



1 **Technical note: Development and field validation of SMART-ASF, a low-cost**
2 **automated soil gas flux monitoring system for long-term field observations**

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4 Ching-Chou Fu^{1,*}, Sheng-Fu Hu², Li-Hung Lin³, Kuo-Hang Chen¹, Chin-Shang Ku¹,
5 Hao Kuo-Chen³, Kuo-Wei Wu¹, Chin-Jen Lin¹

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- 7 1. Institute of Earth Sciences, Academia Sinica, Taiwan
8 2. XY ELECCONTROL TECHNOLOGY CO., LTD, Taoyuan, Taiwan
9 3. Department of Geosciences, National Taiwan University, Taipei, Taiwan

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11 ***.Corresponding author:** Ching-Chou Fu
12 Institute of Earth Sciences, Academia Sinica, Taiwan
13 E-mail: ccfu@earth.sinica.edu.tw
14 Tel.: +886-2-2783-9910 ext.1513
15 Fax: +886-2-2783-9871

16



17 **Abstract**

18 Continuous, high temporal resolution measurements of soil gas fluxes are essential
19 for understanding terrestrial carbon cycling and subsurface fluid processes, yet long-
20 term autonomous monitoring remains limited by the high cost and operational
21 complexity of conventional systems. This study presents the development and field
22 validation of the SMART Automated Soil Flux (SMART-ASF) system, a low-cost and
23 modular platform that integrates automated chamber-based flux measurements, low-
24 cost gas sensing, wireless telemetry, and solar powered autonomous operation for
25 continuous soil CO₂ flux monitoring.

26 Laboratory calibration against a commercial LGR M-GGA-918 analyzer
27 demonstrated excellent linearity ($R^2 \approx 1$) over a CO₂ concentration range of
28 approximately 100 to 8500 ppm, with relative deviations generally within 3 to 5 % over
29 the concentration range most relevant to soil gas flux measurements. Independent
30 comparisons with conventional manual closed chamber measurements showed good
31 agreement under field conditions. Long-term field deployment for more than five
32 months demonstrated stable unattended operation without routine maintenance or
33 component replacement under natural environmental conditions. Continuous
34 observations successfully captured both short-term and seasonal variations in soil CO₂
35 flux, including a marked suppression of emissions during intense rainfall associated
36 with Typhoon Fengshen and the subsequent recovery of background fluxes. The system
37 also consistently resolved low background fluxes below 0.1 g m⁻² d⁻¹, demonstrating
38 sufficient sensitivity for monitoring low emission environments.

39 These results support the applicability of the SMART-ASF system for long-term
40 automated soil gas flux monitoring and its potential use in terrestrial carbon cycle
41 research and environmental geochemical monitoring.

42

43 Keywords: automated soil flux system; soil CO₂ flux; low-cost sensor; continuous
44 monitoring; terrestrial carbon cycling

45



46 1. Introduction

47 Gas exchange at the soil–atmosphere interface is a central process in the terrestrial
 48 carbon cycle and within the Critical Zone, where microbial respiration, root activity,
 49 and abiotic reactions collectively regulate CO₂ fluxes. These fluxes reflect the
 50 biogeochemical dynamics of soils and play a crucial role in evaluating global
 51 greenhouse gas budgets and climate feedbacks (e.g., [Holland et al., 1999](#); [Werner et al.,](#)
 52 [2007](#)). High frequency measurements obtained from automated closed chambers
 53 coupled with online analyzers have demonstrated the capability to continuously resolve
 54 instantaneous fluxes and diel variability of CO₂, CH₄, and N₂O under field conditions.
 55 This approach substantially improves the detection of short-term and event driven
 56 variations that are often missed by manual sampling ([Savage et al., 2014](#); [O’Connell et](#)
 57 [al., 2018](#)).

58 Compared with the eddy covariance technique ([Aubinet et al., 1999](#); [Aguilos et al.,](#)
 59 [2018](#)), chamber-based methods provide finer spatial resolution and are particularly
 60 suitable for heterogeneous terrain and complex environmental settings. Automated non
 61 steady state chamber systems further enable high frequency flux measurements,
 62 efficient processing of large datasets, and temporal upscaling, making them widely
 63 adopted for long-term ecosystem monitoring ([Livingston et al., 2005](#); [Courtois et al.,](#)
 64 [2019](#); [Themistokleous et al., 2024](#)).

65 Beyond ecological applications, soil gas fluxes also serve as sensitive indicators
 66 of geological activity. Along active faults and volcanic systems, deep sourced fluids
 67 migrate through permeable structures and produce temporal and spatial anomalies in
 68 soil CO₂ fluxes together with other tracers such as radon and helium ([Chiodini et al.,](#)
 69 [2008](#); [Yuce et al., 2017](#); [D’Alessandro et al., 2020](#); [Li et al., 2024](#); [Fu et al., 2025](#)).
 70 Continuous soil gas monitoring therefore provides valuable information for
 71 investigating fluid migration, fault permeability, volcanic degassing, and earthquake
 72 related processes ([Fu et al., 2017](#); [Girault et al., 2018](#)).

73 Recent advances in automated chamber systems have focused on improving
 74 temporal resolution, reducing system cost, and increasing operational autonomy
 75 through low-cost sensors, open source electronics, and wireless communication
 76 technologies ([Bastviken et al., 2015, 2020](#); [Blackstock et al., 2019](#); [Brown et al., 2020](#);
 77 [Forbes et al., 2023](#); [Macagga et al., 2024](#); [Zawilski and Bustillo, 2024](#); [Tonolo et al.,](#)
 78 [2025](#)). These developments have substantially expanded the feasibility of long-term
 79 field observations and dense monitoring networks. Nevertheless, many existing systems



80 still rely on relatively expensive analyzers, complex mechanical structures, or limited
81 sensor integration, which constrain their scalability and widespread deployment,
82 particularly in remote environments. Furthermore, relatively few systems
83 simultaneously integrate automated chamber measurements, expandable multi gas
84 capability, wireless cloud-based data transmission, autonomous power management,
85 and long-term unattended operation into a single monitoring platform.

86 The present study is motivated by three interrelated needs. First, high temporal
87 resolution and long-term continuous soil gas flux measurements are required to capture
88 event driven processes, such as rainfall induced degassing, and to provide reliable
89 surface observations relevant to fault activity and earthquake fluid interactions. Second,
90 there is a need for a modular and low-cost system architecture that enables scalable
91 deployment and improved spatial coverage while maintaining measurement
92 performance. Third, long-term autonomous operation under remote environmental
93 conditions requires robust integration of sensing, power management, wireless
94 communication, and real time data visualization.

