



## **Social Relations, Capital, and Power in the Tobacco Industry: A Bourdieusian Practice Theory Perspective**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Social relations in the tobacco industry reflect persistent inequalities between tobacco farmers and other actors within the production and distribution chain. Although numerous studies have examined price mechanisms and marketing systems in the tobacco sector, limited attention has been given to how social relations and power structures shape farmers' dependence on intermediaries. This research addresses this gap by examining the social relations of tobacco farmers within the tobacco industry through Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical perspective. The study aims to analyze how forms of capital and power relations influence farmers' positions in the tobacco production system. A qualitative case study approach was employed, with data collected through in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentation. Informants were selected using purposive sampling and consisted of six participants, including four tobacco farmers and two intermediary actors involved in tobacco distribution. Data were analyzed using qualitative techniques involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that social relations in the tobacco industry form a structural pattern that favors downstream actors. Middlemen and cigarette companies possess stronger economic capital and control over marketing networks, enabling them to dominate price determination and quality standards. In contrast, farmers' limited capital and restricted access to market information reinforce their dependence on intermediaries and weaken their bargaining position. Consequently, farmers tend to accept market prices without meaningful negotiation. This study implies that unequal social relations in the tobacco industry are not solely driven by market mechanisms but are reproduced through enduring social structures that perpetuate farmers' marginal positions. These findings highlight the need for policy interventions and institutional support aimed at strengthening farmers' capital and bargaining capacity.

**Keywords:** Social Relations, Tobacco Farmers, Social Capital

## ABSTRAK

Relasi sosial dalam industri tembakau mencerminkan ketimpangan yang persisten antara petani tembakau dan aktor lain dalam rantai produksi dan distribusi. Meskipun berbagai penelitian telah mengkaji mekanisme harga dan sistem pemasaran di sektor tembakau, kajian yang menelaah bagaimana relasi sosial dan struktur kekuasaan membentuk ketergantungan petani terhadap perantara masih relatif terbatas. Penelitian ini mengisi celah tersebut dengan mengkaji relasi sosial petani tembakau dalam sistem industri tembakau menggunakan perspektif teori praktik Pierre Bourdieu. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana bentuk-bentuk modal dan relasi kekuasaan memengaruhi posisi petani dalam sistem produksi tembakau. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi kasus. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi lapangan, dan dokumentasi. Informan dipilih secara purposive sampling dan terdiri atas enam orang, yakni empat petani tembakau dan dua aktor perantara dalam distribusi tembakau. Data dianalisis secara kualitatif melalui tahapan reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa relasi sosial dalam industri tembakau membentuk pola struktural yang cenderung menguntungkan aktor hilir. Tengkulak dan perusahaan rokok memiliki modal ekonomi yang lebih kuat serta kontrol atas jaringan pemasaran, sehingga berperan dominan dalam penentuan harga dan standar kualitas. Sebaliknya, keterbatasan modal dan akses informasi pasar yang dimiliki petani memperkuat ketergantungan mereka terhadap perantara serta melemahkan posisi tawar petani. Akibatnya, petani cenderung menerima harga pasar tanpa proses tawar-menawar yang seimbang. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa ketimpangan relasi sosial dalam industri tembakau tidak semata-mata ditentukan oleh mekanisme pasar, tetapi direproduksi melalui struktur sosial yang berkelanjutan dan mempertahankan posisi marginal petani. Temuan ini menegaskan pentingnya intervensi kebijakan dan dukungan kelembagaan yang berorientasi pada penguatan modal dan kapasitas tawar petani.

**Kata kunci:** Relasi Sosial; Petani Tembakau; Modal Sosial

### Introduction

Tobacco farming is an agrarian sector that holds a strategic position in the rural economic structure of Indonesia (Pujiriyani, 2022). As a commodity with high economic value and direct links to the national cigarette industry, tobacco not only serves as a source of income for farmers but also serves as a crucial node in a network of social relations involving various economic actors (Maretalinia et al., 2021). In the rural context, tobacco production activities always take place within a complex framework of social relations, where economic interests, power, and social norms are intertwined, forming distinctive patterns of interaction (Sevindik et al., 2021).

