

**ORIGINAL ARTICLE**

# The role of village institutions and the welfare of tobacco farmers in Ganti Village, Central Lombok

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**Abstract**

This study examines the role of village institutions in improving the welfare of tobacco farmers in Ganti Village, Central Lombok. Tobacco is a strategic commodity that supports the rural economy, but it still faces structural inequalities in distribution, market access, and the dominance of middlemen. Using a qualitative approach, this study describes the dynamics of village institutions such as farmer groups, village-owned enterprises (*BUMDes*), and the role of customary institutions in intervening in the local economy. The findings indicate that village institutions have the potential to act as facilitators, protectors, and liaisons between farmers, markets, and the government. However, institutional challenges such as weak capacity, conflicts of interest, and structural *oligarchization* also remain obstacles. Therefore, strengthening village institutions in a democratic and participatory manner is key to creating a just, transparent, and sustainable agrarian system. This study concludes that adaptive local institutional-based development is a crucial foundation for the economic independence of tobacco farmers in Central Lombok.

**Keywords**

Tobacco, Village Institutions, *BUMDes*, Farmer Groups, Tobacco Farmer

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## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Tobacco is an agricultural commodity that not only holds high economic value but also plays a vital role in sustaining the livelihoods of farmers across various regions (Nyambara & Nyandoro, 2019). As the primary raw material for the cigarette industry, tobacco significantly contributes to national revenue, particularly through the excise sector. In Indonesia, Central Lombok is one of the key tobacco-producing regions. Alongside rice, tobacco has long served as a pillar of the rural economy, improving the welfare of many farming households (Audrine, 2020). The region's strategic geographic location, tropical climate with a prolonged dry season, and fertile soil composition make it highly suitable for tobacco cultivation.

Despite these natural advantages, the welfare of tobacco farmers in Central Lombok remains vulnerable (Sukardi et al., 2023). This is due to systemic issues such as unstable market dynamics, unequal distribution systems, and the dominance of middlemen and corporations, which undermine farmers' ability to determine prices. According to data from the Central Lombok Regency Agriculture Office (2023), over 50% of tobacco farmers in the region are categorized as smallholders, owning less than 0.5 hectares of land. Such structural limitations severely restrict their bargaining power and economic resilience (Welker, 2024).

In this context, the role of village institutions becomes crucial. These institutions—especially farmer groups, village-owned enterprises (*BUMDes*), and customary bodies—can serve as platforms to build an inclusive support system, enhance farmers' bargaining positions, and empower them to better manage the tobacco value chain. Experiences from other regions in Indonesia, such as Temanggung, show that the presence of strong and active farmer groups has significantly improved farmers' negotiation capacities with middlemen and large corporations, even reducing dependency on intermediary traders entirely (Nuryanti et al., 2018). Strengthening farmer groups has also led to the development of fairer and more accessible markets (Yaqin et al., 2025). These institutions, which function as forums for advocacy, deliberation, and collective action, have proven effective in amplifying farmers' voices and interests (Chikmawati, 2019).

Quantitative data from the Indonesian Ministry of Agriculture (2022) reinforces this argument, showing that farmers who are members of formal groups are 45% more likely to gain access to agricultural credit and post-harvest technology training than those who operate individually. These institutional supports have been shown to improve productivity, bargaining power, and ultimately farmers' welfare.

