

Phatic, Patron-Client, and Convergent Interactions: Communication Structures Between Vegetable Farmers and Middlemen in Baturiti District Bali Indonesia

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Received 28-05-2024

Revised 30-05-2024

Accepted 24-06-2024

Published 26-06-2024



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Abstract

In rural regions, agricultural operations rely significantly on middlemen, who not only buy crops from farmers but also offer vital financial assistance. This multifaceted engagement fosters a sense of dependence among farmers, given the symbiotic social connection that proves difficult to dissolve. This study delves into the communication structuration between vegetable farmers and *tengkulak* (middlemen) within the Baturiti District, Bali, Indonesia, utilizing a critical communication methodology and collecting data via interviews, observations, and document analyses. The uncertainty of livelihood constantly shadows the lives of vegetable farmers in the Baturiti District. The income uncertainty of these farmers is explained as a product of the dynamic relationship between agents and structures that institutionalize social practices within the farming community. Based on this understanding, the forms of communication structuration between vegetable farmers and middlemen include phatic communication, patron-client relations, and convergent communication between farmers and middlemen. The findings from this study highlight the intricate social and economic dynamics between vegetable farmers and middlemen in a rural context. The relationship, while beneficial for both parties, inherently favors the middlemen who possess greater access to resources and knowledge

Keywords: Communication Structures, Convergen Interaction; vegetable farmer; middleman

Introduction

The process of capitalization, which permeates every aspect of society, has disproportionately burdened the poor, particularly those with minimal bargaining power. Farmers, as a part of this marginalized group, lack the means to advocate for their welfare in the public sphere. According to Jonathan (2012, p. 58), farmers with low incomes, working in the informal sector, are unable to keep up with rising living costs due to the continuous increase in the prices of basic necessities. An adage commonly heard in society claims, "become a

wealthy merchant, be a respected civil servant, and live peacefully as a farmer." This saying seems increasingly irrelevant today, as farmers' lives are far from peaceful and prosperous. Sastraatmadja (2006, p. 27) describes farmers as living in backwardness and dire conditions. Similar hardships are experienced by farmers and agricultural laborers in rural areas. Warty (2015, p. 20) asserts that while villagers should live prosperously, the reality is starkly different. Most rural residents, especially farmers and farm

laborers, remain impoverished and are depicted as economically and politically weak compared to local elites.

The poverty of farmers at the national level is an aggregate of the poverty experienced by farmers across various regions. For instance, vegetable farmers in Baturiti District, Tabanan, Bali, despite their hard work, have low incomes. The gap between their income and expenditure makes it difficult for these farmers to escape poverty. Monographic data from Baturiti District in 2021 indicates that 21,034 people work as farmers, while 2,536 households, or 17.23% of the population, are classified as poor (SDGs Data of Baturiti District, 2021).

The poverty experienced by vegetable farmers in Baturiti District is particularly paradoxical given the area's natural potential. Baturiti District, the only district in Tabanan Regency that develops the agritourism sector, boasts fertile soil, a cool climate, abundant water, and easy access via public transportation. The region's strategic location near famous tourist attractions, such as Beratan Lake, Ulun Danu Beratan Temple, Bedugul Botanical Garden, Buyan Lake, and Tamblingan Lake, highlights the stark contrast between high poverty rates and significant agritourism potential.

This situation is exacerbated by rising prices of necessities and living costs, forcing farmers to sell their produce at low prices to middlemen, as they lack direct market access. Meanwhile, middlemen profit from this practice, leading to better and more prosperous lives compared to the farmers. Suyanto (2016, pp. 30-34) notes that poverty affects not only farmers but also all individuals who lack income and capital. This condition is exploited by capital owners who engage in various hegemonic and monopolistic practices against the poor, creating a persistent poverty trap.