Ganti Village, located in Central Lombok Regency, is one of the tobacco-growing areas that clearly illustrates this dynamic. The majority of Ganti Village residents depend on tobacco farming for their livelihood, either as sharecroppers or farm laborers. Tobacco not only determines the annual economic cycle of the village community but also shapes

the structure of social relations between individuals and groups involved in its production and distribution chain. Therefore, understanding the social life of tobacco farmers in Ganti Village cannot be separated from the social relations that exist between farmers, middlemen, and large cigarette companies as the main actors in the tobacco agribusiness system. In practice, tobacco farmers are at the beginning of the production chain, but they do not necessarily have full control over the results of their work. Limited capital, dependence on natural conditions, and fluctuating market prices place farmers in a vulnerable position (Pujiriyani, 2022). This situation encourages farmers to build relationships with other actors who are considered capable of guaranteeing the continuity of production and marketing of their crops (Susilo et al., 2024). This is where the role of middlemen becomes very significant in the social and economic lives of tobacco farmers (Yakin & Rahmatin, 2023).

Middlemen in Ganti Village's tobacco farming system serve not only as buyers of the harvest but also as intermediaries connecting farmers with large cigarette companies (Arofah & Setiawan, 2022). The relationship between farmers and middlemen is often long-term and personal, built on trust, social closeness, and a history of relationships that have existed for many years (Pujiriyani, 2022). In many cases, middlemen provide initial capital, assistance with production facilities, and even guaranteed purchase of the harvest, creating a strong sense of dependence on the middlemen.

These social relations are not always symmetrical. Middlemen generally have broader access to market information, greater capital, and more established distribution networks than farmers. This position gives middlemen the power to determine purchase prices, quality standards, and transaction times, which are often non-negotiable for farmers (Ibnu, 2023). However, these relationships are not always perceived as openly exploitative by farmers (Talay et al., 2025). In many situations, farmers interpret their relationships with middlemen as a realistic and pragmatic form of cooperation in the face of their structural limitations (Tonya, 2021). On the other hand, large cigarette companies occupy the top position in the tobacco value chain. They possess the economic, technological, and political capacity that allows them to determine the direction of the national tobacco market (Razzaq et al., 2022). Tobacco quality standards, grading systems, absorption volumes, and reference prices are ultimately heavily influenced by cigarette company policies and interests. However, relationships between cigarette companies and farmers at the village level are rarely direct. These interactions are generally mediated by middlemen or large collectors, creating social and structural distance between farmers and companies (Khan et al., 2025).

These conditions create a hierarchical and layered social structure. Cigarette companies dominate the market, while middlemen act as intermediaries managing relationships with farmers, while farmers are at the bottom of the power structure. Within this structure, decisions made by cigarette companies and middlemen have direct

implications for farmers' well-being, while farmers have relatively limited room for negotiation (Ceballos-Sierra & Wiegel, 2025).

The social relations between farmers, middlemen, and large cigarette companies are also fraught with dimensions of power and dependency. Farmers' dependence on middlemen is not only economic but also social. Middlemen often hold powerful social positions at the local level, whether as community leaders, relatives, or individuals with influence within the village social network (Hari et al., 2024), this position strengthens the middlemen's legitimacy in managing relations with farmers and minimizes the possibility of open conflict.

However, these social relations are not static and unchanging. Changes in economic structure, the dynamics of the cigarette industry, and government policies related to tobacco influence the patterns of relationships between actors (Yakin & Rahmatin, 2023). Fluctuating tobacco prices, tightening regulations in the cigarette industry, and increasing quality demands from large cigarette companies have changed the way farmers, middlemen, and companies interact (Renaldi et al., 2022). Farmers are required to meet increasingly high quality standards, while access to information and technology remains limited (Joshi & Bose, 2023). In this situation, farmers often find themselves in a dilemma. On the one hand, they must comply with market demands determined by cigarette companies through middlemen. On the other hand, they face high economic risks due to weather uncertainty, pest attacks, and price fluctuations. Social relations with middlemen are one of the farmers' adaptation strategies to minimize these risks, even if it means sacrificing some of their bargaining power.

The social relations established within the tobacco farming system in Ganti Village also reflect a negotiation process that occurs informally and is not always explicitly visible. Farmers can negotiate prices, payment terms, or specific forms of assistance, but the scope for negotiation depends heavily on each farmer's social and economic position. Farmers with larger plots of land, better-quality tobacco, or closer personal relationships with middlemen tend to have a stronger bargaining position than smallholders.