While several national studies have explored the significance of institutional support in the agricultural sector, the literature could be further strengthened by incorporating more recent international research on similar institutional frameworks. Comparative studies from countries like India, Brazil, and the Philippines have demonstrated how farmer cooperatives and local governance structures play a key role in shaping rural agrarian economies, particularly by improving access to markets, information, and government support schemes. Comparative studies from countries such as India, Brazil, and the Philippines highlight how institutional innovations—like Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) and agricultural cooperatives—have strengthened farmers' access to markets, credit, and collective bargaining. For instance, in India, FPOs have been shown to enhance smallholder farmers' access to inputs and market information while reducing their reliance on exploitative intermediaries (Mukherjee et al., 2025). Similarly, agricultural cooperatives in Brazil have facilitated small-scale farmers' integration into formal markets and increased their access to government subsidies (Blanc & Kledal, 2012). In the Philippines, cooperative models have empowered rural producers by supporting collective marketing and enhancing their bargaining power against large agribusinesses (Sumalde & Quillooy, 2015). Such perspectives would enrich the analytical depth of this study by situating it within broader global practices and offering potential models for replication or adaptation in the Indonesian context.

One of the most productive tobacco-producing villages in Central Lombok is Ganti Village, located in the East Praya District. The village is characterized by a cohesive social structure, with tobacco farming being a

hereditary tradition (Chitongo, 2017). Most families are either landowning farmers or tenant farmers who rely heavily on tobacco cultivation for their livelihoods. However, the farmers of Ganti Village face persistent challenges, including the declining availability of high-quality seeds—particularly post-pandemic—as well as price opacity and a lack of transparency in the marketing and distribution chains controlled by middlemen.

Given these constraints, this study aims to examine the position and role of village institutions in Ganti Village in representing and protecting the interests of tobacco farmers (Djazuli et al., 2021). Specifically, it seeks to understand how local institutions contribute to addressing structural inequalities and what potential they hold in transforming the tobacco economy at the village level.

To appreciate the contemporary role of village institutions in tobacco farming, it is necessary to situate the issue within the broader historical trajectory of tobacco cultivation in Indonesia. The history of tobacco in Lombok is deeply intertwined with both colonial agricultural policies and local socio-economic practices. During the Dutch colonial period, tobacco cultivation in Lombok was promoted as part of the larger plantation economy that also included coffee, sugar, and copra. Farmers were often integrated into contract farming arrangements that tied them to colonial trading companies, thereby limiting their autonomy in deciding production and marketing practices (Mazwi et al., 2019).

Following independence, the tobacco sector in Lombok underwent several transformations. State-owned enterprises and private companies both played active roles in purchasing and processing tobacco, and the introduction of hybrid seed varieties in the 1980s and 1990s contributed to productivity gains (Iwashita, 2024). However, these developments also reinforced farmers' dependence on external input suppliers and corporate buyers.

At present, Central Lombok's tobacco is predominantly of the Virginia and White Burley types, which are favored by domestic cigarette manufacturers for their flavor profile and burn quality. The seasonal cycle of tobacco farming fits well into the agricultural calendar of the region, allowing for crop rotation with rice and secondary crops. Yet, the crop's profitability remains volatile, heavily influenced by fluctuations in global leaf tobacco demand, domestic cigarette industry policies, and government excise regulations. In Indonesia, the policy environment for tobacco farming is complex, balancing economic, public health, and international trade considerations. The Tobacco Product Industry Roadmap issued by the Ministry of Industry outlines targets for productivity and quality improvements, while the Ministry of Agriculture implements programs for seed distribution, extension services, and post-harvest support. However, the implementation of these policies at the village level is uneven, often depending on the strength and initiative of local institutions.

Moreover, Indonesia's commitment to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) remains partial, meaning that domestic tobacco production continues to be supported as a revenue source despite global anti-tobacco trends. This policy creates uncertainty for farmers, particularly as domestic cigarette consumption patterns evolve. An emerging challenge for tobacco farming in Central Lombok is climate variability. Shifts in rainfall patterns, increasing temperatures, and more frequent extreme weather events threaten both yields and quality (Lim et al., 2023). Adaptation strategies—such as the use of drought-resistant varieties, improved irrigation, and diversified cropping systems—require coordinated action and investment, areas where village institutions could play a pivotal role. This study offers a novelty perspective by focusing on the role of village institutions as key actors in reshaping the power dynamics between farmers, middlemen, and corporations.

