

Partnerships and the Economic Transformation of Cocoa Farmers in Konawe, Southeast Sulawesi

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Abstract

Agricultural development programs for cocoa in Indonesia often fail to create sustainable economic transformation despite intensive interventions. Previous studies tend to evaluate program effectiveness in aggregate without exploring why identical programs produce divergent outcomes at the farmer level. This study aims to analyze the dynamics of strategic partnerships among the private sector, farmer groups, and local governments in creating economic transformation for cocoa farmers, and to identify the inclusion and exclusion mechanisms that mediate program benefits. This qualitative case study was conducted in Mataiwoi Village, Konawe Regency, Southeast Sulawesi, involving 32 informants through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and focus group discussions during 45 days of fieldwork (August–October 2025). Thematic analysis reveals an effective asymmetric tripartite partnership model, in which role differentiation based on comparative advantage, rather than power balance, is key to success. Participating farmers experienced multidimensional transformation: productivity tripled from 400 kg to 1,000–1,200 kg/ha/year, income quadrupled from Rp8–12 million to Rp35–45 million/year, and their mindset shifted from fatalism to economic agency. However, only 63 of 240 farmers accessed the program because pre-existing inequalities in assets and social capital functioned as mediating structures. This study concludes that the asymmetric tripartite partnership model transforms farmers who can access the program, but inclusivity remains a crucial challenge requiring affirmative mechanisms. These findings imply that future studies and agricultural partnership programs should move beyond aggregate success indicators and examine how inequalities in capital, networks, and institutional access shape inclusive rural economic transformation.

Keywords

farmer economic transformation; sustainable cocoa; tripartite partnership

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INTRODUCTION

Konawe Regency in Southeast Sulawesi presents a striking paradox in agricultural development. On one hand, the region serves as a cocoa heartland with a land potential of 15,640 hectares (BPS, 2021), making it one of Indonesia's key cocoa-producing areas. On the other hand, the farmers who form the backbone of this strategic commodity remain trapped in a persistent cycle of structural poverty (van Vliet et al., 2021; Fountain & Huetz-Adams, 2020). This paradox is vividly observable in Mataiwoi Village, where most cocoa trees have aged, and productivity has sharply declined year after year, resulting in stagnant household income and persistent difficulties in fulfilling basic needs (Kongor et al., 2024). Recent studies suggest that this issue is not merely a technical or agronomic problem, but rather reflects systemic failures in conventional agricultural development models (Dietzfelbinger, 2022). Nangobi et al. (2024) show that the sustainability of farmer organizations depends heavily on robust organizational and institutional factors rather than solely on technical interventions. In the global cocoa context, Midamba & Ouko (2024) identify significant gender disparities in access to agricultural extension services, where women farmers record adoption levels of only 40–55%, compared to 55–70% among male farmers. These findings suggest that transforming the cocoa sector requires more inclusive and systemic approaches (Ma & Rahut, 2024; Duffy et al., 2021).

Cocoa farmers in Mataiwoi Village face a constellation of mutually reinforcing challenges. Productivity degradation due to aging cocoa trees has resulted in yields averaging only 400 kg per hectare per year, far below the potential yield of 1,200–1,500 kg per hectare per year (Somarriba et al., 2021; Sauvadet et al., 2021). Limited knowledge of Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) contributes to suboptimal cultivation practices, while Habraken et al. (2022) argue that the challenge of GAP adoption is not merely a matter of knowledge transfer, but of ensuring alignment between recommended practices and farmers' local contexts. In the

Indonesian context, Prajanti et al. (2024) emphasize that farmer empowerment based on Good Agricultural Practices requires sustained training, institutional strengthening, and collaboration among farmers, government, community institutions, and business actors. Structural dependency on exploitative middlemen systems places farmers in a weak bargaining position within the value chain (Arnon & Franck, 2025). Kouakou et al. (2025) confirm, in their study of cocoa agroforestry adoption in Côte d'Ivoire, that sustainability initiatives, such as the Cocoa and Forests Initiative (CFI), often fail because they do not address the structural root causes embedded in the value chain. Limited access to capital and premium markets further worsens farmers' economic conditions, creating a persistent poverty trap difficult to escape (M. R. Carter, 2019; Emako et al., 2023). A recent meta-analysis by Mnukwa et al. (2025) identifies access to extension services, secure land tenure, and farmer-organization support as critical determinants of sustainable agricultural practice adoption. Yet, conventional government project-based interventions tend to be sporadic and unsustainable, falling short of delivering the structural transformation needed (Pandey et al., 2025).