95 To address these needs, we developed SMART-ASF (Smart Monitoring and
96 Automated Real Time system coupled with an Automated Soil Flux module), in which
97 the ASF module serves as the core component for continuous soil gas flux
98 measurements. The system integrates automated closed chamber measurements, low-
99 cost gas sensing with expandable multi gas capability, intelligent gas circulation, cloud-
100 based data management, and solar powered autonomous operation. This technical note
101 describes the design, calibration, field validation, and long-term deployment of the
102 SMART-ASF system and evaluates its performance for continuous soil CO₂ flux
103 monitoring under natural field conditions.

104

105 **2. Methods**

106 **2.1 Composition and Operating Principles of the Gas Flux Monitoring System**

107 This study developed the SMART-ASF system, in which the Automated Soil Flux
108 (ASF) module enables long-term, continuous, real-time, and high-frequency soil gas
109 flux monitoring. The SMART-ASF architecture comprises four major components: (1)
110 ASF Sensor Unit (ASF-SU), which integrates multiple gas and temperature sensors, a
111 control unit, a diaphragm pump, and data storage; (2) ASF Gateway Unit (ASF-GW),
112 which includes a control module, wireless communication module, and expandable
113 temperature sensing modules; (3) Power supply, composed of lithium battery packs in



114 conjunction with a solar power system, including a battery voltage monitor Unit for
 115 real-time voltage tracking; and (4) Closed chamber, which serves as the gas
 116 accumulation and measurement enclosure.

117

118 **2.2 System Architecture and Components**

119 Within the ASF-SU, the gas sensing module is housed inside a dedicated sensor
 120 chamber. This chamber is equipped with sensors for carbon dioxide (0-4%; Senseair
 121 K30), sulfur dioxide (0-1000 ppm; EC Sense ES4-SO₂-1000), and hydrogen sulfide (0-
 122 500 ppm; EC Sense ES4-H₂S-500). The sensor modules are individually replaceable
 123 and can be readily exchanged or expanded with additional gas sensors according to
 124 specific monitoring objectives, providing a flexible and modular platform for future
 125 system upgrades. The sensing chamber also integrates a barometric pressure sensor
 126 (BMP280, BOSCH) and a temperature-humidity sensor (SHT31) to monitor internal
 127 environmental conditions. The operating ranges and accuracies are as follows: pressure
 128 range 300 to 1100 hPa with an accuracy of ± 0.12 hPa; temperature range -40 to 125 °C
 129 with an accuracy of ± 0.3 °C; and relative humidity range 0 to 100% with an accuracy
 130 of $\pm 2\%$.

131 A custom developed Xy_SensorBOX, implemented in house for this study, is used
 132 as the central control and data processing unit of the system. The unit is based on a
 133 microcontroller (Arm®Cortex®-M0 32-bit RISC core) architecture and provides
 134 integrated functions for data acquisition, system control, and communication. It
 135 manages the operation schedule of the brushless diaphragm pump (PZX512BL; Ever
 136 Motor Guanlian Corp., Taiwan), which has a rated flow capacity of approximately 4–7
 137 L min⁻¹ at 12 V DC. The pump output is software configurable, allowing the operating
 138 flow rate to be adjusted according to system requirements. The pump is capable of
 139 continuous operation with a service lifetime exceeding one year. The system further
 140 incorporates a Nafion-based gas drying module (Perma Pure Co.) to regulate moisture
 141 in the gas stream, onboard data storage via a MicroSD card (up to 32GB, Kingston),
 142 wireless data transmission through a Wi-Fi interface, and a solar powered energy supply
 143 to enable long-term autonomous field deployment. Detailed hardware specifications
 144 and operational parameters of the Xy_SensorBOX are provided in the [Supplementary](#)
 145 [Fig. S1](#).

146 A polypropylene (PP) enclosure with external dimensions of 200 mm × 200 mm
 147 × 130 mm was used to house the system components. The components summarized in



Supplementary Table S1 were securely mounted within the enclosure using a mold-based positioning approach designed to minimize pump induced vibrations and improve overall system stability.

The ASF_GW was housed in a polypropylene enclosure with external dimensions of 100 mm × 100 mm × 40 mm. The unit integrates a WiFi communication module (ESP32-WROOM-32E-H4) and a custom developed Xy_SensorBOX microcomputer, which functions as the central control and data processing unit of the system. Two temperature sensors (SHT31) are connected via an RS485 interface and enclosed within stainless steel pipes to ensure sealed protection for subsurface soil temperature measurements. The overall system architecture and component configuration of the ASF module are illustrated in Figure 1.

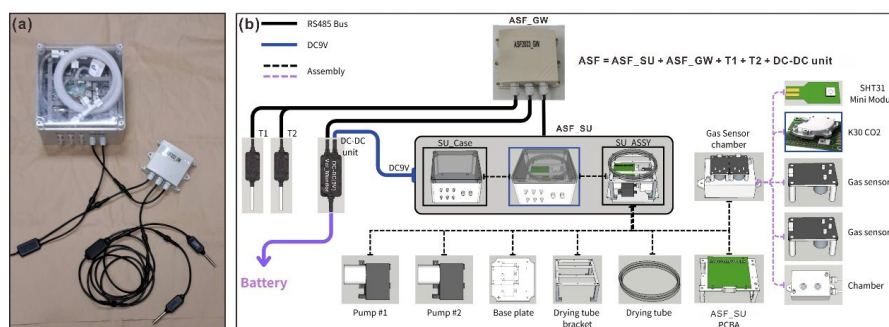


Figure 1. Block diagram illustrating the configuration and functional connections of the Automated Soil Flux (ASF) module. The ASF consists of the gateway unit (ASF_GW), sensor unit (ASF_SU), two soil temperature sensors (T1 and T2), a DC–DC converter unit with integrated voltage monitor and RS-485 interface, and a battery supply input port. The diagram shows the integrated connections among major components, including the gas sensor chamber, dual pumps, drying tube assembly, and the CO₂ (K30) and SHT31 sensors, highlighting the coordinated operation of power delivery, data communication, and gas flow control within the system.