The dominance of middlemen degrades the mentality of farmers, leading to acute dependency. The financial assistance provided by middlemen weakens farmers' capacity to challenge the perceived unjust structure. Consequently, farmers accept oppression by the middlemen's capital

power as the most viable means of survival. Such exploitative practices contradict the principles of Cultural Studies, which advocate for equality and social justice. Farmers should be treated with dignity and fairness, not as individuals to be oppressed or deceived by deliberately constructed systems and conditions (Greg, 1997, p. 21). Empowering farmers must involve various aspects, not only economic and financial support but also enhancing their ability to negotiate and communicate effectively with middlemen.

Literature review:

Research examining the dynamics between farmers and middlemen has primarily focused on economic (Isnawati, 2017; Mahmudah, 2014; Syaifullah, 2016), cultural (Sutisna, 2015), poverty (Ubay, 2012), and agribusiness contexts (Yandi Aulia et al., 2020). Isnawati's (2017) study, titled "Inclusion of Vegetables in the Farm Veggieway Study in Ponggok District, Blitar Regency," outlines two distribution chains in vegetable trading. The first involves a sequence from farmers to middlemen, then wholesalers, retailers, and finally consumers. The second chain moves vegetables directly from farmers to middlemen, then to retailers, and ultimately to consumers, indicating a lengthy distribution process before products reach consumers.

Mahmudah (2014) suggests that farmers often operate as peasants, primarily striving to meet daily needs. Mahmudah notes the vulnerability of farmers, particularly small-scale ones heavily reliant on middlemen. Larger-scale farmers, with more bargaining power, tend to be less dependent on middlemen. Sutisna's (2015) historical analysis of vegetable middlemen highlights an entrepreneurial relationship between farmers and middlemen, echoing James Scott's patron-client theory. Middlemen, as significant capital owners, are portrayed as dominant in agriculture, with farmers occupying lower social positions due to middlemen's substantial influence.

Studies exploring the interaction between farmers and middlemen have examined various contexts, including economic, cultural, poverty, and

agribusiness settings. Isnawati's (2017) investigation into vegetable trading reveals two distribution chains, depicting the journey of produce from farmers to consumers through intermediary steps. Mahmudah (2014) characterizes farmers as often operating in a subsistence manner, especially those heavily reliant on middlemen, while Sutisna's (2015) historical analysis emphasizes an entrepreneurial dynamic between farmers and middlemen, highlighting the latter's dominance in agricultural affairs.

These studies offer valuable insights into understanding the communication dynamics between middlemen and vegetable farmers in Baturiti District. This research aims to delve into the role of middlemen in facilitating communication and marketing among farmers, which often leads to dependency. Situated in Baturiti District, where a majority rely on middlemen for selling agricultural produce, this study seeks to explore communication structuration and the roles of various actors and structures, a perspective less emphasized in previous studies that have predominantly focused on economic, cultural, poverty, and agribusiness aspects.

The concept of structuration, encompassing social structure and human interaction, is crucial in understanding how communication processes unfold. It emphasizes the role of interaction in shaping social institutions and individual behaviors. Vegetable farming is a primary occupation in Baturiti District, serving as a means of livelihood for many families. James C. Scott's classification of farmers into different categories underscores the varied socioeconomic statuses within the farming community, highlighting the complexity of their circumstances.

Middlemen, acting as intermediaries, play multifaceted roles in the agricultural market. They purchase produce from farmers at lower prices and sell them at higher prices, thereby generating significant profits. Serving as collectors, buyers, connectors, marketers, and creditors, middlemen

are integral to the marketing process, contributing to price stabilization. However, their profit-driven approach contrasts with the farmers' goal of securing income for their families rather than maximizing profits.

The theoretical concept of agents and structures within structuration theory synthesizes the tension between functional structuralism and phenomenological constructionism, which offer differing views on how societal structures form. At the core of this theoretical difference lies the role of humans as social actors in shaping social structures and their relationships. Anthony Giddens posits that social practices in society should be seen as the result of members' actions, not just mechanical processes. He introduces the concept of agency, where individuals continuously reflect on and shape social structures through their practices.

