

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHANGES OF PATCHOULI FARMERS: DEPENDENCY AND SOCIAL CAPITAL STRATEGIES IN BAMBANGAN VILLAGE, MALUNDA DISTRICT, MAJENE REGENCY

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ABSTRACT

The development of patchouli farming in Bambang Village has brought significant changes to the socio-economic life of the rural community. This study aims to analyze the forms of farmers' dependency in patchouli farming and to explain the community's social capital strategies in dealing with socio-economic changes. Employing a qualitative method with a case study approach, data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews with 12 informants (farmers, collectors, and village officials), and documentation. The findings reveal that the development of patchouli farming has increased farmers' dependency on patchouli commodities, markets, collectors, capital access, and price information. The decline in food crop cultivation has caused household needs to become increasingly dependent on income from patchouli sales, making the community more vulnerable to price fluctuations and market changes. Conversely, the community maintains social capital such as mutual cooperation (sibali-bali), kinship relations, social networks, and trust in patchouli farming activities. This social capital is utilized as a strategy to reduce production costs, obtain labor assistance, gain access to information, and sustain household economic activities amid economic limitations and commodity price uncertainty. Community social relations have undergone adjustments following the development of commercial agriculture and increasing integration with the market system.

Keywords: Patchouli farming; farmers' dependency; social capital; socio-economic change; rural community.

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INTRODUCTION

In rural communities, socio-economic change is an ongoing process affecting various aspects of people's lives, particularly farming communities. These changes relate not only to increasing or decreasing income but also involve shifts in work patterns, agricultural crops, social relations, ways of meeting household needs, and relationships with agrarian resources. Rural life, previously characterized by subsistence farming patterns, gradually transforms as commercial agricultural systems increasingly connect with markets.

This phenomenon is evident in Bambang Village, Malunda District, Majene Regency. Before patchouli farming developed, the community cultivated various crops such as cocoa, candlenut, coconut, banana, and food crops to meet household needs. Some communities also relied on cattle farming and shifting cultivation in hilly areas. Social relations remained strong, with mutual cooperation practices in agricultural activities such as land clearing, planting, and harvesting typically conducted through reciprocal assistance without fully wage-based labor relations.

The community began cultivating patchouli more widely in 2023. Patchouli brought significant changes as it was considered to have higher economic value than previous crops. Relatively high prices attracted farmers to make patchouli their primary agricultural commodity, with some establishing distillation facilities to process patchouli leaves into oil.

Previous studies on patchouli farming have predominantly focused on economic aspects such as income levels, farming profitability, productivity, and price fluctuations. Mahmud (2025) examined income levels and farming efficiency in Polewali Mandar, finding that patchouli significantly increases income but focusing primarily on economic dimensions. Indriawati et al. (2023) studied socio-economic conditions and gender roles in Poso, revealing patchouli's contribution to income but remaining largely descriptive. Firansyah (2023) analyzed price fluctuations and adaptation strategies in Konawe Selatan, emphasizing economic responses without exploring broader social implications. Siregar (2023) examined agro-industry technology in Mandailing Natal from a technical-economic perspective.

Studies on social change in rural communities have been conducted by Junaedi (2023), who analyzed social change related to urbanization and globalization, and Tanzil (2023), who examined socio-economic dynamics in farming communities. However, these studies did not specifically address structural dependency or social capital strategies in commercial agriculture.

Research Gap: Existing literature has not adequately examined the relationship between farmers' dependency patterns and social capital strategies in patchouli farming, particularly regarding how communities navigate the tension between market integration and maintaining social relations. Furthermore, studies focusing specifically on patchouli farming in Majene Regency remain absent.

This study offers three contributions:

1. This is the first socio-economic study of patchouli farmers in Bambang Village, Majene Regency, providing rich qualitative data on how a rural community experiences and responds to the transition from diverse subsistence-commercial farming to patchouli monoculture.
2. The study integrates James C. Scott's moral economy perspective with Bourdieu's social capital theory and Granovetter's embeddedness concept to analyze both dependency structures and adaptive strategies simultaneously.
3. **Analytical Focus:** Unlike previous studies emphasizing economic outcomes, this research focuses on process how changes occur in work structures, social interaction patterns, and relationships with market actors over time.

Based on the background above, this study addresses two research questions:

- a. What are the forms of farmers' dependency in the patchouli farming process in Bambang Village, Malunda District, Majene Regency?
- b. How do patchouli farmers utilize social capital strategies in facing socio-economic changes in Bambang Village?

The objectives of this study are to:

- Describe and analyze the forms of farmers' dependency in patchouli farming.
- Describe and analyze the social capital strategies employed by patchouli farmers in facing socio-economic changes.

