



e-ISSN 3026-3468

p-ISSN 3026-2593

**Article info**

Received manuscript:

31/08/2023

Final revision:

25/09/2023

Approved:

26/09/2023

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license**SOCIAL NETWORKS IN THE VEGETABLE  
AGRIBUSINESS SYSTEM: THE ROLE OF SOCIAL  
EXCHANGE IN SHAPING SUSTAINABLE  
PARTNERSHIPS****Puput Safiteri<sup>1\*</sup>, Elsina Titaley<sup>1</sup>, Fransina Matakena<sup>1</sup>**<sup>1</sup>Universitas Pattimura, Jalan Ir. M. Putuhena, Ambon 97233,  
Indonesia\*Correspondence E-Mail: [puputsafiteri@gmail.com](mailto:puputsafiteri@gmail.com)DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30598/baileofisipvol1iss1pp53-66>**ABSTRACT**

*This study aims to explore the role of social exchange in shaping sustainable partnerships between vegetable farmers and customers within the agribusiness system in Wayari Hamlet. Using a qualitative approach and in-depth interview methods, this study identifies two main dimensions in the social relations of vegetable agribusiness: the associative dimension, which reflects cooperation, and the dissociative dimension, which reflects the potential for conflict or tension within relationships. The findings show that social exchange, in the form of mutual commitment between farmers and customers, serves as the main foundation for creating mutually beneficial relationships. Farmers provide high-quality and consistent products, while customers offer financial support and long-term loyalty. This relationship not only enhances the economic stability of the farmers but also strengthens social bonds within the community. The novelty of this study lies in its revelation of how social exchange, rather than merely market mechanisms, can serve as an effective strategy to build sustainable agribusiness partnerships. These findings provide significant contributions to the development of social sciences and the humanities, particularly in understanding the dynamics of social relations within community-based local economies. This study recommends the integration of social exchange principles in the design of sustainable agribusiness models and in community-based agricultural development policies.*

**Keywords:** Social Exchange, Social Networks, Social Relations, Sustainable Partnerships, Vegetable Agribusiness

**INTRODUCTION**

Vegetable farming and agribusiness play a central role in meeting the rising global demand for food. Indonesia, as one of the countries experiencing significant population growth, faces a major challenge in ensuring an adequate food supply for its citizens (Puspaningrum et al., 2023). Amidst these challenges, vegetable agribusiness has become one of the strategic options to maintain food security and support the livelihoods of farmers in rural areas (An'amillah et al., 2023; Gandi et al., 2017). One key aspect in sustaining vegetable agribusiness is the establishment of solid partnerships between vegetable farmers and customers (Ikeda & Natawidjaja, 2022; Tort et al., 2022). Strong partnerships not only positively impact the continuity of farming businesses but also benefit customers through access to high-quality products (Harlina

et al., 2018; Mukti & Kusumo, 2022). In Hatusua Village, Maluku, where vegetable farming is the primary livelihood for most residents, the relationship between farmers and customers is particularly relevant.

In this context, the role of social exchange in shaping sustainable partnerships emerges as an important element that requires further investigation. Social exchange encompasses aspects such as interaction, dependency, cooperation, and competition between farmers and customers (Mighfar, 2015; Muttaqien, 2023; Sari, 2018). Although previous studies have identified the significance of social exchange in agribusiness, research focusing on vegetable agribusiness and its social networks in Hatusua Village, Maluku, remains very limited.

