of it.” The purpose was to actively engage all in creating shared understanding and shared vision of way forward in contributing to environmental sustainability. The environmental education process has resulted in wide commitment to eco life amongst the school community and its neighborhood. From green initiative to carbon reduction, the Principal was the architecture of the new culture in the school.

#### **4.2 Community Project Two: Laksi Rooftop Garden and Learning Center**

This community project is at a workplace setting in Bangkok, Thailand. The project is run by public cleaning staff of a district office and neighborhood residents. The project team had 26 active members at the time of research.

##### ***CCB Idea Inception***

The idea was conceived in 2002 by a few public cleaning staff at the Public Cleaning and Public Park Section of the Laksi District Office in Bangkok. They were farming organic vegetables for their own consumption on unused land behind the office premises. As the crops were blooming, the staff was informed that they had to vacate the land for the landowner. The staff members were compelled to look for economical and sustainable alternatives to relocate their crops. The rooftop of the Laksi District Office building was available. The staff members organized and transformed the once storage space for unused equipment to a green rooftop garden.

##### ***Progress***

The rooftop area was approximately 440 m<sup>2</sup>. Only few common varieties of vegetables were transplanted to the rooftop in 2002. At the time of study in November, 2017, more than 130 varieties of seasonable vegetable crops and fruits occupied the entire rooftop. The area was systematically organized into different zones of cultivation seasons and plant root systems. The garden was managed by a project team leader who was also working at the Public Cleaning and Public Park Section. All team members were volunteers, making up of public cleaners and residents in the neighborhood communities. Since 2009, the project team frequently ran sharing sessions on best practices with setting up urban organic garden on concrete floor and limited space. There were also weekly free workshops to introduce innovative organic farming techniques to students, local communities and the public at large, including participants from abroad. With the success and increasing traffic of visitors to the rooftop garden, the project team was offered another open space of approximately 336 m<sup>2</sup> on the ground floor of the building, to expand their organic farming activities. Paddy rice plots, fish ponds, chicken coop and compost production were added to the list since.

Team members have continued to enjoy the harvest from the farms for own consumption. Excess produces from the farms were sold to staff in the building and neighborhood communities, generating income for the maintenance of the project. The project operates without funding from the district office. The project team has fostered community participation and support initiatives that promote self-sustenance. The other funding sources include sale of seedlings, eco-fertilizers and eco-deco items designed by the team members. In February, 2015, the Deputy Governor of Bangkok officiated the garden as a major learning center in the region for urban farming innovations and organic vegetable production. The center brought knowledge from the rooftop to actual farming sites with the establishment of 9 demonstration plots in the outskirts of Bangkok. Several pieces of unused land totaling over 6800 m<sup>2</sup> from public and private sectors, were turned into green land with edible vegetables and fruits. The plots showcase the practice of multiple cropping, a form of ecological intensification that is potentially highly sustainable when two or more crops are grown at the same time or in a sequence. The innovation has attracted thousands of visitors and organizations visiting the learning center and the demonstration plots every year.

### ***Fieldwork***

Site visits and interviews were conducted in November, 2017, with representatives from the Public Cleaning and Public Park Section, the project team leader, project members, and residents in the neighborhood communities, who volunteered for the project. The respondents had requested to be interviewed as a team. The authors also collected data during the tour of the center and the farms with the project members. The discussions centered on the history and guiding principle of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP) for organic production at the learning center and demonstration plots. All the respondents were really proud when they spoke of their home-grown SEP approach to sustainable development and how the project was closely aligned with the recommended practices.

SEP was introduced in 1974 by His Majesty the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej. It is a development approach based on Buddhism in creating sustainable development through the integration of physical, social and spiritual dimensions. The concept of SEP aligns with the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by United Nations Member States in 2015. Some of the more prominent applications of the SEP in sustainable development endeavor include poverty eradication, food security, sustainable economic growth, sustainable industrialization and sustainable consumption and production. As an approach and mindset framework, SEP could support and complement the successful implementation and realization of the Agenda. In recent years, Thailand has begun sharing with the international community the application of SEP.

#### ***- Outcome 1: Expanding Diverse Inclusive Citizen Participation***

SEP is a practice supporting the financial and productive autonomy of a community, while developing an environmentally sustainable economy and including all members of the community in the production and management process. In this respect, the Buddhist principle of compassion and respect for people and the environment provides an ethical foundation. Emphasis is placed on the collective management of the production process and on an ethic of sharing and compassion. Participation is rooted in the collective management as it was with the project team at Laksi Rooftop Garden and Learning Center. The model for participation comes from the way a Buddhist temple is run, where individuals periodically engage in collective endeavors in order to live and demonstrate the principles of SEP. At Laksi Rooftop Garden and Learning Center, adherence to the principles of SEP has proven to be a strong instrument of inclusion based on principles of community participation and the participatory transfer of knowledge.