2.3 Measurement Method and Gas Circulation Process

Soil gas flux was determined using a closed chamber method. The closed chamber consisted of a cylindrical enclosure with a diameter of 20 cm and a height of 40 cm (base area 314 cm²), constructed from polyvinyl chloride (PVC). The dimensions of the closed chamber are configurable and can be adjusted according to specific monitoring requirements; under high flux conditions, a larger chamber volume may be adopted to



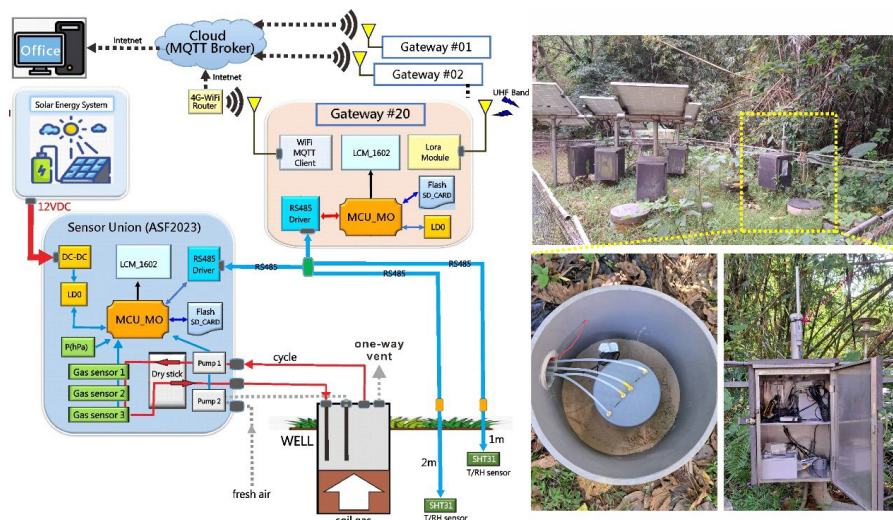
175 accommodate elevated gas emission rates. In the present study, an opaque PVC
176 chamber was selected because the primary objective was continuous monitoring of soil
177 gas emissions rather than ecosystem carbon exchange. For ecological applications
178 requiring measurements of vegetation–atmosphere CO₂ exchange, the chamber can be
179 readily fabricated from transparent acrylic to allow natural light penetration while
180 retaining the same measurement principle (e.g., [Savage et al., 2014](#)). The base was filled
181 with approximately 20 cm of fine-grained quartz sand to provide a stable and
182 homogeneous substrate, thereby minimizing variability associated with vegetation
183 growth, root respiration, and other near-surface biological processes during long-term
184 field deployment. This configuration provided a stable substrate for long-term in situ
185 measurements. The effective internal gas volume was approximately 6000 cm³ ([Figure](#)
186 [2](#)). The system included two diaphragm pumps with operational flow rates set at ~1 L
187 min⁻¹ and ~2 L min⁻¹, respectively, to optimize gas circulation and chamber flushing
188 during the measurement cycle.

189 The first pump continuously directed the air from the chamber into the sensor
190 housing for gas concentration analysis. A particulate filter was installed at the inlet to
191 prevent dust from entering the system. After analysis, the gas was returned to the closed
192 chamber through four directional outlets that generated uniform turbulence, ensuring
193 complete gas mixing and repeated circulation for analysis ([Fu et al., 2025](#)). Gas mixing
194 within the chamber was achieved without an internal fan, thereby reducing the number
195 of moving components and the mechanical complexity of the system. A one-way vent
196 valve was incorporated into the chamber to minimize pressure buildup during both the
197 accumulation and flushing stages. By maintaining chamber pressure close to ambient
198 conditions, the valve helps reduce potential pressure induced suppression of soil gas
199 diffusion and minimizes feedback effects associated with progressive CO₂
200 accumulation. As illustrated in [Figure 3](#), CO₂ concentrations increased approximately
201 linearly throughout the selected measurement interval while chamber pressure and
202 internal temperature remained nearly constant. These observations indicate stable
203 chamber conditions during flux measurements and suggest that significant chamber-
204 related artifacts, including pressure-induced suppression of soil gas diffusion and
205 nonlinear feedback associated with progressive CO₂ accumulation, were not evident
206 under the operating conditions adopted in this study.

207 The second pump was activated after each flux determination to introduce fresh
208 air into the closed chamber. It operated at a flow rate of ~2 L min⁻¹ for 10 minutes,



209 flushing the chamber through a one-way valve and achieving at least 3 complete air
 210 exchanges. This process restored gas concentrations to background levels before the
 211 next measurement cycle. This flushing procedure reproduced the gas-renewal function
 212 of an automated open–close chamber without requiring a mechanically actuated
 213 chamber lid. To prevent condensation within the tubing and maintain sensor stability
 214 during prolonged measurements, a Nafion drying tube was incorporated for
 215 dehumidification. The pressure gradient across the Nafion membrane continuously
 216 removed water vapor from the sampled gas stream, reducing condensation and
 217 humidity-related interference. Although alternative drying materials or desiccators
 218 could also be used, their potential background contribution, gas adsorption
 219 characteristics, and possible influence on the measured gas composition should be
 220 evaluated prior to deployment to ensure measurement accuracy.
 221 Additionally, two temperature probes were installed adjacent to the chamber at depths
 222 of 20 cm (T_{S20}) and 100 cm (T_{S100}) below the soil surface to enable continuous
 223 monitoring of vertical soil temperature variations. The SMART-ASF system was
 224 deployed at a permanent field observation site on the campus of Academia Sinica,
 225 Taipei, Taiwan (25.0402° N, 121.6123° E), established for long-term soil gas
 226 monitoring. Figure 2 illustrates the field deployment configuration of the SMART-ASF
 227 system at the observation site.



228
 229 **Figure 2.** Field deployment schematic of the SMART-ASF system, illustrating the
 230 integration of power supply, sensor unit, gateway, and wireless data transmission to a
 231 cloud-based MQTT platform. Soil gas flux is measured using a closed chamber coupled



with a dual pump circulation and flushing system, enabling efficient gas mixing without internal fans and automated restoration to background conditions. Additional soil temperature sensors installed at depths of 20 cm and 100 cm provide complementary subsurface thermal observations, supporting long-term unattended monitoring.

2.4 Data Acquisition and Flux Calculation

The automated soil gas flux system in this study recorded continuous data at 10-second intervals, which could be adjusted according to research requirements. The monitored parameters included the CO₂ concentration, temperature, and air pressure within the closed chamber, soil temperature at different depths, and system voltage. Each measurement cycle lasted approximately 50 minutes, providing sufficient CO₂ concentration data for flux calculation. The concentration variation exhibited a distinct linear increase trend during the measurement period (as shown in Figure 3, pink-shaded area representing the measurement period). Upon completion of each measurement, the second pump was activated to perform gas flushing, replacing the chamber air with background air (as shown in Figure 3, gray-shaded area representing the flush gas period) to restore the concentration to baseline before initiating the next cycle.