Structuration theory revolves around the notions of structure, system, and duality. Giddens distinguishes between social structures and systems, with systems comprising social practices or relations among actors produced over time and space. Structures have a virtual existence and recur during the production and reproduction of social systems. In this theory, agents or actors possess three levels of consciousness: unconscious motives, discursive consciousness, and practical consciousness.

Michel Foucault challenges traditional views of power, arguing that it exists within all social relations and is exercised rather than possessed. In Baturiti District, power dynamics between middlemen and farmers reflect this perspective, with middlemen exerting control over market access and pricing. Symbolic interactionism underscores the importance of meanings and symbols in social interactions. Farmers and middlemen engage in continuous interactions where trust, dependency, and bargaining play crucial roles, shaping their relationships and reinforcing socio-economic structures. Pierre Bourdieu's social practice theory emphasizes habitus, capital, and field. In Baturiti, farmers' habitus, shaped by agricultural practices and

reliance on middlemen, interacts with their limited capital within the agricultural field, perpetuating economic vulnerability.

In conclusion, the intricate relationship between middlemen and vegetable farmers in Baturiti District can be understood through Giddens' structuration theory, Foucault's power relations, symbolic interactionism, and Bourdieu's social practice theory. These frameworks illustrate how structural constraints, power dynamics, and social practices influence the economic realities and interactions of farmers and middlemen, necessitating changes in underlying social structures and power relations to address farmers' economic challenges.

Research Design:

This research adopts a qualitative and critically analytical approach typical of cultural studies to explore the structuration of communication between vegetable farmers and middlemen in the villages of Candikuning, Angseri, and Batunya. These villages were selected due to their substantial agricultural areas and a majority of the population engaging in vegetable farming, fostering significant interactions between farmers and middlemen. The qualitative methodology encompasses in-depth interviews, document collection, observation, and literature review, ensuring that data is articulated using the language and perspectives of the subjects involved.

Spanning a year, the research involves initial site exploration for preliminary information, followed by primary and secondary data collection and analysis. Data is categorized into qualitative and quantitative types, with qualitative data gathered through interviews and observations providing detailed descriptions of the research sites, including their history, geographical layout, and social structure. Complementing this, quantitative data offers statistical insights into population, land use, and education levels.

Key informants for the study include vegetable farmers, middlemen, ordinary villagers, agricultural extension officers, and village heads.

Farmers provide insights into their dependence on middlemen, while middlemen shed light on lending practices. Ordinary villagers share their perceptions of middlemen's practices, and agricultural officials discuss broader agricultural issues contributing to farmers' reliance on middlemen. Tools for data collection encompass questionnaires, voice recorders, cameras, and writing materials.

The analysis is grounded in structuration theory, power relations theory, and capital theory, with data continuously scrutinized throughout the research process to uncover interconnected elements. The final presentation of findings integrates informal narrative alongside formal formats such as charts, photos, and tables, aiming to elucidate meaningful patterns and facilitate informed conclusions and actionable insights.

This study introduces two notable innovations. Firstly, it delves into the pivotal role of communication in perpetuating the challenges faced by vegetable farmers in Baturiti, seeking to enhance their livelihoods. Secondly, it investigates the power dynamics between farmers and middlemen through an eclectic blend of communication theory and critical theories of structuration and power relations, commonly employed in cultural studies, providing a multifaceted understanding of the subject matter.