Meanwhile, large cigarette companies tend to maintain social distance from farmers, yet still wield significant influence through market mechanisms and internal company policies. These indirect social relations make it difficult for farmers to fully understand the pricing processes and quality standards for tobacco. As a result, farmers often accept market conditions as unchangeable and beyond their control. This phenomenon demonstrates that social relations in tobacco farming are not only related to interactions between individuals but also reflect broader social structures, where power and economic interests play a significant role in shaping relationships between actors. The relationship between farmers, middlemen, and large cigarette companies provides an arena where various interests converge, negotiate, and influence each other. In the context of Ganti Village, Central Lombok, the study of these social relations

becomes increasingly relevant given the community's high dependence on tobacco. Small changes in cigarette company policies or market dynamics can significantly impact the social and economic lives of farmers. Therefore, understanding the social relations established within the tobacco farming system is crucial not only for examining the economic aspects but also for understanding how rural social structures operate and adapt to change.

Furthermore, this study is also crucial for uncovering how farmers interpret their position within these relational structures. Farmers' perceptions of middlemen and cigarette companies, their strategies for survival, and the forms of social adaptation they employ are crucial aspects often overlooked in macroeconomic agricultural studies. A sociological approach allows this research to examine social relations in greater depth, placing farmers' experiences and perspectives at the center of the analysis.

Thus, research on the social relations between tobacco farmers, middlemen, and large cigarette companies in Ganti Village, Central Lombok, is crucial for providing a comprehensive picture of the social dynamics within the commodity farming system. This research is expected to uncover how these social relations are formed, maintained, and changed in line with economic dynamics and cigarette industry policies. Furthermore, this research is also expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of rural sociology, particularly regarding power relations, dependency, and social structures in commodity-based agriculture.

## **Method**

This research adopts a qualitative approach using a case study method to analyze the social relationships between tobacco farmers, middlemen, and large cigarette companies. This approach was taken to gain in-depth insight into the interactions within the economic and social context of Ganti Village, Central Lombok Regency. By conducting this study, the researcher aims to uncover the dynamics of the relationships among the actors involved, in accordance with opinions expressed in the literature regarding qualitative methods for understanding social phenomena.

Ganti Village was selected as a center of tobacco production, allowing for in-depth exploration of social interactions. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, considering that not all community members possess relevant experience and knowledge relevant to the research focus. Informants were selected purposively based on their direct involvement in tobacco production and distribution activities and their experience in establishing relationships with other actors in the tobacco trade chain. The study involved six informants: four tobacco farmers and two middlemen or receivers. The selected farmers are active tobacco growers who routinely cultivate tobacco and sell their harvest through middlemen, while the middlemen are intermediaries who play a strategic role in marketing tobacco to large cigarette companies (Sugiyono, 2014).

Data were collected using in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. The interviews were conducted to explore informants' perspectives and experiences regarding the social relations that exist. The use of in-depth interviews is a common and successful method in qualitative research, detailed in various sources in this field (Moleong, 2016). Observations were conducted to understand the social context in which interactions between farmers and middlemen take place, while documentation served to complement and strengthen the findings obtained from the interviews (Danim, 2002).

Data analysis was conducted qualitatively using a descriptive approach, through a process of data reduction and presentation of findings in narrative form. This process helps researchers draw relevant and contextual conclusions based on patterns found in the collected data. This approach reflects the principles of qualitative analysis, through which a deeper understanding of social phenomena can be gained (Qaissi, 2024).

