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CAPABILITY AS THE BRIDGE: THEORISING SUSTAINABLE SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT AND FIRM PERFORMANCE IN SOUTH EAST ASIAN AGRICULTURAL MARKETS

(Alternate Title: Sustainable Supply Chain Management Practices and Firm Performance in South East Asia)

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Abstract

This paper introduces the Contextual SSCM Capability Framework (CSCM-CF), a new theoretical model that explains how sustainable supply chain management (SSCM) practices generate firm performance outcomes in agricultural and small-to-medium enterprise (SME) contexts in South East Asia (SEA). Despite growing empirical evidence on the SSCM-performance relationship, no integrative theory has adequately captured the unique institutional, economic, and cultural characteristics of SEA — a region that underpins some of the world's most critical and sustainability-challenged agricultural supply chains. Grounded in the Resource-Based View (RBV), Stakeholder Theory, and the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework, the CSCM-CF posits that SSCM capability is the key mediating construct between the adoption of SSCM practices and firm-level outcomes of financial performance, operational efficiency, and stakeholder trust. Seven theoretically grounded propositions are derived to direct future empirical research. The framework further identifies firm size, regulatory environment, industry sector, institutional capacity, and digital technology adoption as contextual moderators shaping the SSCM capability-development pathway in SEA. The CSCM-CF advances SSCM theory in emerging-market contexts and provides actionable guidance for agricultural supply chain managers, policymakers, and researchers.

Keywords: Sustainable Supply Chain Management, Firm Performance, South East Asia, Agricultural Sector, Conceptual Framework, Resource-Based View, Stakeholder Theory, SSCM Capability, Emerging Markets, SMEs.

I. INTRODUCTION

Incorporating sustainability into supply chain management has evolved from an optional corporate exercise to a business imperative for companies in the global marketplace [21], [36]. In South East Asia (SEA), the need to re-imagine how agricultural enterprises and small-to-medium enterprises (SMEs) manage their supply chains is particularly compelling, driven by mounting environmental pressures, tightening international trade regulations, and rising stakeholder expectations. The region encompasses five major

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agricultural economies — Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand, and the Philippines — all ranking among the world's largest producers and exporters of palm oil, rice, rubber, aquaculture products, tropical fruits, and a range of other commodities central to global food, bioenergy, and industrial value chains [12], [14].

In recent years, the business case for SSCM in SEA has strengthened considerably. The European Union Deforestation Regulation, the proliferation of Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) investment criteria among global institutional investors, and growing civil society pressure for supply chain transparency have created strong external incentives for regional firms to invest in environmental, social, and economic sustainability practices [13], [25]. Empirical evidence increasingly shows that SSCM investments are more than a cost of doing business; they are a proven means of improving firm performance through tangible benefits in cost savings, market access, supplier reliability, and stakeholder trust [1], [3], [10].

Despite this momentum, the SSCM field has not yet produced a conceptual framework explicitly addressing the institutional, cultural, and operational conditions of SEA. Influential frameworks proposed by Seuring and Müller [21] and Carter and Rogers [22] were developed in the context of advanced manufacturing economies in Europe and North America, which differ markedly from the SEA supply chain environment. This theoretical gap carries practical implications: managers and policymakers in SEA are missing the conceptual tools to design, implement, and evaluate SSCM strategies truly adapted to their operational realities.

To address this gap, this article introduces the Contextual SSCM Capability Framework (CSCM-CF), a new theoretical model explaining how SSCM practice adoption leads to firm performance outcomes in SEA, mediated by SSCM capability and moderated by context-specific factors. The CSCM-CF integrates the Resource-Based View (RBV), Stakeholder Theory, and the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework. Seven propositions derived from the framework guide future empirical research.

The article makes three main contributions. First, it offers the first integrative conceptual framework specifically theorising the SSCM-performance relationship in the SEA context. Second, it advances SSCM capability as the key mediating construct, integrating insights from dynamic capability theory, the RBV, and Stakeholder Theory. Third, it conceptualises SEA-specific contextual moderators shaping capability development. The paper is organised as follows: Section II develops the theoretical foundations; Section III discusses SSCM practices in SEA; Section IV presents the CSCM-CF; Section V develops the theoretical propositions; Section VI discusses implications; Section VII addresses future research and limitations; Section VIII concludes.

II. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

A. The Resource-Based View

The Resource-Based View (RBV) holds that sustainable competitive advantage derives from the development and deployment of resources and capabilities that are valuable,

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rare, imperfectly imitable, and non-substitutable [35]. In SSCM, the RBV frames sustainability-related supply chain practices as strategic assets rather than operational expenses. SSCM practices are path-dependent, socially complex, and causally ambiguous — attributes built through continuous investment, learning, and the gradual accumulation of tacit knowledge in managing sustainability trade-offs across extended supply chains [24], [35]. These attributes make SSCM practices difficult for competitors to replicate and thus capable of generating above-normal economic returns over time.

The RBV is widely applied in the SSCM literature to explain performance differentials between firms in similar institutional settings. Paulraj [35] found that firms with stronger internal sustainability management capabilities demonstrate significantly enhanced organisational sustainability performance, while Pagell and Wu [26] identified a distinctive set of rare and inimitable supply chain capabilities — including a culture of sustainability, proactive supplier development, and cross-functional integration — that characterise high-performing sustainable supply chain firms. The RBV also justifies the non-uniform performance gains from SSCM adoption, particularly given the resource constraints facing SMEs prevalent in the SEA context [11].

B. Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder Theory provides a complementary perspective on the drivers of SSCM adoption and the relational mechanisms through which sustainability practices generate stakeholder outcomes. The theory explains why firms that integrate social and ecological accountability into their supply chain operations gain legitimacy, trust, and productive relationships with a diverse set of stakeholders — including customers, suppliers, employees, regulatory bodies, investors, and local communities — essential to long-term competitive advantage [34], [40].

In the SEA agricultural context, stakeholder pressures are multifaceted. International buyers require sustainability certification and supply chain transparency as prerequisites for market access [14], [25]. Environmental regulations and labour protection measures are intensifying, imposing compliance pressures on agricultural producers [29], [37]. Civil society organisations and advocacy groups hold firms accountable for environmentally damaging or socially exploitative activities through reputational mechanisms [13], [38]. Regional evidence consistently shows that firms proactively managing stakeholder relationships through SSCM investments outperform reactive firms on supplier loyalty, customer trust, and regulatory goodwill [1], [7], [15].

C. The Triple Bottom Line Framework

The Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework organises the three practice dimensions of the CSCM-CF — environmental, social, and economic — as equally important pillars of organisational sustainability [21], [22]. The TBL's tripartite approach has become the preferred way of operationalising SSCM practices in empirical research, with the three dimensions now widely recognised as distinct yet interconnected components of SSCM strategy [21], [27]. In the SEA context, the TBL framework is particularly relevant as it acknowledges that sustainability extends beyond environmental management to

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encompass the multi-faceted social and economic dimensions of agricultural value chains, including land rights, smallholder welfare, and rural economic development [14], [19].

III. SSCM PRACTICES IN THE SOUTH EAST ASIAN CONTEXT

A. Environmental Practices

Environmental SSCM practices encompass all activities undertaken by firms to reduce the ecological impact of supply chain operations. The most significant practices in the SEA agricultural context include green procurement policies favouring suppliers with credible environmental credentials; eco-design and packaging programmes reducing material waste; carbon footprint measurement and reduction initiatives; water stewardship and soil health management; and deforestation-free sourcing commitments increasingly required by international buyers under frameworks such as the EU Deforestation Regulation [14], [25]. Rao and Holt [10] provided foundational empirical evidence linking green supply chain practices to competitiveness and economic performance in SEA, subsequently replicated and extended by numerous studies [15], [28], [30]. From a theoretical standpoint, environmental practices generate rare and inimitable capabilities — including proprietary environmental management systems, certified supplier networks, and carbon accounting competencies — consistent with RBV predictions [23], [24].