However, observations revealed that at the onset of flushing, CO₂ concentration did not decrease immediately but continued to rise for approximately 2 minutes. Conversely, when flushing ceased, CO₂ concentration continued to decrease for an additional approximately 2 minutes before reaching stability. This time lag indicates a delayed concentration response, likely reflecting the combined effects of gas transport through the chamber–tubing system, chamber mixing, sensor response time, and the efficiency of gas exchange. At the beginning of the flushing stage, residual high-concentration gas within the circulation pathway was progressively displaced rather than instantaneously replaced, while CO₂ concentrations inside the chamber also required finite time to decrease. Conversely, after flushing ceased, low-concentration air remaining within the circulation pathway required additional time to be replaced by newly accumulated soil gas. This delayed response phenomenon was defined in this study as the “delay zone”, as indicated by the red hatched region in Figure 3.

Because the gas within the closed chamber required approximately 5 minutes after flushing to achieve a stable mixing condition and begin accumulating CO₂ again, only the steady and linear portion of the CO₂ concentration increase (from the 10th to the 45th minute) in each measurement cycle was selected for flux calculation. The CO₂ flux



was calculated using the closed chamber method described by Chiodini et al. (1998), with an estimated system uncertainty of approximately 10%. The calculation was based on the rate of CO₂ concentration increase (dc/dt) within the chamber, combined with the mean pressure and temperature during the same period, to obtain the soil CO₂ flux (F_{CO₂}, g m⁻² d⁻¹). The flux was calculated according to the following equation:

$$F_{CO_2} = k \frac{P V}{S T} \frac{dc}{dt} \quad (1)$$

where k is the gas constant, P is atmospheric pressure (Pa), V is the volume of the chamber (m³), S is the base area of the chamber (m²), and T is soil temperature (K). In this system, the soil temperature at a depth of 20 cm (T_{S20}) was used in the calculation.

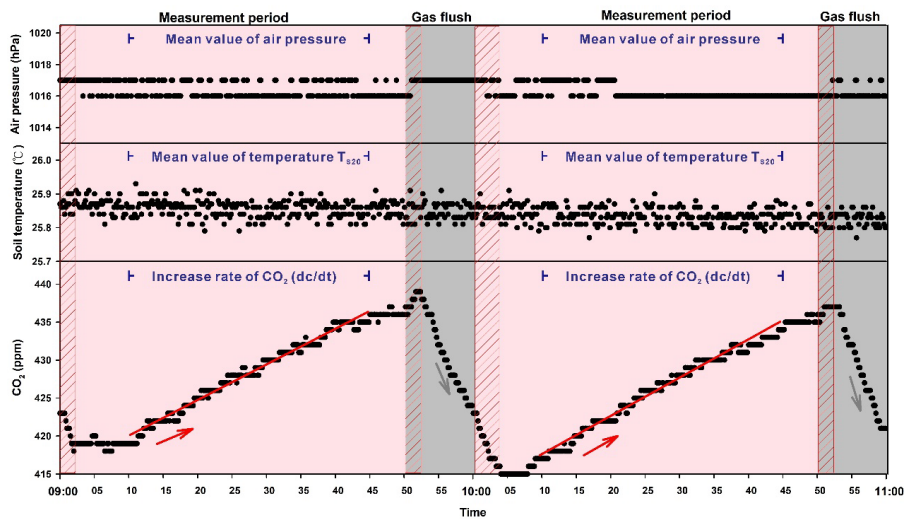


Figure 3. Time series of air pressure, soil temperature, and CO₂ concentration during automated flux measurements. The pink areas indicate measurement periods with linear CO₂ increase used for flux calculation, the gray areas represent gas flushing, and the red hatched zones mark delay intervals caused by transient gas mixing within the chamber system after the switch of pumping.

2.5 Data Transmission and Remote Monitoring

Data transmission in the SMART-ASF system was managed through the ASF-GW, which retrieved data from the ASF-SU at scheduled intervals of 10 seconds. The collected monitoring data were simultaneously transmitted in real time to a cloud server (MQTT broker) through the built-in Wi-Fi, while a laboratory host server received synchronized copies of the data for integration and visualization.



288 Data visualization and monitoring were performed using the open-source platform
 289 Grafana (<https://grafana.com>), which is characterized by its high modularity and
 290 interactivity. Grafana enables real-time access to various databases such as MQTT and
 291 MySQL, displaying monitoring parameters through dynamic and customizable
 292 dashboards. Users can configure the visualization time scale, refresh frequency, and
 293 alert thresholds, as well as conduct cross-sensor data comparisons and trend analyses
 294 (Figure 4).

295 If the ASF-GW fails to obtain data from the ASF-SU for more than 10 minutes,
 296 the system automatically transmits a “No data” alert message to indicate a potential
 297 malfunction. Additionally, the ASF-GW is programmed to reboot daily at 00:00 to
 298 maintain system stability and ensure smooth network performance by clearing potential
 299 communication errors.



300
 301 **Figure 4.** Time series of a 12 hour continuous observation acquired by the SMART-
 302 ASF system and visualized using Grafana, showing synchronized measurements of
 303 chamber gas concentrations, temperature, humidity, soil parameters, atmospheric
 304 pressure, and system voltage. Data were recorded at 10 second intervals and transmitted
 305 in real time to cloud and laboratory servers.

306 307 2.6 Power Supply and System Stability

308 The SMART-ASF system operates at a nominal voltage of 5 V, while the air
 309 pumps are powered at 9 V. An integrated DC–DC converter allows the system to accept
 310 a DC input voltage ranging from 4 to 18 V. Depending on field conditions, the system
 311 can be powered either by AC mains electricity through an appropriate power adapter or



by a battery pack. Power consumption of the ASF unit was evaluated using an INA226 power-monitoring chip. The 24 h power profile shown in Figure 5 indicates an average power consumption of approximately 2.84 W, with a baseline of approximately 2.2 W and hourly increases associated with the chamber-flushing cycle, during which power consumption reached a maximum of approximately 6.23 W. The brief decrease to approximately 0.47 W near midnight corresponds to the scheduled automatic system restart and represents a normal part of the operating cycle rather than a power interruption. The communication infrastructure, including Wi-Fi and 4G telemetry, consumed an additional approximately 2.1 W, resulting in an estimated total average system power consumption of approximately 4.94 W.

In this study, the SMART-ASF system was primarily powered by a 14.4 V lithium-ion battery pack (Samsung INR21700-50E, 4S13P configuration, total capacity 63.7 Ah), integrated with a 300 W solar photovoltaic module and a solar charge controller (Morningstar PS-15M). The nominal battery capacity corresponds to approximately 917 Wh, providing a theoretical operating duration of approximately 7.7 d at the estimated average system power consumption of 4.94 W in the absence of solar charging. This estimate is consistent with field observations showing that the system could operate on battery power for approximately one week during prolonged periods of low solar radiation. No routine maintenance of the power module was required during the field deployment period of more than five months.