Farmers' Dependency in Commercial Agriculture

Dependency in this study refers to the relations built between farmers and other actors involved in patchouli farming, including collectors, landowners, and laborers. In the context of commercial

agriculture, dependency emerges when farmers lack full control over resources, economic access, and distribution processes, forcing reliance on others to maintain livelihoods (Bernstein, 2019).

In smallholder agriculture, dependency relations often arise due to limited capital, market access, technology, and information compared to actors with stronger positions in agricultural value chains. These dependency relations are not always coercive but often develop through ongoing socio-economic relations in rural communities.

Social Capital as an Adaptive Strategy

Social capital is a crucial concept in contemporary sociology explaining how social relations become resources for individuals and groups. Bourdieu (1986) defines social capital as the aggregate of actual or potential resources linked to possession of a durable network of institutionalized relationships. Unlike Coleman (2015) and Putnam (2000), who emphasize functional and collective dimensions, Bourdieu places social capital within power relations and domination structures.

In rural contexts, social capital manifests through mutual cooperation (gotong royong), kinship networks, trust, and social solidarity. These relations serve as crucial resources when farmers face economic limitations and market uncertainties (Syahyuti, 2012; Salman, 2007). Social capital facilitates access to labor, information, credit, and risk-sharing mechanisms that formal institutions often fail to provide.

Theoretical Framework

James C. Scott's Moral Economy. Scott (1976) argues that peasant behavior is guided by subsistence ethics prioritizing survival security over profit maximization. The safety-first principle explains why peasants maintain relationships providing economic security, even when not maximizing profits. This framework helps explain why patchouli farmers maintain relationships with specific collectors despite potentially lower prices.

Pierre Bourdieu's Social Capital Theory. Bourdieu (1986) conceptualizes social capital as resources derived from social networks and group membership, convertible into other forms of capital. This theory illuminates how mutual cooperation, kinship relations, and trust function as resources enabling farmers to reduce production costs, access information, and maintain livelihood sustainability.

Mark Granovetter's Embeddedness. Granovetter (1985) argues that economic actions are embedded in social relations never purely rational or impersonal. This perspective explains why economic transactions among patchouli farmers remain embedded in trust, kinship, and long-term social relationships rather than purely market logic.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design to understand the socio-economic changes experienced by patchouli farmers in Bambang Village. The qualitative approach was chosen for its ability to capture meanings, motives, and narratives that cannot be reduced to statistical data (Creswell, 2024; Moleong, 2012), particularly relevant for examining habitus and social practices that are contextual and situational.

The research was conducted in Bambang Village, Malunda District, Majene Regency, selected purposively due to its representation of structural marginalization experienced by traditional water transport workers. The village comprises seven hamlets with a population of 1,734 people across 417 households. Data collection was conducted from March to August 2026.

Informants. Twelve informants were selected purposively based on criteria of direct involvement in patchouli farming and experience of socio-economic pressures. Informants included patchouli farmers (primary informants), collectors/smallholders (supporting informants), and local/village officials. Selection criteria included: (a) active involvement in patchouli cultivation for at least 3 years, (b) diverse landholding sizes, (c) varied socio-economic backgrounds, and (d) willingness to participate. Informant ages ranged from 28 to 67 years.

Table 1. Informant Criteria and Distribution

Category	Type	Number
Patchouli Farmers	Primary	7
Local/Village Officials	Key	2
Collectors/Agents	Supporting	3
Total		12

Data Collection. Data were collected through three techniques: (1) in-depth semi-structured interviews using interview guides exploring work patterns, dependency relations, social networks, and adaptation strategies; (2) participant observation of farming activities, social interactions, and economic transactions; and (3) documentation including photographs, audio recordings, and village demographic data.

Data Analysis. Analysis followed Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive model: (1) data reduction selecting and focusing data relevant to dependency and social capital indicators; (2) data display descriptive presentation connecting findings with theoretical categories; and (3) conclusion drawing interpreting patterns and relationships.

Trustworthiness. Credibility was ensured through source triangulation (comparing farmer, collector, and official accounts), method triangulation (combining interviews, observation, documentation), and member checking (verifying interpretations with informants). Transferability was addressed through thick description of the research context.

Ethical Considerations. Ethical approval was obtained from Hasanuddin University's Institutional Review Board (No. [insert approval number]). All informants provided informed consent and were assured of confidentiality through anonymization.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Development of Patchouli Farming in Bambang Village

Before patchouli's introduction, Bambang's economy was characterized by diverse agricultural activities including cocoa, candlenut, coconut, banana, and shifting rice cultivation, particularly in upland hamlets (Rattepunaga, Bunga, Batususun). Mutual cooperation (*siduluang*) characterized agricultural labor landowners provided food while community members contributed labor reciprocally. Livestock rearing, particularly cattle, provided supplementary income and long-term savings.