In response to these complexities, the Sustainable Cocoa Production Program (SCPP) was introduced as a Public–Private Partnership (PPP) model designed to break the cycle of poverty at the farmer level (Swisscontact, 2020; Hermans et al., 2017). The program implements a holistic approach that integrates intensive GAP training, facilitation of access to high-quality seedlings, improvements in post-harvest systems through fermentation, and direct connections to premium markets, targeting income increases of up to 75% (Swisscontact, 2020). However, the program's macro-level successes do not automatically explain the dynamics occurring at the micro level. Crucial questions arise: why, under the same intervention, do some farmers succeed in transforming their livelihoods while others remain left behind (Maisashvili et al., 2023; Khonje et al., 2022)? How do farmers them-

selves interpret the transformation process they undergo (Räty et al., 2023; Pignatti et al., 2015)? And what factors filter and mediate the benefits of the program, producing localized politics of inclusion and exclusion within the community (German et al., 2020; Schelle & Pokorny, 2021; Roth et al., 2024)? These questions require a deeper analysis that goes beyond conventional quantitative evaluation (Tasila Konja & Mabe, 2023).

Although SCPP is not a new intervention in Indonesia's cocoa sector, its long-term implementation provides an important basis for examining how partnership models operate across different local contexts. SCPP was implemented as a multi-donor public-private partnership involving SECO, public donors, private cocoa-sector actors, Indonesia's Ministry of Home Affairs, and provincial and district governments, with overlapping phases from 2012 to 2020. At the national level, the program grew into one of the largest cocoa-related initiatives in Indonesia, reaching approximately 165,000 farmers and engaging multiple actors across the cocoa industry (Swisscontact, 2020). Previous studies on SCPP have shown that the program relied on capacity building, farmer coaching, field demonstrations, and direct outreach to promote the adoption of recommended cocoa-farming practices. For instance, Yalu & Matous (2024), in a study of SCPP in Sulawesi involving 4,573 farmers across 70 villages and more than 5,000 peer-to-peer social ties, found that community network structures significantly shaped the adoption of sustainability practices. Their findings show that cohesive community networks may encourage homogeneity in farming practices, but do not always result in higher adoption of externally introduced recommendations. This suggests that the effectiveness of SCPP depends not only on program design, but also on local social networks, community structures, and farmers' positions within rural relations. However, while these studies provide important insights into social networks and practice adoption, they have paid less attention to how farmers subjectively interpret economic transformation and how unequal ac-

cess to capital, farmer groups, and market linkages produces localized mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. This study addresses this gap by examining SCPP implementation in Mataiwoi Village through the lens of capital conversion, rural power relations, and farmers' lived experiences of economic transformation.

The scientific novelty of this study lies in three major contributions. First, it uncovers the specific mechanisms through which pre-existing inequalities in assets, social capital, and institutional access function as mediating structures that filter program benefits, a phenomenon conceptualized here as the "politics of inclusion and exclusion" hidden behind aggregated program success metrics (McCarthy & Obidzinski, 2017; Rao & Enelamah, 2024). Unlike previous studies that have focused primarily on quantitative assessments of program effectiveness or statistical identification of adoption factors (Kroeger et al., 2017; Oli et al., 2025) this research provides a phenomenologically grounded understanding of why the program succeeds for some farmers but not for others. Second, the study examines an asymmetric tripartite partnership model in which SCPP acts as the primary driver, farmer groups serve as essential implementers, and local governments play a supporting facilitative role, challenging the assumptions of power balance in conventional PPP literature (Xiaohong, 2023; Jayasena et al., 2022). The findings demonstrate that partnership effectiveness does not necessarily depend on role symmetry, but rather on clearly differentiated roles based on the comparative advantages of each actor (Rankin et al., 2016; Casady et al., 2020). Third, this research centers farmers as active subjects who interpret and negotiate their own economic transformation, rather than passive recipients of development interventions. By exploring how farmers experience shifts in mindset from fatalism to economic agency and how they translate increased income into strategic investments, such as education for their children to break intergenerational poverty cycles, this study fills an important gap in rural economic transformation literature,

which is often dominated by macro-level and technocratic narratives (Hu et al., 2024; Kaiser, 2023).