B. Social Practices

Social SSCM practices embed principles of social responsibility into supply chain governance, operations, and relationships. Key practices include fair labour standards and living wage policies, occupational health and safety management systems, community engagement and local procurement, gender equity and non-discrimination policies, and ethical supplier screening to identify forced labour, child labour, and other human rights abuses [7], [38], [40]. Theoretically, social practices operate through Stakeholder Theory mechanisms, primarily by creating and maintaining relational capital — the collaborative goodwill, trust, and legitimacy that stakeholders attribute to firms they perceive as socially responsible [34]. In SEA agriculture, proactive investment in social SSCM practices is especially important for securing the stakeholder cooperation and social licence to operate necessary for stable supply chain relationships [13], [19].

C. Economic Practices

Economic SSCM practices provide the financial and operational foundations necessary for sustained investment in environmental and social sustainability. Core practices include supply chain cost optimisation, risk identification and mitigation, supplier capacity development, long-term partnership building, and circular economy integration [21], [39]. These practices are supported by the RBV — which frames cost efficiency and supply chain resilience as strategically valuable capabilities — and by the TBL framework, which positions economic sustainability as equally important as its environmental and social counterparts. In SEA, economic SSCM practices are especially critical given the high

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vulnerability of agricultural supply chains to input price volatility, climate-related disruptions, and market demand uncertainty [4], [39]. Research by Le [4] in the Vietnamese context demonstrates that integration of big data analytics and circular economy principles in economic SSCM significantly enhances economic sustainability outcomes, highlighting the growing importance of digital technology as an enabler in SEA.

Table I: SSCM Dimensions: Theoretical Grounding And Expected Performance Outcomes

Dimension	Theoretical Basis	Key Practices	Expected Performance Outcome
Environmental	RBV: rare green capabilities as competitive resource [23], [24]	Green procurement, eco-design, carbon management, water conservation	Cost reduction, premium market access, operational efficiency, regulatory compliance
Social	Stakeholder Theory: social legitimacy and relational capital [34], [35]	Fair labour, community engagement, health & safety, ethical sourcing	Stakeholder trust, supplier loyalty, brand equity, reputational resilience
Economic	RBV + TBL: economic resilience as core capability [21], [39]	Cost optimisation, risk management, supplier development, circular economy	Financial stability, supply chain resilience, competitive advantage, long-term profitability
Integrated	Dynamic Capabilities: synergy across all TBL dimensions [22], [26]	Holistic SSCM strategy with capability investment across all dimensions	Multiplied financial, operational, and strategic performance improvements

Source: Authors' theoretical synthesis from reviewed literature.

IV. THE CONTEXTUAL SSCM CAPABILITY FRAMEWORK (CSCM-CF)

A. Framework Architecture and Core Logic

The Contextual SSCM Capability Framework (CSCM-CF), presented in Fig. 1, proposes that the relationship between SSCM practice adoption and firm performance in SEA is mediated by SSCM capability — a dynamic, integrative organisational competency that emerges from deliberate and sustained investment in environmental, social, and economic supply chain practices. The framework advances a capability-mediation logic: SSCM practices do not generate performance benefits directly or automatically, but rather through the gradual development of an SSCM capability that enables firms to integrate sustainability considerations into strategic decision-making, operational processes, and stakeholder relationships in a coherent and mutually reinforcing manner.

This capability-mediation logic builds on Barney's [35] RBV insight that performance advantages stem from capabilities rather than from individual practices or resources, and on Pagell and Wu's [26] empirical finding that exemplar sustainable supply chain firms share a distinctive set of integrative capabilities underpinning their superior performance. It extends these insights to SEA by arguing that the SSCM capability-development process is not uniform or universally accessible, but is significantly shaped by contextual

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factors — including firm size, regulatory environment, institutional capacity, industry sector, and digital technology adoption — that vary considerably across SEA economies and firm populations.