Patchouli was introduced in 2020 by a community leader who obtained cuttings from Kopeang, Tapalang District, Mamuju Regency. Initially planted on a small scale, patchouli's spread accelerated when farmers observed neighbors achieving significant income. The community leader freely distributed cuttings to anyone willing to plant, demonstrating strong social solidarity in the early development phase.

"At first, I took cuttings from Kopeang only about twenty plants. I developed them and brought them to the garden. When I harvested about ten sacks, I distilled them in Tapalang because there was no distillation facility here yet." (AS, 67 years, farmer and former hamlet head, Interview, April 19, 2026)

The spread of information about patchouli's high price created enthusiasm across all community segments men, women, youth, and returning migrants became involved. Land previously unproductive or used for food crops was converted to patchouli cultivation. Distillation facilities were established in each hamlet to reduce production costs and improve market access.

"When patchouli prices were high, most people preferred planting patchouli because it generated money faster. Previously, people still planted rice or corn for family consumption, but now those areas have decreased because land is used for patchouli. Daily needs like rice, sugar, coffee, even vegetables are more often bought from the market using patchouli money." (AG, 38 years, farmer, Interview, April 2, 2026)

Forms of Farmers' Dependency in Patchouli Farming

Dependency on Patchouli Commodity

The most significant dependency is on the patchouli commodity itself. Before patchouli, households maintained diverse food sources rice, corn, cassava, and other staples provided food security independent of markets. Patchouli monoculture has undermined this self-sufficiency, making households increasingly dependent on cash income from patchouli sales for basic needs. When prices are high, economic conditions improve; when prices fall, households face immediate hardship.

"When patchouli prices are good, the community is happy because there's money to buy household needs and other goods. But when prices start to fall, farmers worry because now

many depend on patchouli for daily needs." (S, 47 years, village head, Interview, April 4, 2026)

This finding aligns with Scott's (1976) moral economy argument peasants are risk-averse, prioritizing subsistence security. However, the shift to monoculture has paradoxically increased vulnerability by eliminating traditional buffers. The community has moved from diverse, relatively secure subsistence-commercial agriculture to a more profitable but more vulnerable patchouli dependency.

Dependency on Collectors

Patchouli farmers in Bambang Village predominantly sell their output to the same collectors repeatedly, forming long-term buyer relationships. This dependency is shaped by multiple factors: (1) limited direct market access due to geographical isolation and lack of transportation; (2) information asymmetry prices are determined by collectors with market knowledge; (3) credit relationships collectors provide production loans or consumption credit; and (4) social relationships trust developed through repeated transactions.

"I usually sell patchouli, distill it in the same place. Besides because the price is higher, also because of comfort, and most importantly, funds are not delayed." (RU, 53 years, farmer, Interview, March 10, 2026)

Collectors provide pre-harvest loans, reducing farmers' risk but creating moral obligations to sell through that collector even when prices elsewhere are higher. This creates a patron-client dynamic: patrons provide economic security (credit, market access), clients provide loyalty and stable supply.

"If there are other buyers offering good prices, sometimes we sell there too, but usually we stick with our regular buyer." (RO, 44 years, farmer, Interview, April 3, 2026)

However, farmers are not entirely passive. Those with better social networks, access to information, and independent capital have greater choice. This variation demonstrates that dependency is not uniform but shaped by economic capacity.

"I've sold patchouli in several places just to try, including outside the village, but after that, I only distill at the village distillation facility." (K, 46 years, farmer, Interview, April 15, 2026)

Dependency on Market Information

Farmers typically lack independent access to price information, relying instead on collectors or other farmers. Information flows through informal networks word of mouth, WhatsApp groups but remains filtered and incomplete.

"We usually just follow the price the collector announces. We don't know what prices are outside. The collector knows more about price developments because they're the ones who take patchouli out. So when they come and tell us the price, farmers just follow because there's no comparison. Patchouli farmers never determine selling prices it's all determined by buyers." (AR, 31 years, farmer, Interview, April 1, 2026)

This information asymmetry reinforces farmers' position as price takers they accept prices determined by buyers rather than actively negotiating. Better-informed farmers with wider networks can occasionally access alternative markets, but this remains limited to those with greater social and economic resources.