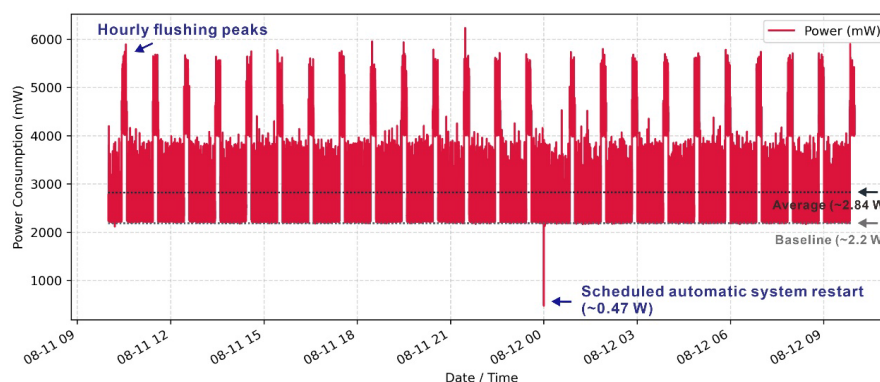


Figure 5. Twenty-four-hour power consumption profile of the ASF unit measured using an INA226 power-monitoring chip. The baseline power consumption was approximately 2.2 W, with hourly increases associated with the chamber-flushing cycle and a maximum instantaneous power consumption of approximately 6.23 W. The average power consumption over the 24 h measurement period was approximately 2.84



338 W. The brief decrease to approximately 0.47 W near midnight corresponds to the
339 scheduled automatic system restart.

340

341 **3. Results and Discussion**

342 **3.1 Laboratory validation and performance evaluation**

343 [Figure 6a](#) illustrates the comparative relationship between CO₂ concentrations
344 measured by the K30 sensor employed in this study and those obtained using the
345 commercial LGR-ICOS gas analyzer (M-GGA-918). Prior to the comparison
346 experiment, the K30 sensor was calibrated using certified standard gases over a CO₂
347 concentration range of approximately 100–8500 ppm, encompassing the concentrations
348 typically encountered during automated soil gas flux measurements. The calibrated K30
349 sensor was subsequently evaluated against the LGR M-GGA-918, which served as the
350 reference instrument for independent performance validation. The experimental setup
351 involved connecting both the ASF module and the LGR M-GGA-918 to the same gas
352 chamber, which was initially filled with zero air and subsequently injected with CO₂ of
353 increasing concentrations to establish a series of controlled CO₂ concentration levels.
354 The results show an excellent linear correlation between the two instruments ($R^2 \approx 1$),
355 with the regression equation $y = 1.05x - 6.5$. The calibration covered CO₂
356 concentrations from approximately 100 to 8500 ppm, encompassing the concentration
357 range typically encountered during automated soil gas flux measurements under natural
358 field conditions. The slope being slightly greater than unity indicates a minor
359 overestimation by the K30 at higher concentrations (>6000 ppm); however, the overall
360 deviation remains negligible, and the regression line nearly coincides with the ideal 1:1
361 reference line.

362 This finding demonstrates that the K30 sensor exhibits a linear response across a
363 wide range of CO₂ concentrations, accurately capturing concentration variations.
364 Compared with the LGR M-GGA-918, the K30 achieves excellent agreement when
365 properly calibrated and operated under stable airflow conditions, with deviations
366 remaining within only a few percent throughout the evaluated concentration range.
367 Such linearity improves confidence in subsequent field measurements for long-term
368 field applications ([Brown et al., 2020](#); [Forbes et al., 2023](#)). Although the comparison
369 was conducted under controlled laboratory conditions, the calibrated K30 achieved
370 analytical performance comparable to the LGR analyzer over the evaluated
371 concentration range, supporting its subsequent field application.



Figure 6b presents the results of the same experimental setup, showing the CO₂ concentrations and relative percentage differences measured by the K30 sensor and the LGR M-GGA-918 across a series of controlled concentration levels. Each dataset represents a steady-state condition within the chamber at a specific CO₂ concentration, with red symbols corresponding to K30 measurements and black symbols to LGR readings. The concentration trends of both instruments are highly consistent, and the relative deviations remain within $\pm 8\%$ across the entire concentration range. Specifically, relative deviations were approximately 8% below 200 ppm, decreased to 3–4% over the 400–2000 ppm range, and remained around 5% at higher concentrations.

The slightly larger deviation at very low concentrations is consistent with the reduced signal-to-noise ratio of NDIR sensors under low-signal conditions. Across the concentration range most relevant to soil gas monitoring, the calibrated K30 achieved analytical performance comparable to that reported for other low-cost NDIR systems and approached that of the LGR M-GGA-918 analyzer (Bastviken et al., 2015; Brown et al., 2020; Macagga et al., 2024). These findings indicate that calibrated low-cost NDIR sensors can substantially reduce the cost of long-term automated monitoring systems while maintaining analytical performance comparable to laboratory-grade instruments.

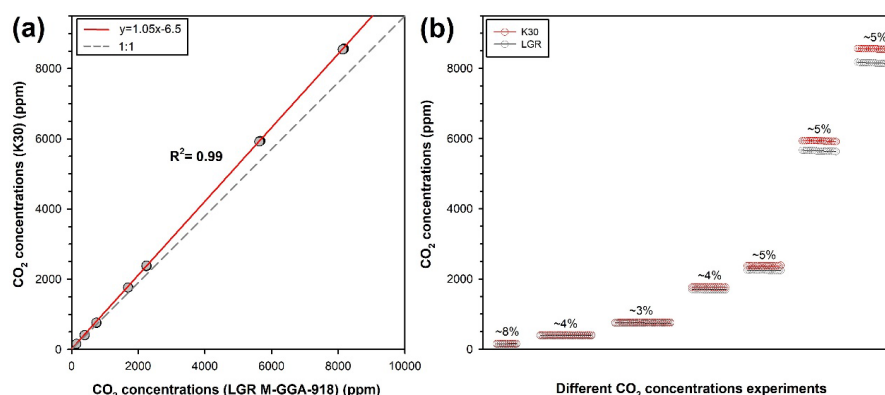


Figure 6. Laboratory validation of the CO₂ sensing performance of the SMART-ASF system. (a) Calibration relationship between the K30 nondispersive infrared sensor and the commercial LGR M-GGA-918 analyzer over the concentration range of approximately 100 to 8500 ppm. The dashed line represents the ideal 1:1 relationship. (b) Measured CO₂ concentrations at individual calibration levels together with the corresponding relative deviations between the two instruments.