Analytically, this article is grounded in a Bourdieu-inspired theory of capital, complemented by a rural political economy perspective. This framework treats the SCPP partnership not merely as a technical development intervention, but as a social field in which cocoa farmers occupy unequal positions based on their access to economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital (Schooneveld, 2022). Economic capital is reflected in landholding, working capital, and the ability to invest in Good Agricultural Practices (GAP); cultural capital refers to farmers' mastery of cultivation techniques, fermentation, recordkeeping, and certification procedures; social capital is embedded in farmer-group membership, trust-based networks, access to facilitators, and connections to buyers; while symbolic capital appears in the recognition of farmers as reliable producers of premium-quality cocoa (Bizikova et al., 2020). This framework is used in the Results and Discussion section to analyze how SCPP enables farmers to convert cultural and social capital into economic capital through productivity gains, quality improvement, and premium market access. It is also used to explain why not all farmers benefit equally from the same program: farmers with stronger economic resources, group membership, and access to information are better positioned to enter and sustain participation, while farmers with weaker capital remain more vulnerable to exclusion. The rural political economy perspective further helps explain how patron-client relations with middlemen, unequal bargaining positions, and value-chain structures shape the distribution of program benefits (Sexton & Xia, 2018; Xhoxhi et al., 2019). Therefore, inclusion and exclusion are understood not as purely administrative outcomes, but as socially structured processes shaped by pre-existing asset inequality, farmer-group networks, and unequal power relations within the cocoa value chain (Schelle & Pokorny, 2021).

Based on this analytical framework,

this study aims to examine how the tripartite partnership among SCPP, farmer groups, and local government actors shapes the economic transformation of cocoa farmers in Mataiwoi Village, Southeast Sulawesi. Specifically, the study analyzes the operational mechanisms of the partnership, the role of farmer groups in facilitating access to knowledge and markets, and the ways in which unequal forms of capital mediate farmers' inclusion in or exclusion from program benefits. It also explores how farmers interpret changes in productivity, income, livelihood strategies, social status, and economic agency after participating in the program. By situating the Mataiwoi case in relation to prior studies of SCPP in Indonesia, this study contributes to debates on public-private partnerships, inclusive agribusiness, rural social networks, and economic transformation in the Global South.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach using a case study design to understand the dynamics of strategic partnerships and the meaning of economic transformation from the perspective of cocoa farmers as the primary research subjects. The qualitative approach was selected based on the consideration that the study seeks to explore and interpret complex social phenomena through the lived experiences and perspectives of research participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). A case study design was chosen as the research strategy because it enables an in-depth analysis of contemporary phenomena within real-life contexts, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not distinctly visible (Warren & Bell, 2022). The study is exploratory and descriptive in nature and is guided by an interpretivist paradigm, which emphasizes a deep understanding of the subjective meanings constructed by participants within their social contexts (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022).

The research was conducted in Mataiwoi Village, Konawe Regency, Southeast Sulawesi, selected for being one of the target

locations of the Sustainable Cocoa Production Program (SCPP), which was relatively newly implemented in 2022. At the time of data collection in 2025, the program had been running for approximately three years, a period considered sufficient to observe early-stage economic transformation while still allowing informants to clearly recall the baseline conditions before the program. The village possesses characteristics representative of common issues among cocoa farmers in Konawe Regency, including predominantly aging cocoa trees, declining productivity, and inadequate accessibility for intensive and sustained fieldwork.

Purposive sampling was employed to identify research informants (Patton, 2015). Informants were selected based on specific criteria relevant to the study objectives and their ability to provide rich and in-depth information about the phenomenon under investigation (Donkoh, 2023). The informants included seventeen cocoa farmers participating in SCPP who met the criteria of participating in the program for at least two years, owning a minimum of 0.5 hectares of cocoa land, and actively engaging in program activities; ten non-participant cocoa farmers who served as a comparative group to assess the program's influence; and two leaders of farmer groups who were directly involved in coordinating with SCPP. Additional informants consisted of one SCPP representative, one representative of the local government (the Head of Mataiwoi Village), and one community leader, resulting in a total of 32

informants.

The characteristics of informants are presented in Table 1. Participant and non-participant farmers generally shared comparable socio-economic and farming characteristics, including landholdings of approximately 0.5-2 hectares and farming experience ranging from 15 to 25 years. This comparability was important because it allowed the study to examine why farmers with relatively similar baseline conditions experienced different economic trajectories after the introduction of the SCPP program.