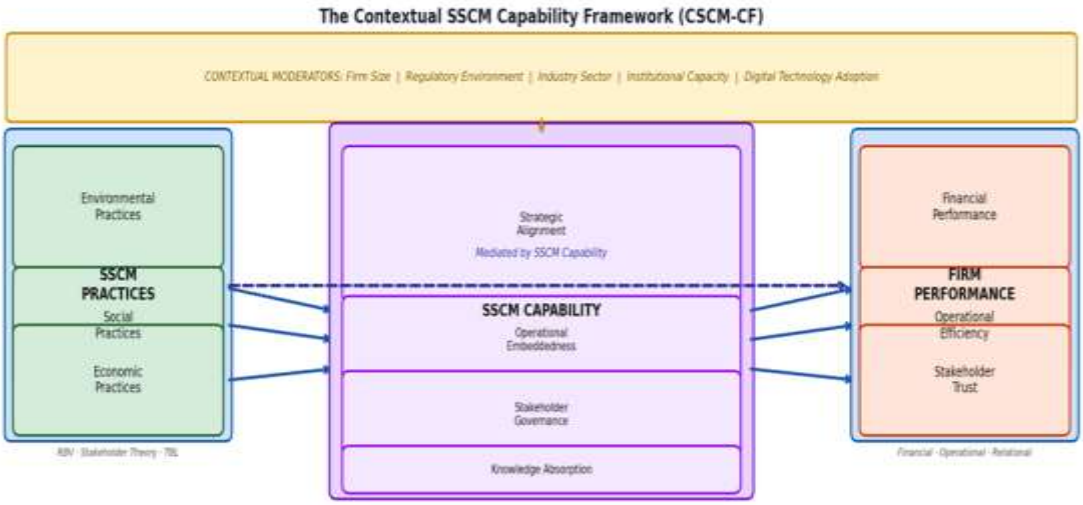

Fig 1: The Contextual SSCM Capability Framework (CSCM-CF) for South East Asian Firms

B. SSCM Capability as a Mediating Construct

In the CSCM-CF, SSCM capability is defined as the dynamic integration of environmental, social, and economic supply chain practices into a coherent organisational competency, characterised by four key attributes: strategic alignment, operational embeddedness, stakeholder governance, and knowledge absorption. Strategic alignment refers to the extent to which SSCM practices are embedded in the firm's competitive strategy rather than treated as peripheral compliance activities [22], [36]. Operational embeddedness captures how deeply sustainability considerations are integrated into day-to-day operational decision-making across procurement, production, and distribution [26], [42]. Stakeholder governance denotes the firm's capacity to proactively identify, monitor, and respond to sustainability expectations of supply chain stakeholders [34], [40]. Knowledge absorption is the firm's ability to learn from its own sustainability experiences and from those of supply chain partners and industry peers, and to apply that learning to continuously improve SSCM practices over time [24], [41].

Empirical support for the mediating role of SSCM capability is provided by Asante-Darko and Osei [1], who demonstrated that firm capabilities fully mediate the relationship between SSCM practices and performance across a multi-country sample, and by Mukhsin and Suryanto [3], who found that competitive advantage — a construct closely related to SSCM capability as defined here — fully mediates the SSCM-performance relationship among Indonesian firms. The capability-mediation logic also resonates with dynamic capability theory [26], which posits that a firm's ability to sense, seize, and

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reconfigure sustainability-relevant resources and relationships is the primary source of sustainable competitive advantage in fast-changing markets.

C. The SSCM Capability Development Pathway

The CSCM-CF conceptualises SSCM capability development as a five-stage pathway (Fig. 2), along which firms progress from initial awareness of sustainability pressures to full strategic integration of SSCM as a dynamic organisational capability. The five stages — Awareness, Adoption, Integration, Capability, and Performance — are not necessarily sequential and may be reversed in response to shifts in the external environment, competitive landscape, or internal leadership. The pathway provides a practical framework for identifying where individual firms are in their SSCM maturity journey and what investments are needed to advance to the next stage. The staged capability-development logic is supported empirically by Jo and Kwon [16] in the context of green SCM for SMEs, and by Phonthanukitithaworn et al. [6] in the context of SME innovation in SEA.