Issues concerning social networks in the vegetable agribusiness system generally show certain characteristics. Many of these studies tend to be more general in nature, focusing on agriculture as a whole without differentiating specific crops or agricultural commodities (Mighfar, 2015; Mukti & Kusumo, 2022; Tambunan et al., 2018). This implies that vegetable agribusiness may not have received special attention in previous research (Harlina et al., 2018). In addition, some earlier studies have acknowledged the importance of social exchange in the agricultural context (Mwema et al., 2018; Purnaningsih, 2007). This social exchange involves interactions between farmers and customers, the degree of dependency between them, as well as collaboration within the agribusiness supply chain (Wiśniewska-Paluszak & Paluszak, 2018, 2019). Moreover, previous studies often use interdisciplinary approaches that include economic, sociological, anthropological, and environmental aspects (Ituma-Aleke & Egwu, 2014; Maiellaro et al., 2022; Mwema et al., 2019). This reflects the complexity of social networks in agricultural agribusiness. Some studies also describe the geographic and cultural contexts under investigation, involving rural, urban, or other regions in Indonesia or other countries, each with its own unique characteristics (Marwan & Isnaeni, 2022; Tambunan et al., 2018). Meanwhile, earlier research has identified various benefits of social networks in the agribusiness system, including improving farmer welfare, increasing customer access to quality products, and contributing to food security (Liang et al., 2022; Mwema et al., 2019).

Although earlier studies have contributed valuable insights into social networks in agricultural agribusiness (Ituma-Aleke & Egwu, 2014), this research has significant differences. This study specifically identifies vegetable agribusiness as its main focus, distinguishing it from more general research on agriculture. Moreover, it emphasizes the role of social exchange in shaping sustainable partnerships, which may not have received special attention in previous research. With a deeper understanding of the dynamics of social networks in vegetable agribusiness in Hatusua Village, Maluku, this study has the potential to fill those gaps and provide more specific and relevant insights into this topic.

Furthermore, the influence of the local context of Hatusua Village, Maluku, on the dynamics of social exchange in vegetable agribusiness is one of the key aspects revealed in this study. Local contexts such as culture and geography can influence interactions between farmers and customers, and previous studies may not have explicitly considered these influences.

Therefore, this study also helps to fill the gap in understanding how local context affects social exchange in vegetable agribusiness. By addressing these gaps, this study is expected to provide new, relevant, and contextual insights into the role of social exchange in forming sustainable partnerships in vegetable agribusiness in Hatusua Village and potentially in similar contexts throughout Indonesia.

Hence, this study holds important significance. Through a deeper understanding of the role of social exchange in shaping sustainable partnerships between vegetable farmers and customers, we can identify strategies that can enhance farmers' productivity and welfare as well as improve public access to quality vegetable products. The findings of this study are expected to provide practical guidance for the development of sustainable vegetable agribusiness, contribute to improving the quality of life for local communities, and support food security at the regional level.

## RESEARCH METHOD

The research approach used in this study is qualitative, focusing on in-depth understanding of the role of social exchange in shaping sustainable partnerships between vegetable farmers and customers in Wayari Hamlet, Hatusua Village, Kairatu District, West Seram Regency, Maluku. This approach was chosen because it is suitable for exploring social contexts and complex dynamics within vegetable agribusiness (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The research location, Wayari Hamlet, was selected due to its significant role in vegetable production in the area and the unique social dynamics that influence social networks in vegetable agribusiness. The research subjects consisted of two main groups: vegetable farmers and customers. Subject selection employed purposive sampling with criteria of significant experience in vegetable agribusiness.

Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews with research subjects, participatory field observation to understand interaction dynamics, and analysis of documents related to vegetable agribusiness in Wayari Hamlet. The collected data was analyzed using a thematic analysis approach, in which the data was transcribed, coded, and categorized into relevant themes. In addition, research ethics were maintained by obtaining consent and approval from research subjects, ensuring data confidentiality, and making sure that the study does not harm the research subjects or the local community. Through this method, the study aims to provide in-depth insights into the critical role of social exchange in vegetable agribusiness at a specific research site, potentially yielding benefits for the development of sustainable agribusiness and the welfare of the local community.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### From Refuge to Farmland: The History of Vegetable Farmers in Wayari Hamlet

The presence of vegetable farmers in Wayari Hamlet has deep roots, shaped by a web of interrelated factors. To begin with, their presence dates back many years, with some farmers having settled there for 7–10 years. Initially, they were drawn to the area after hearing from others who were interested in cultivating land and growing crops in Wayari. Interestingly, according to several informants, Wayari Hamlet was once a place of refuge for people from Bacan Island, North Maluku. Over time, some chose to stay and settle permanently, while others returned to their place of origin.