Social Capital Strategies

Mutual Cooperation (Sibali-bali/Siduluang)

Despite economic transformations, mutual cooperation remains significant, particularly during harvest periods requiring substantial labor. Farmers mobilize family, kin, and neighbors for harvesting, chopping, and transporting patchouli. Assistance is typically reciprocated rather than monetarily compensated the helper will be assisted when their own harvest arrives.

"If there are family or neighbors who want to plant or harvest, we usually help each other. When patchouli prices were high and many planted patchouli, people came to help in the gardens not just men but women, young and old. Later when we have work, they also come to help in return." (H, 57 years, farmer, Interview, April 15, 2026)

Mutual cooperation serves as a crucial economic strategy, reducing production costs during labor-intensive periods. Farmers with limited capital particularly depend on this system.

"There are some who hire workers for harvest. It's calculated daily. But if all work uses hired labor, the costs are heavy because patchouli needs many workers during harvest, and usually it must be completed in one day even with large fields." (K, 46 years, farmer, Interview, April 18, 2026)

However, mutual cooperation patterns have adapted as cultivation has intensified. When only some community members grew patchouli, coordinated harvesting was easier. Now that most are busy with their own gardens, coordinating collective labor has become more difficult, leading to increased hired labor use.

"Before, it was easier to help each other because not everyone was busy with patchouli. Now sometimes it's hard to find time because everyone has their own garden to work." (M, 60 years, farmer, Interview, April 10, 2026)

Social Networks and Information Sharing

Social networks facilitate information and resource sharing among farmers. Information about patchouli cultivation, price trends, disease management, and market opportunities spreads through kinship and neighbor networks.

"I first learned about patchouli from family members who planted earlier. They said the returns were good. The most important thing is cuttings were shared by relatives or other farmers. So here we support each other, help each other. We encourage others to farm too." (A, 31 years, farmer, Interview, April 10, 2026)

Cuttings distribution exemplifies social capital in action. Rather than selling cuttings for profit, early adopters distributed them freely, enabling broader community participation. This reflects a solidarity-oriented rather than purely commercial approach, though it also served collective interests by increasing patchouli supply and attracting market actors.

Trust in Economic Relations

Trust constitutes a crucial foundation for economic relations. Farmers maintain relationships with trusted collectors who provide payment certainty and emergency assistance. Collector loans are more accessible than formal credit no collateral requirements, flexible repayment terms, and established personal relationships.

"If it's not harvest season and there's an urgent need, farmers usually borrow first from the collector. Some is used for household needs, some for garden work. Later after harvest, payment is made when patchouli is sold." (SI, 42 years, farmer, Interview, April 17, 2026)

Trust relations provide security but also create dependency. Farmers who have received loans feel morally obligated to sell through that collector, even when prices elsewhere are higher.

"I was once helped for a need, and sometimes I didn't repay the money just told to keep planting patchouli. Usually, it's the collector who's close who helps first. So farmers feel that relationship must be maintained because when things are difficult, they're the ones who usually help." (J, 55 years, farmer, Interview, April 5, 2026)

Dependency-Social Capital Nexus

The findings reveal a complex relationship between dependency and social capital:

1. Dual Function: Social capital simultaneously enables adaptation (providing resources when markets fail) and reproduces dependency (tying farmers to specific patrons).
2. Adaptive Resilience: While dependency on patchouli and collectors makes farmers vulnerable, social capital networks provide resilience reciprocal labor arrangements, crisis support, and risk-sharing mechanisms.
3. Embeddedness: As Granovetter (1985) suggests, economic relations remain embedded in social relations. Market integration does not eliminate trust-based relationships; rather, these relationships adapt to commercial pressures.
4. Partial Transformation: Socio-economic change in Bambang Village is not linear from traditional to market society. Instead, social relations continuously adjust mutual cooperation coexists with wage labor, loyalty to collectors coexists with occasional price-seeking behavior.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that patchouli farming in Bambang Village creates economic opportunities and increases household income while simultaneously generating dependence on commodities, collectors, market prices, and limited access to information, thereby weakening farmers' bargaining

power and potentially threatening household food security. Social capital, including mutual cooperation (sibali-bali), kinship networks, and trust, remains essential in reducing production costs, supporting livelihoods, and helping farmers adapt to market uncertainty. These findings reinforce Scott's (1976) moral economy theory, Bourdieu's (1986) social capital framework, and Granovetter's (1985) concept of economic embeddedness, demonstrating that social relationships both strengthen resilience and reproduce economic dependency. The study recommends livelihood diversification, improved market access, stronger farmer cooperation, and sustainable agricultural practices to reduce vulnerability. Although limited to one village, the findings provide insights into rural economic transformation and highlight the need for comparative, quantitative, and longitudinal research on agricultural dependency and social change.

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