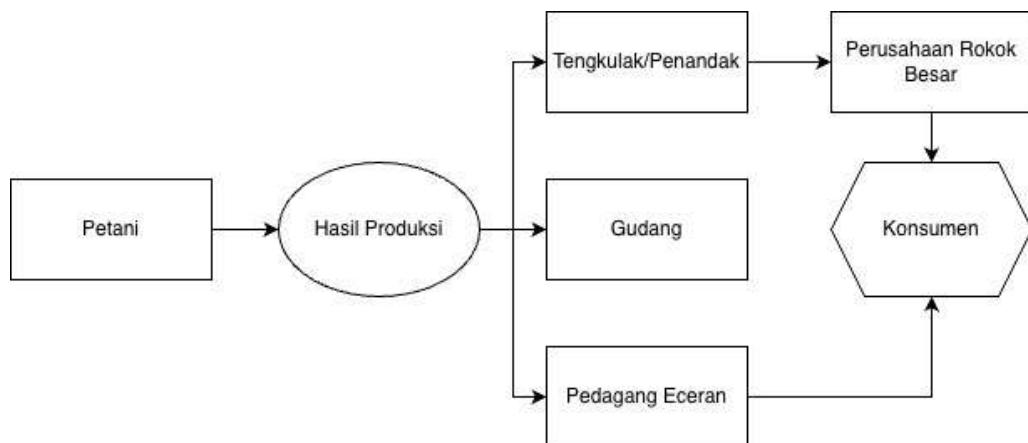
Data validity was ensured through triangulation, a method for ensuring the consistency of information from multiple sources and data collection techniques. This triangulation method is essential for ensuring the quality and reliability of research results and is recognized in the literature as an essential practice in qualitative research (Danim, 2002). Furthermore, researchers double-checked with informants after interviews to ensure the accuracy of the data generated.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **The Structure of Social Relations in the Tobacco Farming System in Ganti Village**

The research results show that the tobacco farming system in Ganti Village is not merely composed of production and distribution relationships, but also forms a relatively well-established and layered social structure. This structure involves three main actors: tobacco farmers, middlemen or receivers, and large cigarette companies. Each actor occupies a different social position and has unequal levels of resource control, thus forming a hierarchical social relationship. The following is a schematic of social relations within the tobacco farming industry:

Figure 1 The Production and Distribution Chain of Tobacco Industry in Ganti Village



The chart depicts the production and distribution chain of tobacco agricultural products, while also showing the socio-economic relations that are built between farmers and other actors in the tobacco agribusiness system, from upstream to downstream.

#### *Farmers as Upstream Actors*

At the very beginning, farmers play the primary role as producers. They carry out the entire tobacco cultivation process, from land preparation and planting to maintenance and harvesting. Their position in this chart demonstrates their primary source of economic value, as without their production, the entire distribution chain would be unable to function. However, despite their primary role, farmers generally have limited bargaining power, particularly in determining prices and market access.

#### *Production Results as a Transition Point*

After harvest, tobacco enters the production phase, which is a crucial transition point. At this stage, tobacco is no longer simply an agricultural commodity but begins to be positioned as an economic good ready for marketing. From this point, production can flow through several different distribution channels, depending on market conditions, social relationships, and farmer access.

#### *Middlemen/Sellers Route*

One of the main routes is through middlemen or "penadaks." In the diagram, this route connects production directly to the middlemen, who then proceed to large cigarette companies. The relationship between farmers and middlemen is generally asymmetrical and patron-client, with the middlemen not only serving as buyers but also often providing capital, loans, or production needs at the start of the planting season. This dependency often leaves farmers socially and economically tied, with the selling price of their crops largely determined by the middlemen.

#### *Warehouse as an Intermediary Institution*

The chart also shows warehouses as an alternative distribution channel. Warehouses serve as storage, drying, and quality classification locations for tobacco before further marketing. The presence of warehouses can provide negotiation space for farmers, especially if they don't sell their harvest directly. However, access to warehouses is often uneven and requires capital, information, and specific networks.

#### *Retail Traders*

Another route for production is through retailers. This route typically involves smaller-scale distribution and local markets. Retailers sell tobacco products in more limited quantities, both for direct consumption and further distribution. The role of retailers demonstrates market fragmentation, as not all tobacco production reaches large-scale industries.

### *Large Cigarette Companies as Powerful Downstream Actors*

In the diagram, large cigarette companies occupy strategic positions downstream of production, receiving supplies from middlemen. These companies wield strong control over quality standards, prices, and purchasing volumes, thus indirectly influencing production practices at the farmer level. Large cigarette companies possess the greatest economic and symbolic capital, as they control markets, brands, and access to a broad consumer base.

### *Consumers as the End Goal*

All distribution channels ultimately lead to consumers. Consumers receive tobacco products through both the large tobacco industry and retail channels. Interestingly, in this chart, consumers are at the end of the chain and relatively socially separated from farmers, even though they benefit from the fruits of their labor. This demonstrates the social and economic distance between producers and consumers within the tobacco industry system.