Insights from farming families reveal that their continued presence is influenced by promising agricultural opportunities in Wayari. The availability of expansive and relatively affordable farmland, coupled with the potential for high income through vegetable sales, has motivated them to remain and cultivate the land. Field observations revealed that Wayari's vegetable farmers are diligent and consistent in their work, engaging in agricultural activities from Monday to Saturday, between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. Their routine includes various stages such as planting, watering, and harvesting.

Additionally, these farmers have invested in land and home construction as a form of future savings. All these aspects have contributed to a social reality marked by primary social contact, reflected in strong interpersonal interactions among fellow vegetable farmers. This social bond is reinforced by ongoing cooperation and coordination, establishing a form of mechanical solidarity that has become inseparable from their daily lives. Thus, the existence of vegetable farmers in Wayari represents not only agricultural activity but also a deeply rooted and sustained social connection built through time and hard work.

This reality shows that the farmers' presence is not driven solely by economic necessity but also by strong social and cultural elements within the community. Their decision to settle and commit to farming has forged close social networks and sustainable partnerships. Moreover, social exchange plays a key role in sharing information and experiences among farmers. The agricultural practices of long-established farmers in Wayari have served as models and sources of inspiration for newcomers. These social exchanges foster strong relationships and mutual influence (Cofré-Bravo et al., 2019; Lai et al., 2020). They also allow for the collective learning of skills and knowledge, which contributes to more efficient and sustainable farming.

In this context, it is essential to understand that vegetable farming in Wayari is not merely an individual occupation, but an integral part of a larger social system. The social relationships forged in this context not only benefit the farmers themselves but also have a positive impact on the local community as a whole (Richter, 2019; Rivera et al., 2019). Furthermore, statements from the Raja of Hatusua and the Head of Wayari Hamlet provide valuable insights into the long-standing history and positive impacts of vegetable farmers in the region. According to both informants, these farmers have been part of Wayari's landscape for a long time, indicating the sustained nature of agricultural activity in the area.

The significance of these farmers is also reflected in their economic contributions. Their farming activities—planting, maintaining, and harvesting crops—not only meet their own needs but also provide job opportunities and economic prospects for the local population. The profits are reinvested in farmland and agricultural equipment, creating a positive cycle of economic activity within the community.

Beyond the farmers and customers, local government support also plays a vital role in the sustainability of farming in Wayari. The provision of vegetable seeds and farming tools demonstrates the village government's commitment to supporting local agriculture and improving community welfare. With this collaboration among farmers, the local community, and the government, the vegetable farmers of Wayari represent not only local food security but also a successful model of economic cooperation.

The arrival and decision of vegetable farmers to settle in Wayari were largely influenced by information shared among fellow farmers. These exchanges opened their eyes to the opportunities available, encouraging them to cultivate the land. Their success is also attributed to their skills and continuous development of agricultural expertise. Their persistent commitment has yielded satisfying profits, which they have used not only to build homes but also to fulfill other life necessities. In other words, agricultural success in Wayari has not only provided tangible profits but also significantly improved the farmers' and their families' well-being, highlighting the vital role of these farmers in the social and economic life of Wayari Hamlet.

### **Social Relations Between Vegetable Farmers and Customers in Wayari Hamlet**

Humans are destined to be both individual beings and social beings. As individuals, humans strive to fulfill all their needs for survival. As social beings, in the course of building their lives, humans always engage in relationships involving two or more people with specific goals. Social relationships are dynamic social interactions that involve relationships between individuals, between groups, or between individuals and groups.