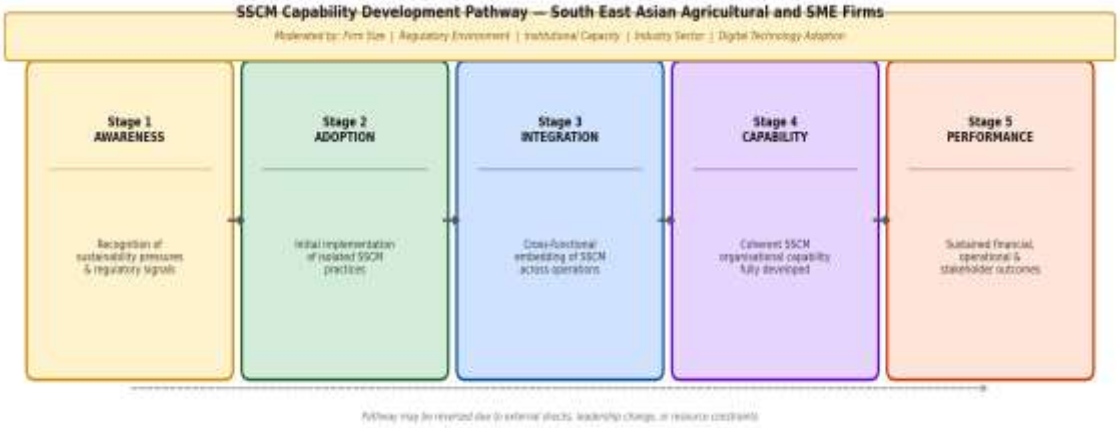

Fig 2: SSCM Capability Development Pathway for South East Asian Agricultural and SME Firms

D. Contextual Moderators in the SEA Setting

A distinctive feature of the CSCM-CF is its explicit incorporation of contextual moderators that shape the relationship between SSCM practice adoption and SSCM capability development. Five moderating factors are identified. First, firm size: smaller agricultural enterprises may have more limited resources for full-scale SSCM programmes, but often exhibit greater organisational flexibility in adapting sustainability practices to their operational context [11], [16]. Second, regulatory environment: the stringency, consistency, and enforcement of national sustainability regulations differ substantially across SEA economies, generating varying incentives and pressures for SSCM investment [25], [29]. Third, industry sector: the type of primary production activity — crop, livestock, aquaculture, or agro-processing — determines the relevance and feasibility of specific SSCM practices and the performance pathways they activate [14], [18]. Fourth,

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institutional capacity: the availability of sustainability certification infrastructure, financing mechanisms, technical assistance, and industry association support varies considerably across SEA markets, significantly affecting the ease and pace of SSCM capability development [12], [37]. Fifth, digital technology adoption: firms embracing AI-driven supply chain analytics, blockchain traceability systems, and IoT-based environmental monitoring are better positioned to accelerate capability building and enhance the performance impacts of SSCM [20], [41].

V. THEORETICAL PROPOSITIONS

Seven empirically testable propositions are derived from the theoretical architecture of the CSCM-CF to operationalise its key arguments. The propositions are summarised in Table II and mapped graphically in Fig. 3.

P1: The adoption of environmental SSCM practices positively contributes to the development of SSCM capability among agricultural firms and SMEs in South East Asia.

This proposition is grounded in RBV theory, which posits that green supply chain capabilities are valuable and difficult to imitate [35], and is supported by extensive empirical evidence demonstrating that green supply chain practices build the knowledge, systems, and supplier relationships that underlie supply chain capability [10], [23], [28].

P2: The adoption of social SSCM practices positively contributes to SSCM capability development by building the relational capital of South East Asian firms.

A core dimension of SSCM capability is the development of trust, legitimacy, and collaborative relationships with suppliers, communities, and regulators [34], [38], [40]. Social practices in SEA agricultural supply chains build a social licence to operate that is especially significant and cannot be replicated by environmental or economic practices alone [13], [19].

P3: The adoption of economic SSCM practices positively contributes to SSCM capability development by strengthening supply chain resilience and long-term partnership orientation.