398 To further validate the performance of the complete SMART-ASF system,
 399 automated CO₂ flux measurements were compared with independent manual closed
 400 chamber measurements conducted on multiple occasions following the protocol
 401 described by Fu et al. (2025). The comparisons included measurements at the
 402 permanent SMART-ASF observation site under background flux conditions and at a
 403 nearby temporary site established to evaluate higher CO₂ fluxes. Figure 7a summarizes
 404 the relationship between paired SMART-ASF and manual chamber measurements over
 405 a broad range of CO₂ fluxes, encompassing both background and elevated emission
 406 conditions. Excellent agreement was obtained between the two methods ($R^2 = 0.99$, n
 407 $= 19$), with the regression line closely following the 1:1 reference line, indicating that
 408 the automated measurements closely reproduced manually determined CO₂ fluxes
 409 under natural field conditions over a wide range of CO₂ fluxes spanning approximately
 410 0.1 to 5.4 g m⁻² d⁻¹. This validated range encompasses typical background as well as
 411 elevated soil CO₂ emissions encountered in many environmental and geological
 412 monitoring applications, supporting the applicability of the SMART-ASF system across
 413 diverse field conditions.

414 Figures 7b and 7c further compare paired measurements as a function of
 415 measurement time under relatively low- and high-flux conditions, respectively. In both
 416 cases, the SMART-ASF system consistently captured the temporal variations observed
 417 by the conventional manual chamber method, demonstrating that the automated
 418 chamber measurements faithfully reproduced the overall pattern of CO₂ flux variability.
 419 Although the SMART-ASF measurements exhibited a slight systematic
 420 underestimation relative to the manual measurements, the discrepancy remained
 421 consistent across both flux regimes, suggesting that the observed differences primarily
 422 reflect a systematic proportional bias rather than flux-dependent measurement errors.
 423 The mean absolute relative difference between the two methods was approximately
 424 10%, with individual differences generally ranging from about 3% to 16%, which falls
 425 within the uncertainty commonly reported for chamber-based CO₂ flux measurements
 426 under field conditions.

427 Although the field comparison was not intended to represent a comprehensive
 428 intercomparison campaign covering all environmental conditions, the agreement
 429 observed over multiple measurement periods and a substantially broader flux range
 430 demonstrates that the laboratory-calibrated sensor performance can be effectively
 431 translated into field-based CO₂ flux measurements that agree with conventional manual

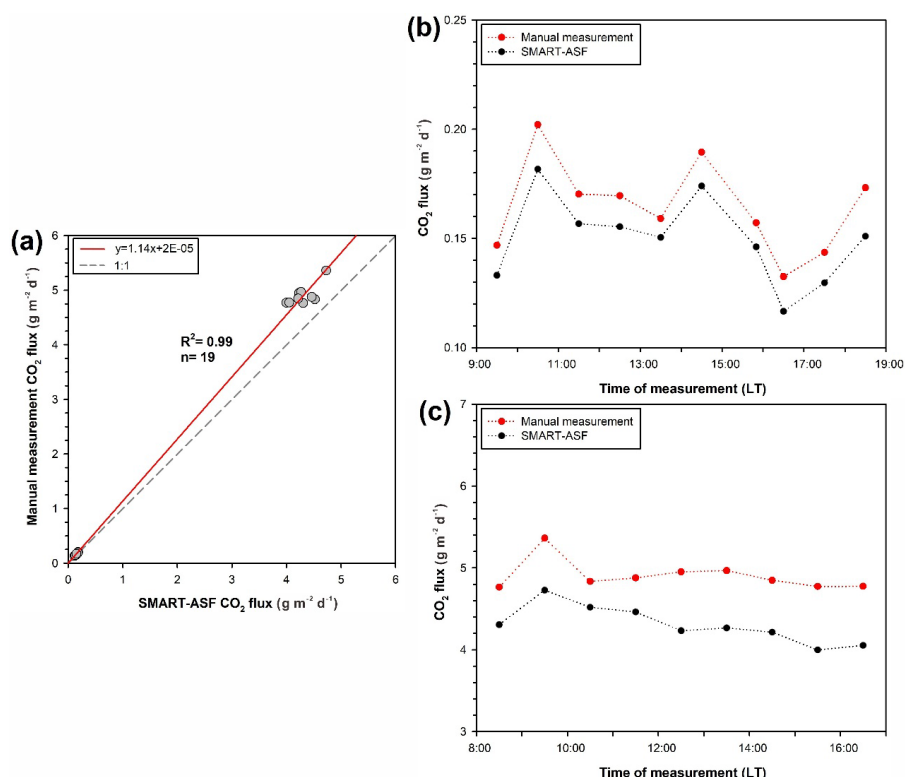


Figure 7. Field validation of the SMART-ASF system through comparison with conventional manual closed chamber measurements. (a) Relationship between paired CO₂ fluxes measured by the SMART-ASF system and the manual chamber method over a wide range of CO₂ fluxes (approximately 0.1–5.4 g m⁻² d⁻¹). The dashed line represents the 1:1 relationship, and the solid red line indicates the linear regression ($R^2 = 0.99$, $n = 19$). (b) Time series comparison of paired CO₂ flux measurements under relatively low-flux conditions. (c) Time series comparison of paired CO₂ flux measurements under relatively high-flux conditions, demonstrating consistent agreement between the two methods across different emission levels.



3.2 Long-term field observations and operational performance

Long-term field observations were conducted from 8 September 2025 to 16 February 2026 to evaluate the long-term operational performance of the system under natural environmental conditions. [Figure 8a](#) presents the complete observation record, including time series of barometric pressure, chamber relative humidity and temperature, CO₂ concentration, calculated CO₂ flux, soil temperature at two depths (T_{S20} and T_{S100}), and precipitation. The precipitation data were obtained from a nearby Central Weather Administration meteorological station (C1AI50 Station; 25.0342° N, 121.6197° E), located approximately 2 km from the study site. Continuous observations were obtained throughout the deployment period.

The observation area was affected by a prolonged rainfall event associated with Typhoon Fengshen from 19 to 28 October 2025, as indicated by the precipitation peaks in [Figure 8a](#). During this period, CO₂ flux declined from the previous range of approximately 0.1 to 1.4 g m⁻² d⁻¹ to values approaching background levels. This reduction is likely associated with heavy rainfall that temporarily filled soil pore spaces, restricted gas transport pathways, and reduced the effective diffusion of soil gases ([Livingston et al., 2005](#); [O'Connell et al., 2018](#)). Despite the sustained reduction in solar radiation during this period, no interruption of system operation, wireless communication, or data transmission was observed.