Social relations or social relationships refer to connections between individuals, between individuals and groups, and between groups in daily life. Any activity or routine conducted by humans will naturally influence one another. The relationships within social interactions are reciprocal in nature, where one individual affects and is affected by another. They are considered systematic because they occur regularly and repeatedly with the same pattern. Based on this definition, social relations are essentially the same as social interaction. Social interaction can be defined as dynamic social relations—relationships that can occur between one individual and another, or between a group and an individual.

This is reflected in the social relations established between vegetable farmers and customers in Wayari Hamlet, where such relations have long existed through the intensive activities and interactions carried out by both parties. As a result, they have developed a mutually dependent relationship—farmers need customers to distribute their vegetables, and conversely, customers also need the farmers' produce to resell or consume personally.

The close relationship between vegetable farmers and customers in Wayari Hamlet is one of the key aspects in sustaining the vegetable agribusiness in the area. The presence of this solid relationship is well illustrated through the ongoing cooperation and coordination between both parties. Both farmers and customers play complementary roles in the vegetable agribusiness ecosystem.

The interdependence between farmers and customers forms the basis of this relationship, which is rooted in active social exchange. Vegetable farmers rely on customers to distribute their harvest, and conversely, customers need a supply of quality vegetables from farmers to resell or for their own needs. This creates a mutually beneficial cycle where both depend on each other to achieve their goals in vegetable agribusiness. A concrete example of this cooperation is the practice of working together to transport the harvest. Farmers and customers collaborate to ensure the produce arrives safely at the selling point. This reflects the collective spirit and cooperation that has become an integral part of their daily lives. In this context, good coordination and joint efforts are essential foundations for maintaining the social relationship that has been built over the years.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the intense and consistent activities between farmers and customers have created a strong bond between them. This relationship goes beyond just a working relationship and has developed into something deeper. Farmers and customers have become more than just business partners; they have become part of a supportive community. A statement from KW, a customer in Wayari, reflects the importance of this relationship. He stated that his relationship with the farmers runs smoothly and that they help each other. When farmers need help acquiring seeds or medicine, they know they can rely on customers like Mr. Kuat. This shows that the relationship between farmers and customers has moved beyond business transactions and has become one based on trust and mutual dependence.

Likewise, JN also shared a similar experience, describing his relationship with the vegetable farmers in Wayari as very close. He even considers them like family, and the openness in helping one another is part of the established relationship. This affirms that the social relations in Wayari Hamlet are not just business ties, but strong emotional bonds that create a supportive and comfortable environment for all parties involved. In order to understand more deeply the important role of social exchange in the relationship between vegetable farmers and customers in Wayari Hamlet, this study will continue to explore the dynamics and impacts on various aspects of local community life.

Furthermore, it is important to explain that the close social relations between vegetable farmers and customers in Wayari Hamlet are not only about individual relationships. They also have a positive impact on the broader community level. The presence of solid cooperation and growing solidarity between farmers and customers positively affects the local economy and community welfare. One of the most visible outcomes of this relationship is the improved quality of vegetables provided by the farmers. With loyal customers, farmers are incentivized to



maintain and enhance the quality of their harvest. This results in fresher, higher-quality vegetables that are more attractive to customers. This higher quality also allows customers to sell the products at better prices, benefiting both parties. Moreover, the social network that has formed also helps in addressing challenges and opportunities in the vegetable agribusiness. Farmers and customers share information about weather changes, plant diseases, or effective marketing strategies. This helps them to be better prepared in facing environmental and market changes, creating greater resilience in agricultural business.

Additionally, strong social relationships also create a sense of togetherness in Wayari Hamlet. Farmers and customers are not only business partners but also part of a larger community. They help each other in daily life, both in agricultural matters and other needs. This creates a harmonious atmosphere in Wayari Hamlet and strengthens the community's pride in their agricultural heritage.