The tobacco production and distribution flowchart represents the tobacco industry as a socio-economic field characterized by unequal power relations between actors (Mariati et al., 2022). In this field, farmers, middlemen, warehouses, retailers, and large cigarette companies interact based on a set of implicit rules that govern market access, pricing, and quality standards. The structure of this field indicates that primary control rests with downstream actors, while farmers, as primary producers, occupy a relatively subordinate position in the value chain. (Arofah & Setiawan, 2022).

This unequal position is closely related to the distribution and conversion of capital, as Bourdieu argued. Large cigarette companies and middlemen possess advantages in economic and social capital, which enable them to control distribution flows and influence quality and pricing mechanisms (Mukti & Kusumo, 2022). Farmers, on the other hand, rely primarily on practical, inherited cultural capital, which has limited conversion power in an increasingly standardized market. This inequality narrows farmers' negotiating space and reinforces their dependence on intermediaries.

This unequal structure of the field gradually shapes the farmers' habitus, which is reflected in their daily economic practices. The pattern of selling crops through middlemen, accepting prices without bargaining, and a short-term orientation to maintain production continuity are expressions of this internalized habitus (Andrews, 2021). Within Bourdieu's framework, these practices are not simply the result of rational individual choices, but rather the product of the interaction between habitus, capital, and the structure of the field, which simultaneously reproduces the unequal position of farmers in the tobacco industry.

Furthermore, relations within the tobacco industry also contain a dimension of symbolic violence, where the dominance of powerful actors is accepted as something natural and objective. Quality standards and pricing mechanisms are perceived as the

result of market logic, even though they are determined by the interests of dominant actors (Reay, 2021). Thus, the chart not only illustrates the distribution flow of tobacco commodities, but also reveals the mechanisms of reproduction of power and socio-economic inequality that operate within the tobacco industry, as explained in Pierre Bourdieu's theory (Walker et al., 2023).

In everyday practice, tobacco farmers occupy the lowest position in this relationship structure. They serve as primary producers, providing tobacco raw materials, but they have limited access to capital, market information, and distribution networks. This situation prevents farmers from fully controlling their production, particularly regarding pricing and tobacco quality standards. Most farmers in Ganti Village sell their harvest through middlemen with whom they have long-standing relationships. Middlemen occupy an intermediate position in the social relationship structure of tobacco farming. They act as intermediaries between farmers and large cigarette companies, as well as actors controlling market access and pricing information. Middlemen not only purchase crops but also provide initial capital, lenders, and regulate tobacco distribution channels. This dual role gives middlemen strong social influence at the local level, both economically and symbolically.

Meanwhile, large cigarette companies occupy a leading position in the social relations structure of the tobacco farming system. They have the power to determine quality standards, grading systems, and tobacco prices. Although companies rarely interact directly with farmers, their decisions directly impact the economic well-being of farmers in Ganti Village. The relationship between cigarette companies and farmers is indirect and entirely mediated by middlemen. When viewed through Pierre Bourdieu's framework, this social relations structure can be understood as the tobacco farming field, a social space where various actors interact, compete, and negotiate using their capital. The tobacco farming field in Ganti Village is not neutral, but rather characterized by an unequal distribution of capital between actors.

Tobacco farmers generally have limited economic capital, consisting of small plots of land and production that is highly dependent on natural conditions. Farmers' social capital is also relatively limited to local networks among fellow farmers, with no direct access to broader markets. In this arena, these limited capital positions farmers weakly and vulnerable to the domination of other actors with greater capital. In contrast, middlemen possess a stronger combination of economic and social capital. Middlemen's economic capital is evident in their ability to provide advance financing, purchase harvests in bulk, and assume storage and distribution risks. Middlemen's social capital is reflected in their extensive network of relationships, both with farmers and with cigarette companies. Furthermore, middlemen also possess symbolic capital in the form of reputation, trust, and social legitimacy at the local level. This symbolic capital makes their position accepted and rarely questioned by farmers, even though the relationships they establish are unequal.