The project team leader and members chose to engage in a horizontal relationship rather than a hierarchical one. The project membership was fluid and based on volunteerism, which is a Buddhist cultural practice. The membership strength expanded as the community evolved and the project grew.

- ***Outcome 2: Expanding Leadership Base***

All project team members, including the leader, were volunteers. They were either employees of the Laksi's District Office or residents in the neighborhood communities. Although there was no formal recruitment process for leaders and members, the respondents said that they had not experienced problems getting volunteers for the project: "We just put up a note on the notice board for help". There was one project leader for the learning center. However, there were also sub-leaders for various farming activities and community engagement initiatives in the project structure. For instance, there were sub-leaders for setting up a stall outside the building compound to sell farm produces to the neighborhood. These sub-leaders were often the idea originators.

Everyone was encouraged to contribute and lead to achieve the common development goals for the community, embedded within the principle of SEP. There was no formal training program for leaders. There were instead, abundant developmental activities within the community, including coaching, mentoring and task rotations, and members were encouraged to engage in leadership self-development. Every initiative success was celebrated as a community achievement. There were scrapbooks of celebration photos and shelves of mementos to show guests and visitors.

- ***Outcome 3: Strengthening Individual Skills***

SEP espouses moderation, reasonableness and prudence and the development framework is based on knowledge and virtue. The philosophy also attaches great importance to human development at all levels and emphasizes the need to strengthen community's capacity to ensure a balanced way of life and resilience, with full respect for the environment. Project members were passionate self-directed learners who constantly explored new approaches to organic farming and innovative techniques through knowledge sharing and exchanges with farming experts, an attitude facilitated by the world-wide-web technology. Knowledge acquired and created from the successful implementations of new farming approaches and techniques were shared within and beyond the community during knowledge sharing sessions and workshops. This, in turn, helped members to gain exposure, obtain constructive feedback, and generate new ideas.

Sharing knowledge also helped team members to build both individual and organizational reputation and stay motivated. As a resident volunteer said, "Having an opportunity to feel that my knowledge makes a difference, allows me to see how my work fits in the bigger mission of the organization, and the wider community". Another respondent who was a cleaner added, "Work without purpose is no work at all." A new team member noted, "I can be updated with the latest information and acquire new sets of skills from the expert sharing". There was also a buddy program, where a senior team member would be assigned by the project team leader to a new team member to provide guidance and assist the new member to foster constructive relationship with other team members to contribute to the community's shared goals.

- ***Outcome 4: Widely Shared Understanding and Vision***

The horizontal relationships amongst all team members and leader were held together by the guiding principles of SEP, and the common vision to contribute to the 20-year development plan for Bangkok Metropolis (2013-2032). One of the main outcomes of the development plan is to turn Bangkok into a city of knowledge, a green city and a city of opportunity for everyone. Posters of SEP principles, United Nation's Sustainable development Goals (SDG) and the city



development plan were found in many places at the Laksi Rooftop Garden and Learning Center, and demonstration plot sites. Respondents had good knowledge of the poster contents. As one interviewee mentioned, “The first lesson for all new team member is to understand SEP, SDG and what roles we play in the bigger development plan for our city”. The objectives outlined in Table 1 show close alignment and consistency in all the three broad focus areas of the community project.

**Table 3:** Objectives of Laksi Rooftop Garden and Learning Center (Public Cleaning and Public Section, Laksi District Office)

<p><b>Objectives of Rooftop Garden</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To promote SEP to lead people to a balanced way of life and be a source of sustainable development by creating a self-supporting economy. People can produce their own food.</li> <li>2. To establish a learning center and turn it into a main source of several organic agricultural techniques for people living in big cities</li> <li>3. To help unemployed persons create alternative income opportunities</li> <li>4. To encourage people to produce organic food for their own consumption</li> <li>5. To reduce household waste by reusing and recycling organic and inorganic waste.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Objectives Learning Center</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To visibly expand sufficiency economy</li> <li>2. To be a center of knowledge of organic vegetable production</li> <li>3. To be a center for community to meet and exchange their knowledge</li> <li>4. To be a source of organic food production</li> <li>5. To be an attractive ecotourism park</li> <li>6. To increase green areas based on the strategy of the Governor of Bangkok</li> </ol>
<p><b>Objectives for the Demonstration Plots</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To visibly expand sufficiency economy</li> <li>2. To increase green areas and reduce the impact of global warming</li> <li>3. To promote and expand learning centers of organic vegetable production</li> <li>4. To increase sources of organic food production</li> <li>5. To increase the value of unused land to normal garden for agro-tourism</li> <li>6. To strengthen collaboration between the public sector and the community</li> </ol>