The social relationships established between vegetable farmers and customers in Wayari Hamlet continue to thrive, reflecting a bond that goes beyond mere business transactions. In daily activities, there is a strong sense of mutual understanding between them. They understand each other's needs and challenges, creating a harmonious and collaborative working environment. Furthermore, the cooperation established is not based solely on self-interest or business concerns. The relationship has grown into more than a working partnership; farmers and customers feel like family to one another. They feel they have become inseparable parts of each other's lives, with a sense of belonging and concern for each other's well-being.

The importance of this relationship is reflected in the fact that their cooperation does not end when one party achieves their goal. Instead, they continue to build cooperation in every aspect of their lives, both in the agricultural context and beyond. In this case, the established relationship also reflects the existence of significant social capital, which consists of two key concepts: trust and dependence. Trust is a key element in the social exchange relationship between vegetable farmers and customers. It is an important foundation for building a strong and sustainable relationship. Trust creates a relational quality dimension in the relationship, where both parties feel comfortable and confident with one another. This provides the basis for ongoing and productive cooperation.

Furthermore, dependence is also an important element in this relationship. Dependence occurs when vegetable farmers need resources or support from customers, and vice versa. This creates mutual dependence in which both rely on the resources possessed by the other party. In the agricultural context, this dependence creates a positive cycle in which customers support farming through their purchases, while vegetable farmers continue to supply high-quality products.

### **Social Networks Between Farmers, Traders, and Customers in Wayari Hamlet**

The social networks connecting farmers, traders, and customers in Wayari Hamlet, Maluku, serve as a crucial element in sustaining the local vegetable agribusiness ecosystem.

Farmers play a central role in the production cycle. They are not only producers of high-quality vegetables but also custodians of vital agricultural resources such as land and equipment. Their knowledge and expertise in cultivation, passed down through generations, position them as key actors in ensuring the continuity of agricultural endeavors.

On the other hand, traders or aggregators act as intermediaries between farmers and customers. With an in-depth understanding of market dynamics and consumer demand, they are able to efficiently distribute agricultural products to various destinations through their extensive networks. The collaboration between farmers and traders ensures a steady supply chain, allowing products to reach customers in fresh condition.

Customers, as end consumers, play an equally important role in maintaining demand for local vegetable products. By purchasing these goods, they provide economic incentives for both farmers and traders to continue producing and distributing high-quality vegetables. In this sense, customers are not merely buyers, but contributors to the overall sustainability of the agribusiness system.

The interdependence among these three entities reinforces their relationships. Farmers need traders to bring their products to market, while traders rely on farmers to supply their inventory. Customers drive this cycle through their purchasing behavior. Beyond the significant economic benefits, these social networks also have a positive impact on the local community by generating employment, helping to address economic challenges, and promoting local economic growth. Moreover, these interactions foster a sense of togetherness and solidarity within Wayari Hamlet.

A deeper understanding of the dynamics and impact of these social networks can offer valuable insights for the development of sustainable business models in agriculture and other local sectors. This is a critical step toward ensuring a reliable food supply and enhancing the well-being of the local community in Wayari Hamlet.

Within the vegetable agribusiness ecosystem in Wayari Hamlet, Maluku, social networks function as the core connective tissue among farmers, traders, and customers. Farmers hold a central position in the vegetable production process. They are not only producers but also guardians of essential agricultural assets, including land and tools. Their knowledge and farming skills are valuable assets in sustaining agriculture in the region.

Meanwhile, traders or aggregators serve as intermediaries between farmers and customers. They purchase vegetables from farmers and manage the distribution to various markets or retailers. Thanks to their broad business networks, traders ensure that farmers' products reach markets efficiently. Customers, as final consumers, help sustain demand for local vegetable products. Their support through continuous purchasing not only fosters agribusiness sustainability but also provides economic motivation for farmers and traders to keep producing and delivering high-quality goods.