Economic practices — including risk management systems, supplier development programmes, and circular economy integration — provide the financial and operational support necessary for firms to sustain and progressively strengthen their SSCM investments over time [4], [21], [39]. Conversely, the absence of a robust economic foundation can lead to the retrenchment of environmental and social SSCM practices under economic pressure, a pattern particularly observed among resource-constrained SMEs in SEA [11], [17].

P4: SSCM capability mediates the relationship between SSCM practice adoption and financial performance, such that higher levels of capability amplify financial performance outcomes.

This proposition encapsulates the core mediation logic of the CSCM-CF, supported by empirical findings of Asante-Darko and Osei [1] and Mukhsin and Suryanto [3], and

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theoretically grounded in the RBV prediction that capabilities — not individual practices — generate above-normal returns [35].

P5: SSCM capability mediates the relationship between SSCM practice adoption and operational efficiency, with digitally integrated firms realising greater efficiency gains.

The digital technology dimension of this proposition builds on existing SSCM theory by incorporating the growing body of evidence on the operational performance benefits generated by AI, blockchain, and IoT technologies in supply chain contexts [20], [41].

P6: SSCM capability mediates the relationship between SSCM practice adoption and stakeholder trust, with social practices exerting the strongest influence on this outcome.

This proposition aligns with Stakeholder Theory, which identifies investments in social sustainability as the primary driver of stakeholder relational outcomes [7], [13], [34]. The mediation logic implies that social sustainability investments must be embedded within an organisational capability to generate their full stakeholder trust benefits.

P7: The SSCM practice-capability relationship is moderated by institutional context, regulatory environment, and firm size, such that more enabling institutional contexts amplify the capability-development effect of SSCM practice adoption.

This proposition reflects the context sensitivity of the CSCM-CF and translates the moderating influences identified in Section IV.D into a testable empirical claim [11], [12], [25], [29], [37].

Table II: CSCM-CF THEORETICAL PROPOSITIONS

Prop.	Proposition Statement	Theoretical Grounding
P1	Environmental SSCM practice adoption positively contributes to the development of SSCM capability among agricultural firms and SMEs in South East Asia.	RBV [35]; Green SCM [10], [23], [28]
P2	Social SSCM practice adoption positively contributes to SSCM capability development by building relational capital among South East Asian firms.	Stakeholder Theory [34]; Social SCM [13], [38], [40]
P3	Economic SSCM practice adoption positively contributes to SSCM capability development by fostering supply chain resilience and long-term partnership orientation.	RBV + TBL [21], [22]; Risk management [39]
P4	SSCM capability mediates the relationship between SSCM practice adoption and financial performance, amplifying financial outcomes at higher capability levels.	Dynamic capabilities [26]; Mediation evidence [1], [3]
P5	SSCM capability mediates the relationship between SSCM practice adoption and operational efficiency, with digitally integrated firms realising greater gains.	Operations literature [5], [8]; Technology integration [20]
P6	SSCM capability mediates the relationship between SSCM practice adoption and stakeholder trust, with social practices exerting the strongest influence.	Stakeholder Theory [34]; Social SCM [7], [13], [19]
P7	The SSCM practice-capability relationship is moderated by institutional context, regulatory environment, and firm size, with more enabling contexts amplifying capability development.	Institutional theory [25], [29]; Firm heterogeneity [11], [16]

Source: Authors' theoretical development from the CSCM-CF.