### 5. Findings on CCB Enablers and Drivers

Both case scenarios have demonstrated the existence of various productive CCB activities in community learning and community collaboration. The development of community capacity is also evident especially with the intangible assets of social capital, social cohesion, skills, leadership and shared values. The four outcomes articulated by The Aspen Institute have been attained in both cases. The remaining discussion focuses on enablers and motivations for CCBs in the two community cases. Purpose-driven leadership was clearly an enabler for the CCBs as demonstrated by the Principal in the school and the project leaders in both cases. Personal leadership and team leadership played necessary but distinct roles, in fostering commitment to the community’s goals, promoting participation in community activities and in developing relationships amongst community members through the leaders’ democratic and interpersonal skills.



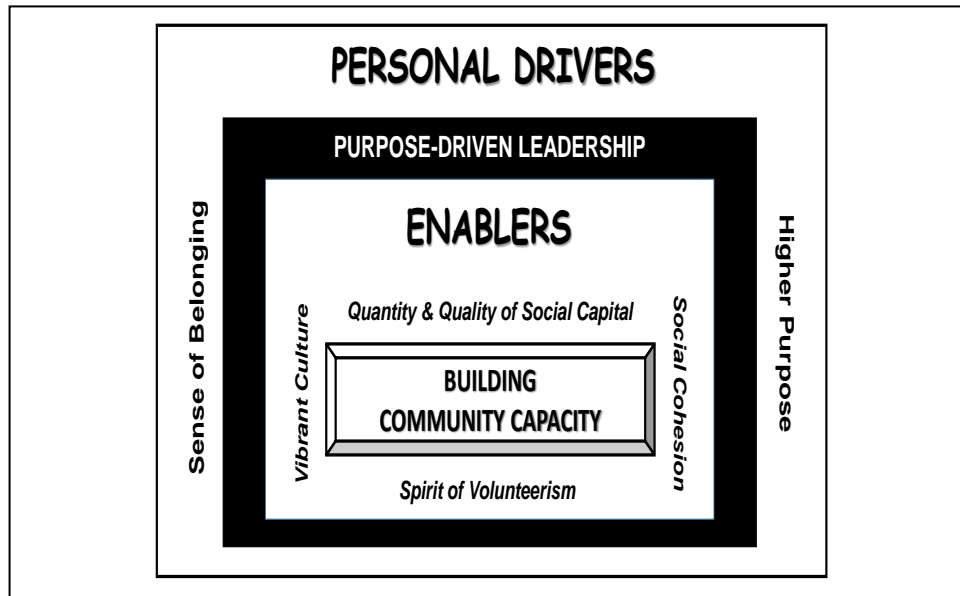
The case findings also bring to light the fact that behind the successful leadership of CCBs is a vibrant culture that engages and energizes the community members. The eco life culture in the school has been defined, shaped and personified by the Principal. In the case of Laksi, Buddhism cultural beliefs make the connections for the community members. The other key enabler for CCB in both communities is social cohesion. There were obvious harmonious and productive social relations where the community members, irrespective of their personal differences in social and economic status, were sharing common community values and goals, having a sense of mutual commitment and belonging to the community. There was also a sense of solidarity, responsibility and mutual recognition with individual democracy.

In both cases, volunteers played a significant role in the community capacity development. They complemented essential services where they were lacking or insufficient and built skills across different areas through transfer of knowledge and experience. They also helped to mobilize the community to develop a sense of ownership and awareness about the challenges the community was facing. Parent volunteers in the school led activities to leverage collective action and attitude changes in areas such as sustainable consumption, environmental sustainability and community autonomy.

The spirit of volunteerism was strongly felt in the case of Laksi Rooftop Garden and Learning Center as it was also a place of Buddhism practice. However, while volunteers donated their work to benefit others and society, it is also clear from the findings that enabling volunteerism requires an investment for people to channel their contributions into meaningful engagement opportunities aligned with wider development efforts. This is precisely where purpose-driven leadership in the community brings them all together. When respondents were asked what drove them to volunteer and commit to community development, two major reasons surfaced: a sense of belonging and a higher purpose. All respondents indicated a strong connection with their communities. A sense of belonging to a greater community that shares common interests and aspirations has been recognized as an important determinant of psychological and physical well-being by many researchers. McMillan (1996) defines the sense of community as a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together. Belonging, as evidenced from the responses received from the study, is primal, fundamental to a sense of happiness and well-being.