Large cigarette companies are the actors with the most comprehensive control of capital in the tobacco farming arena. Companies possess not only substantial economic capital but also symbolic capital in the form of industry authority and institutional legitimacy. The quality standards and grading systems established by companies are often accepted as unquestionable "rules of the game." Within Bourdieu's framework, cigarette companies serve as the dominant actors defining values and rules in the tobacco farming arena. Social relations between actors in this arena are relatively stable and recurring (Andrews, 2021). Farmers routinely sell their crops to the same middlemen, while the middlemen maintain relationships with specific cigarette companies. The stability of these relations indicates the reproduction of social structures, in which the positions of farmers, middlemen, and companies tend to remain constant over time. This reproduction does not occur through direct coercion, but rather through symbolic mechanisms and everyday practices accepted as "normal (Basnet, 2022)." In practice, farmers in Ganti Village tend to accept their position within these relations as part of a social reality that is not easily changed. This attitude can be understood as a form of farmer habitus, a system of dispositions formed from life experiences and recurring structural conditions. Farmer habitus shapes the view that relying on middlemen is a realistic and safe option, even if it is not always economically profitable.

This habitus also influences how farmers interpret their relationship with middlemen. Middlemen are not merely seen as those who control prices, but also as those who "help" farmers when they experience difficulties with capital or marketing. This view strengthens the middlemen's social legitimacy and minimizes the possibility of open resistance from farmers. In Bourdieu's terms, domination occurs symbolically, through the acceptance and internalization of the structure by the dominated party (Lunding et al., 2021). However, this social relational structure is not completely rigid. Research has found variations in position among farmers, depending on their capital holdings. Farmers with larger plots of land, better quality tobacco, or stronger social networks tend to have slightly greater bargaining power in negotiations with middlemen. However, these variations are not significant enough to alter the overall structure of the relationship.

Thus, the structure of social relations within the tobacco farming system in Ganti Village can be understood as an arena dominated by actors with significant capital, in which farmers are subordinated. This structure is reproduced through everyday economic practices, the farmers' habitus, and the symbolic legitimacy held by middlemen and large cigarette companies. This analysis demonstrates that social relations in tobacco farming are not simply economic relations, but rather part of a subtly and continuously operating power structure.

### **Farmer–Middleman Relations in the Framework of Embeddedness and Patron–Client**

The research findings indicate that the relationship between tobacco farmers and middlemen in Ganti Village cannot be understood solely as a sale and purchase of agricultural products. This relationship is built as a long-term, personal social relationship that is deeply embedded in the social life of the village community. Economic transactions between farmers and middlemen are always accompanied by a social dimension that influences how both parties interact, make decisions, and maintain the relationship. In practice, tobacco farmers in Ganti Village tend to sell their crops to the same middlemen season after season. This choice is rarely based on open price comparisons with other middlemen, but rather on considerations of trust and the comfort of the relationship. Middlemen who have worked with farmers for a long time are seen as "familiar," understand the farmers' conditions, and are considered more reliable in collecting harvests. This pattern indicates that the economic relationship between farmers and middlemen is embedded, as Granovetter argued, that is, embedded in a network of social relations that shape the actors' economic behavior.

The embeddedness of these relationships is evident in the lack of formal contracts in tobacco trading transactions. Agreements on price, quality, and payment terms are often made verbally and based on trust. This trust is not formed instantly, but rather through repeated interactions and shared experiences in dealing with agricultural risks, such as crop failure or price fluctuations. In this context, the farmer-middleman relationship becomes more than just a market relationship, but rather a social relationship containing elements of commitment and mutual expectations (Baker & Faulkner, 2009). However, embeddedness in the farmer-middleman relationship does not always bring equal benefits to both parties. Social embeddedness often limits farmers' economic choices. Farmers who have established social ties with a particular middleman tend to be reluctant to sell their crops to another party, even when there is the possibility of obtaining a better price. Reluctance, moral obligation, and fear of damaging long-term relationships are factors that influence farmers' decisions.

This embedded relationship also forms a patron-client relationship between farmers and middlemen. Middlemen occupy the position of patron with access to capital, market information, and distribution networks, while farmers are clients dependent on these resources. In many cases, middlemen provide assistance in the form of initial capital loans, the purchase of production inputs, or guarantees for the purchase of harvested crops (Kumi & Copestake, 2022). This assistance is not always accompanied by a written agreement, but has social consequences in the form of farmer loyalty to the middlemen. As James C. Scott argues, the patron-client relationship in rural areas is often understood as a reciprocal relationship based on moral values (Larsson et al., 2023). In the context of Ganti Village, farmers do not view the relationship with middlemen as entirely exploitative, but rather as one that provides a sense of security amidst economic

uncertainty. Middlemen are perceived as parties who "guarantee" that the harvest will be absorbed by the market, even though the price is not always profitable for farmers.