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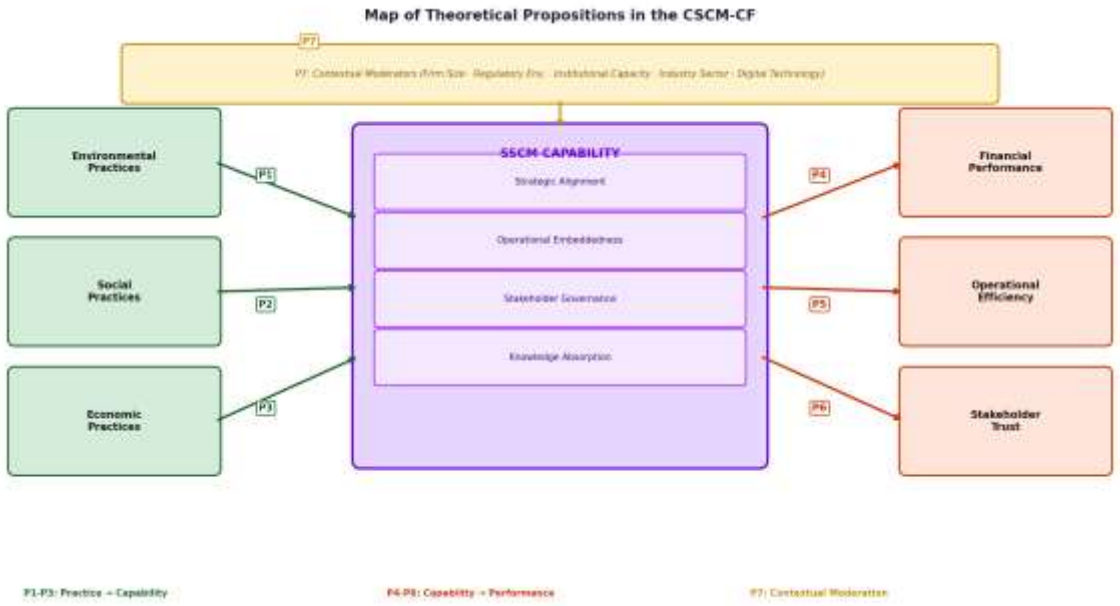

Fig 3: Map of Theoretical Propositions in the CSCM-CF

VI. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

A. Theoretical Implications

The CSCM-CF makes several important contributions to SSCM theory. By introducing SSCM capability as a mediating construct, the framework offers a more nuanced and mechanistically specific account of the SSCM-performance relationship than frameworks that treat SSCM practices as direct performance drivers [21], [22]. The capability-mediation logic explains the highly variable performance impact of SSCM across firms and contexts: it is not merely which sustainability practices a firm implements, but how those practices are embedded within an organisational capability that determines the magnitude of the performance benefits realised.

Second, the CSCM-CF advances the theoretical integration of the RBV and Stakeholder Theory within the SSCM domain. The framework provides a theoretically differentiated account of how different SSCM dimensions create performance value through distinct mechanisms: the environmental dimension through RBV-grounded capability development pathways, and the social dimension through Stakeholder Theory-grounded relational capital pathways.

Third, the CSCM-CF makes a significant contribution to the contextualisation of SSCM theory in emerging-market settings. By explicitly incorporating SEA-specific contextual moderators — including variation in institutional capacities and regulatory regimes, and the pivotal role of SMEs and smallholder farmers in agricultural value chains — the

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framework addresses a critical gap in a literature predominantly developed in advanced-economy manufacturing contexts [12], [14], [25].

B. Managerial Implications

The CSCM-CF carries several practical implications for supply chain managers in SEA agricultural and SME contexts. Effective SSCM strategy requires a deliberate focus on capability development, not merely practice adoption. Firms implementing green procurement policies, social compliance audits, or risk management systems as standalone initiatives — without integrating these into a strategically managed capability — will realise only a fraction of the achievable performance benefits [26], [42]. The five-stage SSCM capability development pathway in Fig. 2 provides managers with a practical diagnostic tool to assess their organisation's SSCM maturity and determine the investments required to advance to the next stage.

The framework also highlights the strategic importance of digital technology adoption in accelerating SSCM capability development. Firms leveraging blockchain for traceability, AI for supplier risk analytics, and IoT for environmental monitoring will build SSCM capabilities more rapidly and comprehensively than those relying on manual or paper-based processes [20], [41]. The growing availability of technology-as-a-service business models in SEA is making digital SSCM capability development increasingly accessible, even for smaller agricultural enterprises.