Although there is a substantial body of research on tobacco farming in Indonesia, much of it focuses on either the economic aspects or the public health implications (Kramer et al., 2023). Less attention has been paid to the institutional dynamics at the village level, particularly in relation to how local governance structures can address market asymmetries and structural inequalities. This study seeks to fill that gap by providing an in-depth

analysis of the roles, relationships, and impacts of various village institutions in Ganti Village's tobacco economy. By situating the analysis within both national and international contexts, the study offers insights not only for policy-makers in Indonesia but also for other tobacco-producing regions facing similar challenges.

## 2 | METHODS AND CONTEXTUALIZATION

This study employed a qualitative approach with the aim of providing a comprehensive and in-depth description of the role of village institutions in supporting the sustainability of tobacco farming in Ganti Village, Central Lombok Regency (Gunawan, 2015). A qualitative approach was selected to allow for a naturalistic understanding of social realities, particularly useful for uncovering community dynamics, relationships between actors, and the embedded roles of local institutions in the agricultural context.

Informants were selected using purposive sampling, focusing on individuals directly involved in tobacco production and village institutional activities. The criteria for selection included active involvement in farmer groups or village governance structures, a minimum of five years' experience in tobacco farming or local institutional leadership, and willingness to participate and provide in-depth information (Shiringo et al., 2022). A total of 23 informants were interviewed, comprising the village head, two managers of village-owned enterprises (*BUMDes*), three members of the Village Consultative Body (BPD), four heads of farmer groups (both administrative and functional), three traditional leaders and religious figures, and ten smallholder tobacco farmers, including six landowners and four tenant farmers (Yudiardi & Karlina, 2017). The informants represented a diverse range of ages from 25 to 68 years, genders, and economic backgrounds, reflecting the local demographic, including farmers owning less than 0.5 hectares of land, consistent with regional characteristics.

Data collection techniques included in-depth semi-structured interviews, which lasted between 45 and 90 minutes, participant observation during farmer group meetings and *BUMDes* coordination sessions, and document analysis of village archives, institutional reports, and agricultural planning documents (Fitriani et al., 2024). The interview guide was structured around five thematic clusters: (1) institutional roles and responsibilities, (2) patterns of interaction with farmers, (3) mechanisms of decision-making, (4) access to and control over resources, and (5) experiences and perceptions of institutional effectiveness. Follow-up questions were adapted based on each informant's position and experience. The data were collected over a three-month period from February to April 2024, beginning with preliminary mapping of stakeholders and ending with a final round of interviews to confirm patterns and gaps.

The data collection continued until thematic saturation was reached, meaning that no new significant information emerged from additional interviews. Saturation was determined by repeated coding of dominant themes that began to recur consistently in interviews across varied participant profiles (Andayana et al., 2024). By the final round of interviews in mid-April, no substantial variations in responses were observed, indicating a point of diminishing returns in further data collection.

The collected data were analyzed qualitatively and descriptively using thematic analysis methods based on the approach of Miles and Huberman (Yusmah, 2023). This process involved open coding to identify recurring themes, data reduction through grouping related categories, and pattern identification and meaning-making focused on institutional dynamics, negotiation processes, and the distribution of power and resources within the tobacco farming context. During participant observation, bias was minimized by employing non-intrusive techniques, such as prolonged engagement and observation across multiple settings by formal meetings and informal post-meeting discussions (Greene, 2014). The researcher also maintained a reflective journal to document potential positional biases and separate descriptive observations from analytical impressions.