However, this patron-client relationship is asymmetrical. Middlemen have a stronger bargaining position in determining tobacco prices and quality standards. Farmers' dependence on middlemen severely limits their negotiation opportunities. Farmers tend to accept the prices set by middlemen as inevitable, especially when they have obligations to repay loans or fulfill existing social commitments.

This patron-client relationship is also reinforced by social dimensions beyond economic transactions. Middlemen often maintain personal ties with farmers, whether through kinship, geographic proximity, or social roles at the village level (Rivanisa, 2025). This closeness strengthens the middlemen's legitimacy as patrons and makes the relationships seem natural and appropriate. In such circumstances, middlemen's dominance is not always expressed openly but rather occurs subtly through social mechanisms accepted by farmers.

Embeddedness and patron-client relationships are interrelated in shaping farmer-middleman relations in Ganti Village. The embeddedness of economic relations within social networks makes patron-client relations stable and sustainable. At the same time, the patron-client structure deepens embeddedness, as economic dependence is reinforced by social and moral ties (Maifianti et al., 2021). The combination of these two frameworks explains why farmer-middleman relations tend to persist despite their inherent inequalities. However, this study also found variations in farmer-middleman relations. Farmers with greater production capacity or better quality tobacco have slightly more room for negotiation, even though they remain within the patron-client structure. This variation suggests that patron-client relations are not completely rigid, but are negotiated contextually according to the position and resources of each farmer (Agustina et al., 2024).

Overall, the farmer-middleman relationship in Ganti Village reflects how tobacco farming economic activity is embedded in complex and asymmetrical social relations. Embeddedness explains the embeddedness of economic transactions within social networks, while patron-client relationships explain the structures of dependency and the power imbalances that accompany them. This analysis emphasizes that the farmer-middleman relationship cannot be reduced to market relations alone, but rather is part of the rural social structure that shapes and is shaped by everyday economic practices.

### **The Role of Middlemen as Mediators between Farmers and Large Cigarette Companies**

The research results show that the relationship between tobacco farmers and large cigarette companies in Ganti Village is almost entirely indirect. Middlemen act as the primary mediators, bridging the interests of cigarette companies with tobacco production practices at the farmer level. In this system, middlemen serve not only as intermediaries for economic transactions but also as actors who transmit the company's standards,

rules, and market logic into the social lives of farmers. In practice, large cigarette companies establish tobacco quality standards, grading systems, and price ranges that serve as purchasing benchmarks. These standards are not communicated directly to farmers but are conveyed through middlemen. The middlemen then translate the company's standards into language and practices understandable to farmers, for example through visual assessments of leaf quality, dryness, or color. This process positions middlemen as key actors with symbolic authority to assess and determine the suitability of farmers' tobacco.

This mediator role gives middlemen a strategic position within the social relations structure of tobacco farming. Middlemen not only control tobacco distribution channels but also control the flow of information between farmers and companies. Information about price changes, tightening quality standards, or declining tobacco uptake is often perceived by farmers as "market decisions" without knowing the exact origins and process of their determination. This structural distance makes it difficult for farmers to seek clarification or negotiate directly with cigarette companies.

Within Pierre Bourdieu's framework, middlemen can be understood as actors possessing social and symbolic capital that enables them to occupy dominant positions in the tobacco farming arena (Andrews, 2021). Middlemen's social capital is reflected in their extensive network of relationships with farmers and cigarette companies, while symbolic capital emerges in the form of legitimacy as "market savvy" and "company representatives" at the local level. This symbolic capital makes middlemen's assessments of tobacco quality and price accepted as legitimate and rarely questioned. Meanwhile, large cigarette companies operate as dominant actors, defining the rules of the game in the arena, despite not being directly present in daily interactions. Corporate domination occurs invisibly through market standards and mechanisms internalized by middlemen and then passed on to farmers. Thus, the farmer-to-cigarette company relationship is a mediated power relationship, in which middlemen act as extensions of the companies in controlling the tobacco production and distribution process.