Part of happiness is having a higher purpose; something to strive for that is bigger than the individual. Most people want to matter and to make a difference in the world, at work, or in someone else's life. A higher purpose is how these people find deep meaning and fulfillment in their lives by contributing to someone or something that is bigger than them. The respondents shared the following two quotes that summed up their perspectives: "Many persons have a wrong idea of what constitutes true happiness. It is not attained through self-gratification but through fidelity to a worthy purpose" (Helen Keller, an American author and educator, 1880-1968). "Focusing your life solely on making a buck shows a certain poverty of ambition. It asks too little of yourself. Because it's only when you hitch your wagon to something larger than yourself that you realize your true potential" (Barack Obama, the 44<sup>th</sup> president of the United States from 2009-2017). The findings also reveal that a key requirement for capacity building is to recognize that the social whole is more than the sum of its individual components. People form social systems which provide for a range of needs not met through market transactions. Households, communities of interest, locality and neighborhoods create networks of mutual obligation, care, concern and interest. These networks, norms, and trust, which facilitate co-operation for mutual benefits, are the 'social capital' of the community.

The quality of the social processes and relationships within which learning interactions take place is especially influential on the quality of the learning outcomes in the community. The quantity and quality of a community's social capital has a large impact on that community's capacity to sustain a social learning environment and manage change amidst concerns about the social and economic viability of rural, remote and 'peripheral' communities in the national and global political economy today. Figure 1 summarizes the study's findings on enablers, drivers and the need for purposeful leadership in CCB projects.



**Figure 1:** A Model of Enablers and Drivers for Community Capacity Building

### 6. Managerial Implications and Conclusion

This study highlighted the alignment of the concept of community capacity building with shared value creation for community development. It began with a phase of community research into the strengths, challenges and needs of target communities with the aim to understand the breadth and scope of capacity needs in these communities. CCB strategies were then implemented to build specific capacities to address the challenges and needs within the communities. In both case studies, CCB strategies yielded impressive results, bringing enormous benefits to the communities. Both in Malaysia and Thailand, these cases demonstrate the important and positive role CCBs can have in creating and sustaining an environment in which opportunities can be created, whilst simultaneously recognizing that community needs must be addressed for communities to be strong and resilient. Indeed, what is evident from these two cases is the importance of recognizing the strong interconnections between opportunity creation and wider community capacity building activities.

The findings show that most of the beneficial changes in communities come about through the process of engagement, whereby communities are able to respond to opportunities, or deal with problems, by bringing them to the attention of those with the ability to respond and carrying out agreed plans of action. However, such engagement cannot take place unless the community has the capacity and the recognition required to engage in such discussions. Policy makers should thus understand that most decisions and support should be exercised within communities as much as is practically possible. On the other hand, the challenges faced by local government in implementing CCB strategies should be understood, as Dhakal (2010) found with climate mitigation strategies implementation, especially in developing countries.

Portney (2003) reasons the idea of sustainable communities grew out of the understanding that individual human behavior and the local governance context in which it takes place is of vital importance. Social capital and community capacity is less likely to be created or sustained from the outside. Ultimately, it is the community and its residents that have the strongest understanding, ability and motivation to shape it for the better. The study reveals that an effective CCB is a positive example of social innovation in practice. Social innovation will play a critical role in the short, medium and long-term as communities, cities, regions and states seek to build and rebuild in crisis and address complex issues. The findings also demonstrated the multiplier effect that takes all sorts of actors and assets to develop or to build capacity in a community. The capacity of a community to develop is dependent on the private, public and voluntary sectors as well as on households and individuals who are resident there. Measures to promote private sector and social entrepreneurship are perhaps a prerequisite for successful and sustainable regeneration.

There are many strategies that will help to turn a deprived area around, but the most effective will be the ones that bring the best of the private, public and third sectors together and that recognize that most people will play some role in all three. Eliot (2013) argues that sustainable development refers plainly to maintaining development overtime. Communities, like people, are never really finished developing. New capacities are constantly required and emerging as communities respond to new issues over time. Thus, community capacity building is best thought of as an ongoing process of learning and development that is required for effective action.

However, it is also important to realize that a CCB is not a 'quick-fix' to the problems of local communities. Rather, it is an essential part of a sustained approach to local development. As Chaskins (2001) states, a CCB is designed as short-term interventions that have long-term effects. Engaging in CCB initiatives need to focus on initiatives that create short-term outcomes but that enable and grow the long-term capacities of communities. In conclusion, the authors posits that CCB initiatives should be more than 'projects'; they are long-term commitments. It is intended that the findings in this paper will contribute to knowledge base as inputs for CCB strategic decision making in other settings.

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