To further illustrate the monitoring stability after the typhoon event, [Figure 8b](#) provides an enlarged view of the observation period from 1 November 2025 to 16 February 2026. During this interval, barometric pressure, chamber temperature and humidity, and CO₂ concentration exhibited short-term fluctuations driven by natural environmental variability, while CO₂ flux remained within a relatively stable low background range of approximately 0.01 to 0.2 g m⁻² d⁻¹. In addition, soil temperatures at different depths displayed a typical seasonal cooling trend. The deeper soil temperature T_{S100} showed smaller variations and a slightly delayed response compared with T_{S20}, reflecting the effects of thermal diffusion and buffering within the soil profile ([Holland et al., 1999](#)).

Throughout the continuous deployment period of more than five months, no routine maintenance or component replacement was required. This operational experience suggests that the current system configuration is suitable for long-term deployment, particularly at remote or difficult-to-access monitoring sites where frequent maintenance is impractical.



Long-term observations during the stable background period from 1 November 2025 to 16 February 2026 (Figure 8b) yielded a mean CO_2 flux of $0.057 \text{ g m}^{-2} \text{ d}^{-1}$, with a median of $0.053 \text{ g m}^{-2} \text{ d}^{-1}$ and a standard deviation of $0.035 \text{ g m}^{-2} \text{ d}^{-1}$. These consistently low background fluxes indicate that CO_2 fluxes below $0.1 \text{ g m}^{-2} \text{ d}^{-1}$ can be resolved over extended observation periods. No obvious long-term drift was apparent in the field record, although a formal minimum detectable flux and periodic drift evaluation were not established in this study.

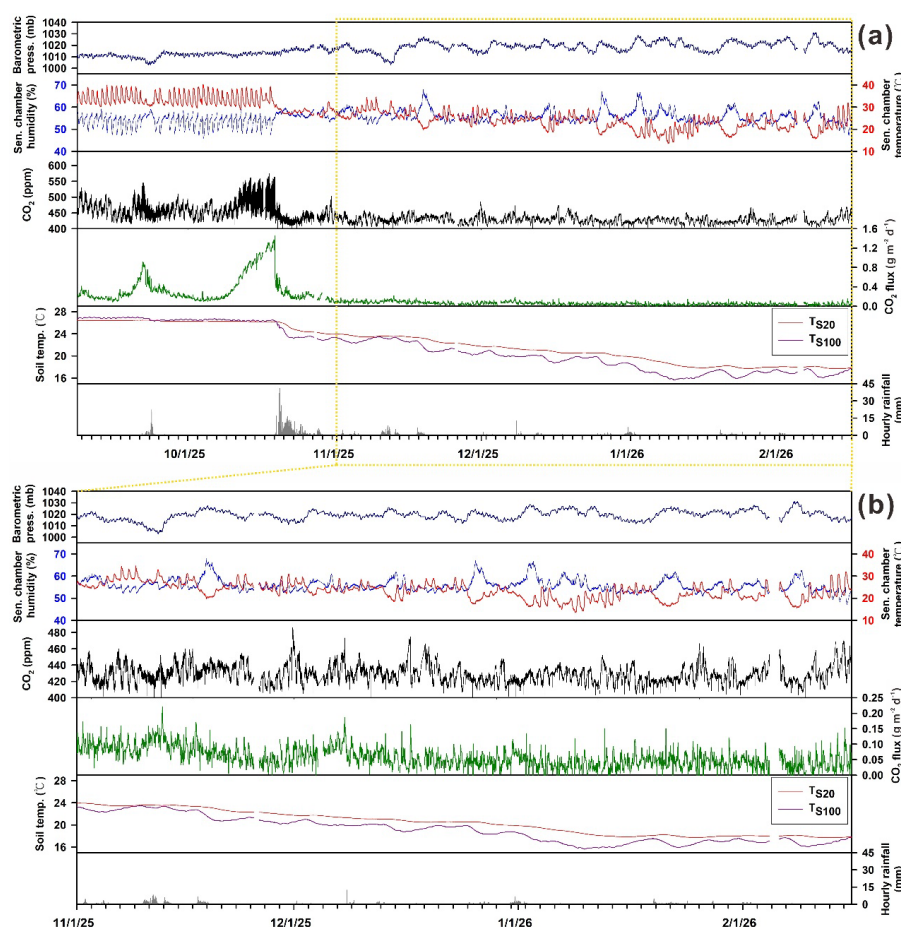


Figure 8. Long-term field observations recorded by the SMART-ASF system. (a) Complete dataset from 8 September 2025 to 16 February 2026, including barometric pressure, chamber relative humidity and temperature, CO_2 concentration, calculated CO_2 flux, soil temperature at depths of 20 cm and 100 cm, and hourly precipitation from a nearby meteorological station. The vertical dashed line indicates the period following a major rainfall event associated with Typhoon Fengshen. (b) Enlarged view



of the dataset from 1 November 2025 to 16 February 2026, showing background CO₂ flux variations and seasonal changes in soil temperature.

3.3 System versatility, limitations, and future applications

Beyond the successful validation of CO₂ flux measurements and long-term field operation, the SMART-ASF system was designed as a flexible monitoring platform that can be adapted to a broad range of environmental and geochemical applications. In the present study, CO₂ was selected as the principal target gas because the field deployment site was located in a non volcanic setting where sulfur bearing gases such as SO₂ and H₂S were expected to be negligible or below practical detection limits. Accordingly, system evaluation focused on CO₂ concentration dynamics and soil CO₂ flux performance. Nevertheless, SO₂ and H₂S sensing modules have already been integrated into the hardware architecture, and additional gas sensors can be incorporated according to site specific monitoring objectives. This modular configuration expands the potential applicability of the SMART-ASF platform beyond CO₂ only observations.

Such versatility is particularly relevant in environments where multi component gas emissions provide key information on subsurface processes. Potential applications include volcanic degassing, geothermal and hot spring systems, mud volcanoes, and fault related gas emissions, where sulfur species, carbon bearing gases, and other tracers may indicate fluid sources, permeability evolution, or hydrothermal activity (Chiodini et al., 2008; D'Alessandro et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2021; Li et al., 2024; Fu et al., 2025). In addition, the relatively low hardware cost of the SMART-ASF system enables denser spatial deployment than conventional commercial instruments, which is advantageous for resolving spatial heterogeneity in soil gas emissions and for establishing distributed monitoring arrays (Bastviken et al., 2015; Forbes et al., 2023). As summarized in Supplementary Table S1, the estimated material cost of one SMART-ASF unit is approximately USD 2,637 for the full multi gas configuration, including the autonomous solar powered energy supply module, but excluding labor, shipping, taxes, calibration gases, and server maintenance. Because the system can also be powered directly from mains electricity, the solar panel, battery, and charge controller are optional components and may be omitted where grid power is available. Furthermore, applications requiring only CO₂ monitoring do not require the SO₂ and H₂S sensor modules, further reducing the overall hardware cost. These configurable options allow the system to be adapted to autonomous remote deployments or fixed monitoring



531 stations and may facilitate denser multi-site deployment than conventional commercial
532 systems.