This situation strengthens the bargaining position of middlemen while simultaneously weakening the position of farmers. Farmers rely not only on middlemen as buyers but also as their sole source of information about the tobacco market. This dependence creates an increasingly layered and hierarchical social structure within tobacco farming, with middlemen serving as the primary link connecting the local arena with the national cigarette industry.

### **Patron-Client Farmer-Middleman Relations from the Perspective of Capital and Habitus (Bourdieu)**

The patron-client relationship between farmers and middlemen in Ganti Village can be understood not only as a relationship of economic dependence, but also as a social relationship formed and reproduced through the capital and habitus of the actors

involved. From Bourdieu's perspective, this relationship takes place within a specific social arena, where actors interact based on their capital and internalized dispositions.

Tobacco farmers generally have limited economic capital, both in terms of land ownership and access to formal financing sources. Farmers' social capital is also relatively limited to local networks among fellow farmers, with no direct links to larger market actors (Asrat & Simane, 2018). Under these conditions, farmers develop a *habitus* oriented toward security and sustainability, rather than profit maximization. This *habitus* is reflected in farmers' tendency to maintain relationships with the same middlemen, even if the prices received are not always optimal. In contrast, middlemen possess a stronger and more diverse combination of capital. Economic capital enables middlemen to provide loans or initial capital to farmers, while social capital allows them to forge relationships with cigarette companies and other market actors (Appau et al., 2019). Furthermore, middlemen also possess symbolic capital in the form of reputation, trust, and informal authority at the village level. This symbolic capital plays a crucial role in strengthening patron-client relations, as it makes middlemen's dominance accepted as normal and legitimate.

Farmers' *habitus*, formed through their experiences of living in economic uncertainty, makes the patron-client relationship perceived as a rational survival strategy. Farmers tend to interpret their dependence on middlemen not as a form of oppression, but rather as a reciprocal relationship that provides a sense of security. In Bourdieu's terms, domination occurs through symbolic mechanisms, where structures of inequality are internalized by those in subordinate positions. This patron-client relationship is also reproduced through seemingly simple daily practices, such as the habit of selling crops to certain middlemen, accepting prices without open negotiation, or relying on middlemen to deal with capital difficulties. These practices collectively reinforce the existing relational structure and make change difficult. The tobacco farming arena thus becomes a social space where structures of inequality are continuously reproduced.

However, this study also shows that patron-client relations are not entirely deterministic. Variations in capital ownership among farmers create different positions within the arena. Farmers with better quality tobacco or broader social networks have slightly more flexible *habitus* and greater room for negotiation, despite remaining within the patron-client structure. This suggests that the tobacco farming arena is dynamic, despite being dominated by actors with substantial capital.

Overall, the integration of the patron-client framework with Bourdieu's perspective allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the farmer-middleman relationship in Ganti Village. This relationship not only reflects economic dependency but also results from the unequal distribution of capital and historically formed *habitus*. Thus, the farmer-middleman relationship can be understood as a stable, layered social relationship reproduced through economic and symbolic practices in the tobacco farming arena.

## **Conclusion**

Based on an analysis of the tobacco production and distribution relationship chart, it can be concluded that the tobacco industry operates as a socio-economic arena characterized by unequal power relations between actors. Farmers, despite their role as primary producers, occupy a subordinate position in the value chain due to limited access to economic, social, and symbolic capital. Conversely, downstream actors, such as middlemen and large cigarette companies, have greater capacity to control market mechanisms, including pricing and quality standards.

From Pierre Bourdieu's perspective, this inequality is not only structural but also internalized through the formation of farmers' habitus. The practice of selling crops, which tends to rely on middlemen, reflects the internalization of unequal market rules, so that farmers' economic practices indirectly reproduce their own subordinate positions. This process demonstrates that economic relations in the tobacco industry cannot be understood solely as neutral market mechanisms, but rather as the result of the interaction between habitus, capital, and the structure of the market.

Furthermore, the sustainability of the tobacco distribution system is also supported by mechanisms of symbolic violence, where the dominance of powerful actors is accepted as normal and objective. Quality and price standards are perceived as representing market rationality, while in fact reflecting the interests of dominant actors in the market. Thus, this study emphasizes that efforts to improve the welfare of tobacco farmers require considering not only economic aspects but also the transformation of the market structure and the redistribution of capital, so that the resulting relationships do not continue to reproduce socio-economic inequality.

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