To maintain data validity, triangulation of sources and data collection techniques was applied, and member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary findings with key informants to verify and refine the researcher's interpretations (Birt et al., 2016). This comprehensive methodological approach enabled the

researchers to understand village institutions not only as formal administrative structures but also as social arenas where negotiation, alliances, and resource distribution take place. The study uncovered the complexity of socio-economic relations underlying village institutions and tobacco farming, which is the primary livelihood of the local community (Masikini, 2023). A key finding is the distinction between functional farmer groups that actively facilitate farmers’ access to price negotiation and seed availability, and administrative farmer groups, which often primarily serve as formal extensions of village bureaucracy. The study provides valuable new insights into how village institutions can simultaneously act as mechanisms of empowerment and tools of control, depending on leadership legitimacy, internal power dynamics, and the alignment of institutional objectives with farmers’ interests. This original contribution offers a nuanced perspective on agrarian governance in tobacco-producing regions of Indonesia and has broader implications for similar agricultural communities globally (Clark, 2022).

**Table 1.** Local actors in village tobacco farming.

Institution	Role/Function	Relationship with Other Actors	Impact on Tobacco Farming
Village Government	Regulates, intervenes in economic affairs; establishes BUMDes to provide agricultural inputs	Oversees BUMDes, farmer groups; mediates between farmers and middlemen	Provides resources and alternative mechanisms to reduce middlemen dominance
Village-Owned Enterprise (BUMDes)	Supplies seeds, fertilizer, post-harvest support; acts as intermediary	Collaborates with farmer groups and village government	Enhances farmers' access to inputs and marketing support
Village Consultative Body (BPD)	Advisory and oversight role in village governance	Works with village government and farmer groups	Influences policy formulation affecting tobacco farming
Farmer Groups (Functional)	Organizes planting, training, partnerships with companies; advocates for farmer interests	Collaborates with BUMDes, purchasing companies, and local government	Strengthens bargaining power, access to inputs, and market certainty
Farmer Groups (Administrative)	Formal groups mainly fulfilling bureaucratic requirements	Often controlled by village elites; limited engagement	Limited impact; may reinforce power imbalances

### 3 | RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 | Village Institutions as Actors

Village institutions are actors within the formal and informal social structures of rural communities, wielding significant influence. They are considered significant because they hold authority over policy formulation and directly influence economic development processes down to the grassroots level (Okafor et al., 2015). In the

context of tobacco farming in Central Lombok, particularly in Ganti Village, village institutions exist not only in the form of government bureaucracy or formal institutions such as the village government and the Village Consultative Body, but also encompass informal institutions such as farmer groups formed organically by farmers. These farmer groups were initiated by farmers who felt they needed a forum to accommodate their tobacco farming interests and needs.

As one farmer stated, "*Kami butuh wadah sendiri karena tengkulak tidak berpihak. Kelompok tani bisa jadi jalan tengah kalau dikelola benar.*" Based on observations and interviews, it appears that the Ganti Village Government understands the importance of its position and role as a strategic actor in regulating and even intervening in farmers' economic affairs. In Ganti Village, the local government established a Village-Owned Enterprise (*BUMDes*) to provide various agricultural needs, such as seeds and fertilizer, at competitive prices. On several occasions, the *BUMDes* also serves as a support organization for farmer groups formed during the post-harvest process (Saleh et al., 2023).

Similar approaches have been observed in regions like Temanggung and Wonosobo, where *BUMDes* and cooperatives have been key intermediaries between smallholders and tobacco firms, indicating the model's broader applicability across different rural contexts (Mulyana et al., 2024). Comparative studies in countries such as India also reveal the critical role of local institutions in mediating between multinational companies and smallholders in tobacco value chains, emphasizing institutional capacity as a central determinant of farmer welfare outcomes.

Interviews revealed that farmers also acknowledged that the presence of middlemen often disrupts their control over tobacco prices. Farmers often feel they are engaging in non-transparent partnerships with middlemen. Strengthening village government institutions is considered a mediator between farmers and third parties, including middlemen (Wang et al., 2021). further explained this, finding that an active and functioning village government will create alternative economic mechanisms that will ultimately gradually reduce the dominance of middlemen in the tobacco distribution chain (Dewanta, 2022). Comparative cases from East Java support this view, where assertive village governance combined with collective marketing channels has weakened the grip of traditional middlemen and improved price certainty for farmers.