This interdependence creates a flow of vital information, sustainable product exchange, and stability in supply and demand. In addition to considerable economic advantages, these



social networks generate positive outcomes for the local community: job creation, economic resilience, and promotion of local development. They also nurture a strong sense of community and social cohesion in Wayari Hamlet. An in-depth understanding of the dynamics and effects of these networks will offer valuable input for the formulation of sustainable business models in agriculture and other local industries.

### **Community Well-being as a Product of Social Exchange**

The ongoing practice of social exchange between vegetable farmers and customers in Wayari Hamlet reflects core principles of Social Exchange Theory as proposed by George C. Homans. Two central concepts from this theory—trust and dependence—are highly relevant to the interactions in Wayari (Cook et al., 2013; Homans, 1958).

Trust is a fundamental component of social exchange, encompassing positive expectations about another party's intentions in situations involving risk. Within the vegetable agribusiness context, mutual trust between farmers and customers underpins their commitment to upholding product quality and fulfilling agreements. This trust cultivates strong emotional bonds and serves as the foundation for durable, high-quality relationships. It shapes the relational quality between farmers and customers and establishes the basis for sustainable cooperation.

Alongside trust, the concept of dependence is also applicable. According to Shanka & Buvik (2019) and Sutton et al. (2021), dependence arises when one party needs the resources or contributions of another in their interactions. In the relationship between farmers and customers, mutual dependence is evident—farmers require financial support and long-term commitment from customers, while customers depend on farmers for a reliable supply of high-quality produce. This mutual dependence ensures that both parties rely on one another to achieve their respective goals.

Thus, the practice of social exchange in Wayari Hamlet exemplifies how trust and dependence operate together to build strong, enduring relationships between vegetable farmers and customers. A deeper understanding of these dynamics can provide critical insights into how to maintain and strengthen social networks in vegetable agribusiness and other sectors within the community.

Statements from farmer families and customers in Wayari also highlight how Social Exchange Theory, as articulated by George C. Homans, can explain the dynamics of their interactions. Three of Homans' core propositions—Success, Stimulus, and Value—can be clearly identified in their relationships (Homans, 1958).

The Success Proposition posits that the more often a behavior is rewarded, the more likely it is to be repeated. In the context of vegetable farmers and customers in Wayari, this is reflected in the economic and relational success achieved through repeated exchanges. Although success often requires time and persistent effort, farmers have experienced satisfying results, including increased profits and improved livelihood outcomes (Enayat et al., 2022).

The Stimulus Proposition refers to the motivation of individuals to repeat actions that have previously led to positive rewards. In Wayari, both farmers and customers benefit from ongoing exchange, driven by recurring profitable opportunities. These benefits act as a motivating force, encouraging sustained participation in the exchange process.

The Value Proposition emphasizes that individuals evaluate actions based on the material and non-material rewards they expect to gain. In the farmer-customer exchange relationship, value is measured in terms of tangible profits and intangible assets such as trust and reliability. For example, farmers extend trust to customers by allowing deferred payment for vegetable purchases, indicating the high relational value placed on their interactions. This proposition helps explain why individuals are more likely to pursue actions that yield positive value while avoiding those with lesser returns (Berraies et al., 2020).

By applying these propositions to the social exchanges between vegetable farmers and customers in Wayari, it becomes evident that such relationships generate shared well-being (Thomas & Gupta, 2021). This well-being includes access to basic needs such as food, water, clothing, children's education, and future savings. Furthermore, the trust and dependence nurtured through these exchanges create strong social bonds. Collectively, these elements contribute to the sense of well-being experienced by both farming families and customers in Wayari Hamlet. Thus, the application of Social Exchange Theory in this agribusiness context illustrates how these principles can meaningfully support collective prosperity in the community.