Result & Discussion:

Baturiti is a sub-district in the Tabanan Regency, Bali Province, Indonesia. The sub-district city center is approximately 40 km north of Tabanan City, with an altitude ranging from 465 to 2082 above sea level. Its position is strategic because it is the only sub-district in Tabanan whose tourist attractions and Agro-tourism economy are developing. The territorial boundaries of Baturiti District are bordered to the north by the Buleleng Regency, to the east and south by the Badung Regency, and to the west by the Penebel District and Marga District. Baturiti District is a fertile area that its residents use for agricultural activities and activities performed to produce vegetables. Vegetables are horticultural commodities grown on

agricultural land. The land is part of the natural landscape, which includes the physical environment, including climate, topography/relief, soil, hydrology, and natural vegetation conditions, all of which have the potential to influence land use. Candikuning Village, Angseri Village, and Batunya Village are villages that have extensive agricultural land compared to other villages in Baturiti District. Most of the population works as vegetable farmers. It has high potential as an agricultural village so that almost every plant planted by farmers in these three villages can grow well. In these three villages, there are still visible differences or economic gaps between vegetable farmers and middlemen, so these three villages have a high number of poor people compared to other villages in the Baturiti District.

This chapter discusses the various forms of communication structuration between vegetable farmers and middlemen. Based on field observations, the ongoing structuration process does not liberate the vegetable farmers from the trap of poverty. On the contrary, it perpetuates existing poverty. In other words, structures can also be constraining, leading to structural changes that do not empower but rather reproduce and sustain the poverty of vegetable farmers, making them even more destitute. As a result, the bargaining position of vegetable farmer vis-à-vis the middlemen is very weak.

The uncertainty of livelihood constantly shadows the lives of vegetable farmers in the Baturiti District. The income uncertainty of these farmers is explained as a product of the dynamic relationship between agents and structures that institutionalize social practices within the farming community.

Based on this understanding, the forms of communication structuration between vegetable farmers and middlemen include: (1) Phatic communication, (2) Patron-client relations, and (3) Convergent communication between farmers and middlemen. The explanation of each form of communication structuration between vegetable farmers and middlemen is as follows:

Phatic Communication between Vegetable Farmers and Middlemen

Based on field observations, the relationship between farmers and middlemen is established through a shared understanding of each role's meaning. This shared meaning is necessary to define the situational context as meanings are not intrinsic. This relationship is symbolic, built on mutual understanding of each role within social interactions. The social interaction between vegetable farmers and middlemen typically occurs during the marketing process.

Vegetable marketing encompasses all forms of economic activity predominantly dominated by local economic actors, particularly in traditional markets. The economic activities in vegetable marketing are forms of grassroots economy involving numerous individuals, thereby absorbing many into the marketing activities of vegetables. The grassroots economy is characterized by economic activities conducted by many people on a small scale (Krisnamurti, 2002, p. 89).

Field observations in the villages of Candikuning, Batunya, and Angseri reveal that interactions between middlemen and vegetable farmers occur through phatic communication. This type of communication tends to be intimate and serves to establish relationships, maintain connections, and express friendliness or social solidarity. The expressions used are typically fixed, such as greetings and inquiries about well-being and family.

An example of a conversation between a middleman and a farmer, as observed in the field, is as follows:

Middleman: "Ayo Bu Jegeg! Ini bawang pere Rp. 40.000/kg nggih."

Farmer: "Ten Ngidang Pak."

Middleman: "Serius Bu Jegeg?"

Farmer: "Inggih."

The above conversation occurs between a middleman and a similarly aged leek farmer. The phrase "Bu Jegeg" is commonly used to foster

familiarity with someone. It serves as a form of address, where the middleman offers a price for the harvested produce.

Field observations also indicate that phatic communication can be non-verbal. Common non-verbal phatic communications include greetings accompanied by handshakes, patting a colleague on the back, making eye contact, raising eyebrows when passing by, waving hands, or simply smiling when meeting face-to-face. According to interviews and theoretical frameworks used, another role of phatic communication is to create a sense of pleasure through small talk, which can foster closeness in interpersonal communication. As conveyed by a middleman informant in Candikuning Village, I Made Budiana, he stated: "When I want to know if a vegetable farmer needs capital or assistance, I always engage in conversation with them, showing enthusiasm in my voice, and of course using polite words accompanied by body language" (Interview, May 8, 2023).