C. Policy Implications

The CSCM-CF underscores the critical importance of institutional enablers for supporting firm-level SSCM capability development. Governments and regional actors can significantly amplify the SSCM-performance linkage by investing in: sustainability certification infrastructure that creates credible and accessible standards for environmental and social SSCM practices; dedicated financing instruments — such as green bonds, sustainability-linked loans, and blended finance facilities — that reduce the capital cost of SSCM capability investments for SMEs; regulatory frameworks providing consistent and enforceable incentives for SSCM adoption; and industry knowledge-sharing platforms fostering capability development through peer learning and best-practice diffusion. Regional cooperation mechanisms, including ASEAN, represent an underutilised opportunity for harmonising sustainability standards across SEA economies, lowering compliance costs for cross-border operators, and transferring SSCM capabilities from more to less institutionally developed national contexts [12], [14].

VII. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Like all theoretical constructs, the CSCM-CF has limitations that must be acknowledged alongside its contributions. First, the framework is grounded in a synthesis of existing literature rather than primary empirical data from SEA firms; the proposed relationships and moderating factors therefore remain theoretical assumptions requiring empirical validation. Second, the framework operates at a relatively high level of conceptual abstraction that, while necessary for theoretical generalisability, does not fully capture the

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nuances of SSCM capability development at the commodity level (e.g., palm oil, rice, or shrimp aquaculture). Third, the five-stage SSCM capability development pathway in Fig. 2 is a stylised representation of what is, in practice, a non-linear, complex, and context-dependent process.

A structured research agenda based on the CSCM-CF is presented in Table III. The most important empirical priority is the testing of the seven theoretical propositions using a multi-country, longitudinal panel data design. Multi-level modelling approaches simultaneously estimating firm-level capability development and country-level institutional effects would be particularly valuable for testing the framework's moderating propositions. Qualitative case study research providing thick description of the organisational processes through which SEA agricultural firms develop SSCM capability — including the roles of leadership, organisational culture, and inter-firm learning — would complement the framework's more abstract theoretical architecture.

Table III: Research Agenda Based on the CSCM-CF

Research Direction	Suggested Approach	Rationale
Longitudinal empirical testing of propositions	Panel data from SEA agricultural firms	Cross-sectional designs cannot establish causality; propositions require temporal validation
Digital technology as moderator/mediator	Longitudinal survey over 5-year period with AI, blockchain, and IoT adoption measures	Technology is an emerging critical enabler of SSCM capability [20]
Focus on smallholders and SMEs	Survey with stratification by firm size	The majority of SEA agricultural firms are SMEs with specific resource limitations [11], [16]
Multi-country comparative study	Multi-level modelling with country-level institutional variables	Country-level institutional variation is understudied in existing literature [12], [14]
Circular economy integration	Moderated mediation models	Circular economy is a growing moderator of the SSCM-performance relationship [4], [27]

Source: Authors' development based on identified research gaps.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This paper has introduced the Contextual SSCM Capability Framework (CSCM-CF), a new theoretical framework that advances understanding of how sustainable supply chain management practices generate firm performance outcomes among agricultural enterprises and SMEs in South East Asia. By integrating the Resource-Based View, Stakeholder Theory, and the Triple Bottom Line framework, and by explicitly incorporating SEA-specific contextual moderators, the CSCM-CF offers a more comprehensive and context-sensitive theoretical account of the SSCM-performance relationship than has previously been available in the literature.

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Seven propositions derived from the framework delineate testable relationships among SSCM practice dimensions, SSCM capability development, firm performance outcomes, and contextual moderating factors — collectively constituting a coherent empirical research programme for SEA and other emerging-market settings. For practitioners, the capability-mediation logic and five-stage development pathway offer concrete guidance on designing effective SSCM investment strategies. For policymakers, the contextual moderation analysis identifies specific institutional investments capable of amplifying the SSCM-performance linkage at the economy level.

As sustainability pressures on SEA agricultural supply chains — driven by climate change, international regulatory requirements, and evolving global consumer preferences — continue to intensify, the ability of regional firms to develop coherent and integrated SSCM capabilities will be increasingly central to their capacity to compete, grow, and endure. The CSCM-CF offers a theoretically grounded and practically informed foundation for supporting that capability-development journey.

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