### **The Role of Social Emotions and Reciprocal Commitment in Strengthening Partnerships**

Beyond the structural dynamics among farmers, traders, and customers, the sustainability of vegetable agribusiness partnerships in Dusun Wayari is profoundly influenced by the role of social emotions and reciprocal commitment. These affective components—such as mutual respect, empathy, gratitude, and a sense of moral obligation—are essential in shaping enduring and resilient relationships within the community (Ikeda & Natawidjaja, 2022). Unlike purely instrumental exchanges, social exchanges are embedded in emotional investments that evolve through repeated and meaningful interactions (Mukti & Kusumo, 2022).

Field observations revealed that farmers often express deep appreciation toward loyal customers who continue to buy their vegetables even during periods of scarcity or quality decline. These expressions of gratitude are not merely personal; they are forms of emotional currency that contribute to social bonding (Mighfar, 2015). On the other hand, customers develop affective ties with specific farmers, driven by a sense of trust and shared social responsibility. This emotional attachment reinforces the view of farming not just as a business but as a collective endeavor to sustain local well-being.

Reciprocal commitment, as a norm of social exchange, is evident in the informal yet binding obligations between actors. Farmers often offer their best produce or allow delayed payments to trusted customers. Customers, in return, show loyalty by continuing their patronage despite fluctuations in price or supply. These reciprocal acts are supported by a logic of

generalized exchange, where the expectation of future support replaces formal contracts (Wiśniewska-Paluszak & Paluszak, 2018, 2019). They create a sense of reliability and moral duty that stabilizes the agribusiness network.

Furthermore, these affective and reciprocal ties serve as buffers against external uncertainties, including market volatility or environmental disruptions. The emotional commitment of actors enhances social cohesion and builds a form of social capital that can be mobilized during crises (Maiellaro et al., 2022). In this way, social emotions do not merely enrich interpersonal relationships—they serve as structural reinforcements that uphold the entire agribusiness system.

Understanding these emotional dimensions is crucial for developing agribusiness models that go beyond economic optimization. As studies in economic sociology suggest, markets are always embedded in social and emotional structures (Marwan & Isnaeni, 2022). Thus, efforts to promote sustainable agriculture in rural communities like Dusun Wayari must pay closer attention to the emotional labor and affective investments that underpin economic transactions.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study confirms that social exchange plays a central role in building sustainable vegetable agribusiness partnerships in Wayari Hamlet. Through relationships grounded in trust, mutual commitment, and interdependence, farmers and customers forge social bonds that not only uphold economic stability but also reinforce social cohesion at the community level. The primary novelty of this research lies in its shift away from conventional economic frameworks toward a social lens in analyzing agribusiness sustainability. It demonstrates that mechanisms of social exchange—traditionally examined within personal or community interactions—can serve as a strategic foundation for economic relations in agribusiness. Accordingly, this study expands the scope of Social Exchange Theory into the realm of local food production and agribusiness, an area rarely explored in depth in previous research. Its contribution to the social sciences and humanities lies in strengthening a sociological perspective on community-based economic systems and promoting the design of agricultural business models that are more inclusive, long-term oriented, and rooted in strong social relationships. Ultimately, this research opens new avenues for theoretical and practical development in the fields of economic sociology, agrarian anthropology, and local development studies—approaches that place human relationships, rather than commodities, at the center of agribusiness systems.

## **ETHICAL STATEMENT AND DISCLOSURE**

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles, including informed consent, protection of informants' confidentiality, and respect for local cultural values. Special consideration was given to participants from vulnerable groups to ensure their safety, comfort, and equal rights to participate. No external funding was received, and the authors

declare no conflict of interest. All data and information presented were collected through valid research methods and have been verified to ensure their accuracy and reliability. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) was limited to technical assistance for writing and language editing, without influencing the scientific substance of the work. The authors express their gratitude to the informants for their valuable insights, and to the anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback on an earlier version of this manuscript. The authors take full responsibility for the content and conclusions of this article.

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