However, it cannot be denied that the authority inherent in village institutions is also highly dependent on the capacity and quality of the institutions themselves. The role of personnel fulfilling each task within these institutions significantly influences the policies and outputs produced. In some cases, Village-Owned Enterprises (*BUMDes*), for example, often function solely administratively without making any real or significant contribution to strengthening the farmer economy (Manggu & Beni, 2020). In more extreme cases, these institutions even monopolize or favor certain groups of farmers. Weak management, a lack of professional staff, and limited capital are all contributing factors. This also indicates that village institutions are not automatically positive entities; they can sometimes even contribute to stagnant farmer welfare. Therefore, village institutions must be built with vision, transparency, and accountability. Strengthening their operational mandate through clearly defined oversight mechanisms and investment in local administrative capacity—as demonstrated in Temanggung—offers a practical path forward (Baskoro, 2025).

### 3.2| Farmer Groups: Representing Farmer Interests or Extending Power?

Ideally, farmer groups serve as a driving force for the welfare of tobacco farmers through strengthening community-based institutions. Theoretically, farmer groups are an informal institution that grows out of social solidarity and has significant potential to strengthen farmers' bargaining power with the market and middlemen. According to Saptari and Hadiz, the existence of democratic farmer groups can increase production efficiency, expand access to technical training, open up partnership opportunities with agribusiness companies, and strengthen farmers' bargaining power in determining fair selling prices (Anggraini, 2023). In the context of tobacco

farming in Central Lombok, farmer groups have strategic potential as mediating institutions between farmers and external actors such as purchasing companies, financial institutions, and local governments.

However, the effectiveness of farmer groups cannot be generalized, as it is highly dependent on local social structures, village political dynamics, and human resource capabilities. Field observations indicate two main trends in farmer group institutional practices. First, there are farmer groups that play an active role functionally. These groups collectively develop planting plans, organize agricultural training in collaboration with agricultural extension workers, and establish contractual partnerships with tobacco purchasing companies such as PT Sadhana Arifnusa and Djarum. Under these partnerships, companies typically provide superior seeds, fertilizer, and guaranteed purchase of harvested crops at a fixed price, albeit under conditions controlled by the corporation. However, this model still provides greater market certainty for farmers. Active farmer groups also tend to play a role in local policy advocacy, such as pushing for regulations that protect tobacco farmers and transparency in the distribution of agricultural subsidies.

Second, many farmer groups serve merely as formal administrative platforms. These groups are typically formed solely to fulfill bureaucratic requirements for obtaining government assistance, development projects, or corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs. Their activities are minimal and do not address strategic issues related to farmers' real needs. In many cases, farmer group leaders also serve as collectors or maintain close ties with village elites, such as village heads or politically influential traditional figures (Septiadi et al., 2022). This situation creates conflicts of interest that undermine the transparency and accountability of farmer group management. Ordinary farmers, who lack power relations, often become passive subjects excluded from group decision-making.

This phenomenon indicates the *oligarchization* of village institutions, as explained by Hadiz (2004) within the framework of local predatory politics. According to Hadiz, local institutions in many regions of Indonesia are undergoing a process of co-optation by local actors with specific economic and political interests. Rather than serving as spaces for economic democratization, institutions such as farmer groups are transformed into tools of domination, strengthening the control of resources by local elites. As a result, the primary goal of establishing farmer groups—strengthening the collective capacity of smallholder farmers—is distorted by the logic of patronage and nepotism.

In this context, institutional democratization is crucial. Active farmer involvement in group deliberation forums, transparency in financial management, and healthy leadership rotation are crucial elements in building inclusive and participatory farmer groups (de Archellie et al., 2020). Local governments, through agricultural services and field extension workers, need to strengthen the guidance and evaluation functions of farmer groups to prevent them from being merely political or administrative instruments. Furthermore, a social control mechanism within village communities is necessary to prevent nepotism within farmer group structures (Promkhambut et al., 2023). Moreover, regular evaluations by independent facilitators—as practiced in Jember—could be replicated to support transparency.