Social actions are undertaken based on the ability to respond to the environment to meet desired needs. In other words, social actions aim to obtain expected rewards. Additionally, it is stated that individuals occupy a position (status) and act (role) according to the norms or regulations established by the system. Roles are reciprocal, meaning they entail mutual expectations. When viewed in terms of an individual's role and status in society, Narwoko et al. (2004, pp. 138-139) assert that a person's role and status are supporting elements of social stratification, where the role is the dynamic aspect of status.

An individual who has fulfilled their rights and obligations according to their status has performed a role; the two are inseparable because they are interdependent (no role exists without status, and no status exists without a role). A person's position or place in society (social position) is a static element that indicates their place within the social organization. Social stratification in society is significant for the development of the social system, where the social system in society

comprises patterns that regulate reciprocal relationships among individuals and their behavior according to their societal roles, thus achieving a complementary situation or condition.

In addition to the functioning of values and norms in society, Narwoko and Bagong Suyanto (2004, p. 242) state that a belief system, symbolic system, and shared value orientation standards enable smooth social relationships, interactions, and processes. This aligns with the view of the Head of Candikuning Village, Made Mudita, who stated:

"Through an extensive communication process, values and norms as part of the culture are built within the context of relationships between vegetable farmers and middlemen. This set of values and norms forms a fundamental basis for individuals to determine their attitudes toward their environment, establishing interaction standards passed down from generation to generation" (Interview, July 18, 2023).

The informant's opinion is consistent with Mulyana's (2004, p. 4) statement regarding the use of language as a medium of communication. Mulyana suggests that communication allows individuals to construct a frame of reference, which can be used as a guide to interpret any situation they encounter (social communication).

Patron-Client Relationship between Vegetable Farmers and Middlemen

Generally, patron-client relationships intensify in communities facing complex social issues and economic resource scarcity. According to Scott (1993, p. 7), the patron-client relationship involves an exchange between two roles, characterized as a special case of a dyadic bond that primarily involves instrumental friendship. In this relationship, an individual with higher socioeconomic status (the patron) uses their influence and resources to provide protection and benefits to a person with lower status (the client).

The term "patron" originates from "paronust," meaning "noble," while "client" comes from "clien," meaning "follower." The patron-client relationship begins with the provision of goods or

services in various forms essential to one party, who, in return, is obligated to reciprocate (Scott, 2018). This relationship is largely instrumental, where the patron, with higher social and economic standing, uses their resources and influence to offer protection or advantages to the client, who reciprocates by offering general support and assistance, including personal services to the patron.

Such exchanges create a complex and enduring bond, typically dissolving only in the long term (Imaniar and Trisnu, 2020). Patron-client ties are based on unequal exchanges and are not founded on ascriptive criteria. The characteristics of patron-client relationships include:

1. Unequal possession of economic resources.
2. Reciprocity, entailing mutual benefit through give-and-take, albeit in unequal measures.
3. Loyalty, involving fidelity or obedience.
4. Personal relationships, which are direct and intensive, often extending beyond mere profit motives to include emotional elements present in personal relationships.

The economic system, including livelihoods, encompasses concepts, plans, policies, customs related to the economy, and actions and patterned interactions among producers, agents, traders, transport experts, retailers, and consumers (Koentjaraningrat, 2009, p. 165). Economic relationships often involve reciprocal interactions, such as those between producers and agents, typically manifesting as patron-client relationships.

Field observations reveal that there are no formal cooperation agreements between patrons and clients, yet both parties share common interests. The patron role is typically played by large capital owners, known as bosses or taukes, such as landowning farmers, vegetable-collecting middlemen, and wealthy individuals who can easily provide aid to vegetable farmers and their families without conditions or guarantees, fostering a lasting cooperation. The client role is naturally played by laboring vegetable farmers who lack

capital or access to capital for farming activities. This aligns with Usman's (2004, p. 87) assertion that "a patron is someone with power, status, authority, and influence, while a client is the subordinate to the patron."