533 In addition to its flexible and cost effective design, the SMART-ASF system
534 incorporates several engineering features to minimize potential artifacts commonly
535 associated with closed chamber measurements. One potential limitation of closed
536 chamber techniques is that pressure buildup within the chamber may alter natural soil
537 gas transport and introduce measurement artifacts (Pumpanen et al., 2004; Venterea and
538 Baker, 2008). To minimize these effects, a one-way vent valve was incorporated into
539 the chamber during both the accumulation and flushing stages to maintain chamber
540 pressure close to ambient conditions. This configuration helps reduce pressure induced
541 suppression of soil gas diffusion and minimizes feedback effects associated with
542 progressive CO₂ accumulation within the chamber. Furthermore, the persistent near-
543 linear increase in chamber CO₂ concentration throughout the selected flux calculation
544 interval (Figure 3) suggests that pressure related disturbances and feedback effects were
545 effectively minimized under the operating conditions adopted in this study.

546 Despite these advantages, several limitations should be considered. As with most
547 low-cost sensor-based systems, long-term measurement quality depends on periodic
548 calibration, environmental correction, and routine quality control. Previous studies have
549 reported that low-cost NDIR CO₂ sensors are susceptible to zero drift and sensitivity
550 changes associated with temperature, humidity, and sensor aging, while
551 electrochemical gas sensors typically require periodic replacement during long-term
552 operation (Brown et al., 2020; Macagga et al., 2024). While the SMART-ASF system
553 incorporates temperature, humidity, and pressure monitoring together with a Nafion-
554 based dehumidification module to reduce environmental interference, these design
555 features reduce environmental influences on sensor performance under field conditions.
556 Nevertheless, periodic calibration remains advisable during extended deployments to
557 maintain measurement quality. Mechanical components and the autonomous power
558 system also remain potential maintenance constraints, particularly at remote sites.
559 Although no component replacement was required during the present five-month
560 deployment, routine inspection of pumps, filters, tubing, batteries, and charging
561 performance is recommended for longer deployments.

562 A further strength of the SMART-ASF system is its capacity for continuous high
563 frequency observations combined with real time wireless data transmission and cloud-
564 based visualization. This capability allows rapid detection of transient events, diurnal



variability, and environmentally driven flux responses that are often undersampled by conventional manual chamber surveys, consistent with previous studies highlighting the advantages of automated chamber systems for capturing high temporal variability (Savage et al., 2014; Courtois et al., 2019; Themistokleous et al., 2024). Such measurements are particularly valuable for quantifying episodic rainfall effects, seasonal transitions, and short lived degassing anomalies associated with tectonic or hydrothermal processes.

The combination of low-cost sensing, modular architecture, and autonomous operation provides a practical framework for long-term soil gas monitoring. Future developments may include expanded multi gas capability, integration with meteorological and geophysical sensors, and deployment as dense observation networks for studies of soil carbon cycling, greenhouse gas exchange, volcanic unrest, and fluid migration along active fault systems.

578

579 **4. Conclusions**

This study presents the development and field validation of the low-cost SMART-ASF system for continuous soil gas flux monitoring. The system integrates automated chamber measurements, low-cost gas sensing, controlled circulation and flushing, wireless telemetry, and autonomous solar power. The principal conclusions are summarized as follows:

- 585 (1) Laboratory calibration and independent field validation demonstrated accurate
 586 automated CO₂ flux measurements over both laboratory and field conditions.
- 587 (2) Continuous field observations over more than five months documented
 588 uninterrupted acquisition of gas concentration, flux, meteorological, and soil
 589 temperature data under natural environmental conditions. Even during intense
 590 rainfall associated with Typhoon Fengshen, the SMART-ASF system operated
 591 without interruption in power supply, wireless communication, or data transmission.
 592 Furthermore, the system consistently resolved background CO₂ fluxes below 0.1 g
 593 m⁻² d⁻¹ during an extended period of stable field conditions, demonstrating sufficient
 594 sensitivity for long-term monitoring of low emission environments.
- 595 (3) High temporal resolution monitoring successfully captured short-term and seasonal
 596 variations in CO₂ flux associated with rainfall, soil temperature, and atmospheric
 597 variability. Heavy precipitation strongly suppressed fluxes, likely through
 598 temporary reduction of soil gas diffusivity caused by water filled pore space.



599 (4) The low-maintenance design, wireless data transmission, and expandable sensor
600 architecture support deployment in distributed observation networks. Potential
601 applications include soil carbon cycling, greenhouse gas monitoring, volcanic and
602 fault-related degassing, and earthquake–fluid coupling studies.

603

604 **Code and data availability**

605 The laboratory calibration data, field validation datasets, representative long-term field
606 observations, and data underlying the figures are available through Mendeley Data ([Fu,](#)
607 [2026](#)). The CO₂ flux calculation procedure is fully described in the manuscript and does
608 not rely on proprietary data-processing software. The hardware architecture, system
609 configuration, measurement workflow, and data-processing procedures are described in
610 the manuscript and Supplementary Material to to enable reproduction of the
611 methodology presented in this study.

612

613 **Supplement**

614 The supplement related to this article is available online and contains detailed hardware
615 specifications, system configuration, component costs, and supplementary figures
616 supporting the development and evaluation of the SMART-ASF system.

617

618 **Author contributions**

619 CCF conceived and supervised the study. CCF, LHL, and HKC contributed to the
620 overall study design and scientific discussion. CCF and SFH designed and developed
621 the experimental setup, sensor units, and data logging system, while LHL provided
622 technical guidance throughout system development and laboratory evaluation. KHC
623 conducted the laboratory calibration experiments. KHC and KWW participated in field
624 deployment, manual chamber measurements, and field validation. CCF led the data
625 analysis and interpretation with contributions from SFH and KHC. SFH developed the
626 logger units and associated hardware described in the Supplementary Material. CSK
627 developed the wireless data transmission and cloud-based visualization framework, and
628 CJL contributed to the design and implementation of the power supply system. CCF
629 and HKC acquired funding for this study. CCF prepared the original manuscript draft
630 and led the writing and revision of the manuscript, with contributions from SFH, LHL,
631 HKC, CSK, and CJL. All authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

632



633 **Competing Interests**

634 Author Sheng-Fu Hu was employed by the company XY ELECCONTROL
 635 TECHNOLOGY CO., LTD. The remaining authors declare that the research was
 636 conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be
 637 construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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