Furthermore, it is also crucial to build institutional capacity through training in organizational management, market literacy, and agricultural policy advocacy. This is crucial so that farmer groups play a role not only in production but also in determining the broader direction of tobacco agricultural development (Chitongo, 2017). This strengthening must be based on the values of solidarity, equality, and farmer economic independence. If farmer groups can carry out these functions effectively, village institutions will truly become a vehicle for significant socio-economic transformation, rather than simply an institutional formality.

This the role of farmer groups in improving the welfare of tobacco farmers depends not only on their structural existence but also on how they are democratically managed, led, and controlled by their members.

Institutional change must be supported by a collective awareness among farmers to reclaim participation and advocate for shared interests, rather than simply becoming a tool for legitimizing policies from above.

### 3.3 | Dependence on Middlemen and Value Chain Imbalance

One of the most crucial and persistent structural issues plaguing tobacco farmers in Ganti Village, Central Lombok, is their dependence on middlemen as the primary distribution channel for their harvest. Middlemen play a dominant role in the tobacco trade chain, not only as direct buyers from farmers but also as determinants of purchase prices, payment terms, and technical purchasing requirements, such as the grading process, which is often not transparent. This situation creates an unequal relationship between farmers as producers and middlemen as market intermediaries who possess greater economic power and access to powerful networks (Xhoxhi et al., 2018).

This asymmetrical relationship places farmers in a very weak economic position. Unilaterally determined purchase prices, often lower than market prices, coupled with delayed or even installment payment systems, add to the pressure on smallholder farmers who rely heavily on harvest income. Non-transparent grading practices also open up room for manipulation, where farmers' harvests can be assessed unilaterally without clear and accountable standards (Sarin et al., 2003). This contributes to income uncertainty and instability in farmers' welfare from season to season.

This situation is exacerbated by farmers' limited access to market information and a lack of strong local institutional support. Many tobacco farmers in Ganti Village, Central Lombok, lack access to national or international market price data, thus lacking adequate reference points for determining the selling price of their products (Jufri et al., 2025). Furthermore, local economic institutions such as farmer cooperatives or Village-Owned Enterprises (*BUMDes*), which should serve as marketing

## 4 | CONCLUSION

Village institutions play a crucial role in improving the welfare of tobacco farmers in Ganti Village, Central Lombok. This role is reflected in their function as facilitators, protectors, and liaisons between farmers, the market, and the government. Village institutions such as the Village Consultative Body (BPD), the Community Empowerment Institute (LPM), and farmer groups serve as forums for participation, advocacy, and the distribution of information and assistance. In the context of tobacco farming, which is vulnerable to price fluctuations, the dominance of middlemen, and unequal market access, the existence of village institutions is crucial in building a protection system and strengthening farmer capacity.

Furthermore, village institutional support strengthens local governance that is adaptive and responsive to farmers' specific needs. Through village deliberations, the development of the Village Development Plan (*RKPD*es), and the management of Village Funds, these institutions can promote equitable agrarian-based development planning. Therefore, strengthening village institutions, both structurally and functionally, is a key requirement for sustainably improving the welfare of tobacco farmers. This conclusion confirms that village development based on local institutions is a crucial foundation for farmer independence and well-being in the tobacco sector.

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Authors declare that has no relevant or material financial interests that relate to the research described in this paper.

## Data Availability Statement

Data used in this article are entirely sourced from semi-structured interviews, which lasted between 45 and 90 minutes, participant observation during farmer group meetings and BUMDes coordination sessions literature studies, including articles, reports, and other publication sources relevant to the topic of Good Governance principles in village administration services. It can be accessed by contacting the corresponding author.

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