As expressed by an informant from Angseri Village, I Gusti Ngr Nyoman Kartika: "When selling these vegetables, I go to my regular middleman because they offer the best prices. However, consistently delivering to them is not guaranteed because different middlemen offer different prices. If we find their prices unsatisfactory or hear from others that another middleman offers better prices, we will go to them instead. Usually, we do this discreetly to avoid being seen by our regular middleman" (Interview, July 19, 2023).

The patron-client relationship develops when the patron and client have a long-standing and close connection. This relationship extends beyond mere business interactions and often involves personal and household matters of the vegetable farmers. As described by an informant from Batunya Village, Ni Ketut Mesir "I have borrowed money for my child's wedding, to help pay off long-standing debts, and several times to cover school expenses" (Interview, May 29, 2023).

The informant's statement illustrates that poor economic conditions often compel vegetable farmers to borrow money and essential goods from patrons or middlemen. Consequently, the farmers become indebted and tied to these patrons or middlemen. This aligns with the flow from patron to client identified by James Scott, which is relevant to the lives of farmers as follows: Providing steady employment or land for cultivation, patrons ensure their clients' basic subsistence by absorbing losses from agricultural problems (such as crop failure) that could disrupt the clients' livelihoods, patrons offer protection against external threats, patrons use their power not only to protect their clients but also to extract benefits or rewards from them in return for their protection, and patrons as a group can collectively perform economic functions, such as managing

various forms of aid for their clients. In essence, the economic hardships faced by vegetable farmers often lead to a dependency on patrons for financial and material support, creating a binding and multifaceted relationship.

Convergent Communication between Vegetable Farmers and Middlemen

The genealogy of power in the discourse of communication structuration between middlemen and vegetable farmers is evident in the power relations within the discourse of poverty. According to Foucault (Beilharz, 2005, p. 189), the task of the genealogy of power is to analyze the lineage of knowledge. In this context, the knowledge about communication structuration is presented within the context of poverty, which itself has long been a battleground for power struggles. Giddens (Beilharz, 2005, p. 196) mentions that power is a logical component of action. An action is understood as the ability to create a difference based on unequal access to resources, which forms the basis of power relations.

The societal structure in Baturiti District is highly pluralistic, forming a system and cultural values that are an amalgamation of the cultures of the various components that make up its society. Living in groups is not only a traditional practice passed down among middlemen but also has ideological reasons aimed at mutual help and care during difficult times.

This aligns with the views of an informant, a middleman from Candikuning Village, I Made Budiana, who stated, "Within the group of middlemen, there is an informal leader trusted by the group members, for example, to make decisions to maintain a harmonious life or solidarity" (Interview, July 17, 2023).

Based on the insights from middleman informants from Candikuning Village, as shown in Figure 5.11, there has been a paradigm shift with the presence of informal leaders aimed at maintaining harmony in the current era of information openness. This can be interpreted as a community-

based approach aimed at achieving societal welfare, which aligns with the convergence (diversity) paradigm or what is known in communication as the participatory paradigm.

According to Roger & Kincaid (1981, p. 79), convergent communication is dialogical communication where individuals share information with one another on an equal footing to achieve mutual understanding and agreement, ultimately reaching the communication goals involving direct community participation. Additionally, sociologist J.D. Halloran states that communication occurs within a social matrix where situations give rise to, develop, and sustain communication.

According to these experts, mass communicators, as key figures within social networks, respond to various pressures by rejecting or selecting information within the relevant social system. This perspective is echoed by the Head of Angseri Village, I Nyoman Warnata, who states, "In the group of middlemen, they act as message conveyors with a political nuance, playing the most significant social role, usually to create public opinion" (Interview, July 17, 2023).

Field findings show that middlemen, as opinion leaders, possess a high level of knowledge, motivation, and actively utilize technology, such as the internet, to maximize up-to-date information on local vegetable prices. Additionally, these middleman group leaders or opinion leaders succeed in creating public opinion by initially proposing ideas that are rejected but eventually accepted by the public. Opinion leaders within the middleman group also function as political leaders.

Nimmo's definition of a group leader (2001, p. 211) is that 1) a group leader performs a set of group functions necessary for the group to behave effectively and meet the needs of its members, 2) a group leader is an individual who consistently exerts more influence than others in performing group functions, 3) a group leader is a member of the community who holds a position that allows them to express opinions on issues to others, 4) a leader is a specific person in the group responsible

for directing and coordinating group activities related to tasks, and 5) leadership is a group process.

According to expert opinions, this aligns with field observations where middleman leaders influence through personality, the art of requesting willingness, the use of influence, persuasion, achieving goals, interaction, and structuring within groups. This is supported by the Head of Batunya Village, I Made Riasa, who states, "The communication patterns controlled by middlemen, when viewed from the socio-cultural life of rural vegetable farmers, make it difficult for them to rise from poverty" (Interview, May 19, 2023). This informant's opinion aligns with Razali's statement (2004, p. 25) that poverty seems to be a trademark of vegetable farmers.

A specific finding in this study is the activeness of middlemen as opinion leaders, from gathering information to disseminating it to vegetable farmers. Despite the varying educational levels of these opinion leaders, ranging from junior high school to high school graduates, they effectively influence vegetable farmers, thereby trapping them further in poverty.

The poverty of vegetable farmers is closely linked to the dynamics of the relationship or communication patterns between middlemen and vegetable farmers in terms of buying and selling, which do not always proceed smoothly. This is influenced by middlemen purchasing at significantly lower prices than market rates.

The specific findings from this study reveal that both vegetable farmers and middlemen adopt distinct attitudes to ensure their social relationships remain harmonious. The goal of strengthening these relationships is to secure profits for both parties. Over time, the relationship between farmers and middlemen becomes increasingly binding. To maintain the longevity of this relationship, middlemen employ strategies to keep farmers engaged, such as persuading them to continue working together. Middlemen strive to maintain communication and relationships with farmers to make them feel comfortable and

confident about borrowing money or funds from them. This effort is a part of middlemen's strategies to sustain their social relationships with farmers.

From the reduction of field data, it was interpreted that vegetable farmers reproduce the lower class within the communication structure. This occurs because communication and technology access are still dominated by the middlemen. In the communication structure, farmers reproduce the dominance and legitimacy of the middlemen, who are considered more skilled in marketing the harvests due to the farmers' perceived lack of knowledge. Moreover, the means of agricultural production, such as machinery, fertilizers, seeds, and other resources, are controlled by the middlemen.

This control limits the farmers' access to higher income from selling their produce. The dominance of the lower class in farming and the biased access to agricultural tools lead to communication interactions within the power process that are constrained for the farmers. This is evident as informants were compelled to rely on middlemen to manage their vegetable fields, even though this prevents them from maximizing their profits.

The social order or communication structure is biased in the management of agricultural land because marketing is controlled by middlemen, and the income is limited due to the control of agricultural tools such as machinery, fertilizers, and seeds. A concrete solution to address the issues identified in this study is to create a symmetrical communication structure between vegetable farmers and middlemen. This involves eliminating the perception that farmers are weak and belong to the lower class.

Conclusion:

The findings from this study highlight the intricate social and economic dynamics between vegetable farmers and middlemen in a rural context. The relationship, while beneficial for both parties, inherently favors the middlemen who possess greater access to resources and knowledge. This imbalance perpetuates a cycle where farmers

remain dependent on middlemen for financial support and market access, thereby reinforcing their lower socioeconomic status. The study suggests that addressing these issues requires creating a more symmetrical communication structure, where farmers are empowered with equal access to resources and opportunities, thereby breaking the cycle of dependency and fostering a more equitable agricultural economy. This involves challenging the prevailing perceptions of farmers' capabilities and ensuring they have the tools and knowledge to compete fairly in the market.

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