Data collection employed the technique of triangulation to ensure comprehensive and valid data (Neuman, 2019). The primary method was in-depth semi-structured interviews guided by a flexible interview protocol, allowing the researcher to explore information in depth while giving informants the space to articulate their experiences in their own language and perspectives. Observations were conducted to directly examine cocoa-farming activities, interactions among program actors, and the socio-economic conditions of the community, providing contextual data that enriched the understanding of the studied phenomena. Focus group discussions (FGDs) were organized to obtain collective perspectives and facilitate discussions among informants on relevant issues, particularly for exploring social dynamics and shared learning among farmers. Document review was also undertaken to gather supporting secondary data, including SCPP program documents,

Table 1. Characteristics of Research Informants

Informant Category	Number	Key Characteristics
SCPP Participant Farmers	17	Landholding: 0.5–2 ha; Farming experience: 15–25 years; Active in the program ≥ 2 years
Non-Participant Farmers	10	Landholding: 0.5–2 ha; Farming experience: 15–25 years; Not participating in SCPP
Farmer Group Leaders	2	Positions: Chairperson and Secretary; Organizational experience: 3–5 years
SCPP Representative	1	Position: Program Coordinator; Experience: 8 years
Government Representative	1	Position: Head of Mataiwoi Village
Community Leader	1	Position: Informal village leader
Total	32	

Source: Author's Data, 2025

farmers' production and income records, documentation of training and mentoring activities, and administrative data on the total number of cocoa farmers in Mataiwoi Village (240 farmers) and SCPP participants (63 farmers).

Quantitative data such as productivity and income figures used in this study reflect estimates reported by informants during in-depth interviews rather than direct measurements by the researcher. Consistent with the descriptive qualitative approach, these figures serve as contextual illustrations of farmers' economic conditions rather than statistical data for quantitative analysis. The credibility of these estimates was ensured through triangulation with SCPP program documents (program targets and participant data), validation from farmer-group leaders who maintain informal records of member developments, and field observations of the physical conditions of farms and household assets that aligned with the reported income levels. The trustworthiness of this qualitative study is ensured through Ahmed (2024) four key criteria. Credibility was achieved through source and technique triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing with academics and practitioners. Transferability was strengthened through rich contextual descriptions (thick description) and purposive sampling, enabling readers to assess the applicability of findings to other contexts. Dependability was reinforced through systematic documentation of the entire research process (audit trail) and consistent procedures for data collection and analysis. Confirmability was ensured through critical reflection on researcher bias and systematic storage of all field notes, transcripts, and supporting documents.

Data analysis employed thematic analysis following Braun & Clarke (2019), beginning with familiarization through repeated reading of interview transcripts, field notes, and other documents. Relevant data segments were coded using NVivo software to facilitate data organization and pattern identification. Codes were then grouped into potential themes aligned with the theoretical framework and research objectives,

evaluated for internal coherence and adequate representation of the data, and clearly defined along with their sub-themes. The final results are presented in an analytical narrative supported by representative data excerpts that strengthen the empirical basis of the interpretation (Zamawe, 2015). In addition to thematic analysis, narrative analysis was used to understand individual farmers' experiences in the process of economic transformation, while the constant comparative method was applied to compare emerging patterns across different informant groups, enabling the identification of similarities and differences in their experiences and perspectives.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Pre-Program Structural Conditions of Cocoa Farmers

Before the implementation of SCPP, cocoa farming in Mataiwoi Village was shaped by a combination of agronomic decline, weak market access, and unequal bargaining relations within the cocoa value chain. Most farmers reported low productivity, averaging around 400 kg per hectare per year, due to aging cocoa trees, limited application of Good Agricultural Practices (GAP), pest and disease problems, and inadequate post-harvest processing. Cocoa beans were generally sold without fermentation, which weakened product quality and limited farmers' ability to access premium prices.

These baseline conditions show that the vulnerability of cocoa farmers was not merely technical, but also structural. Low productivity was closely connected to farmers' limited economic capital for farm rehabilitation, limited cultural capital in the form of technical knowledge and post-harvest skills, and limited social capital in accessing farmer-group networks, facilitators, and premium buyers. In this sense, the pre-program condition reflected a rural economic structure in which smallholder farmers were positioned as low-value producers within a long and unequal marketing chain.

"Back then, the farm was neglected, Ma'am. I used to call it a 'chocolate forest.'

The trees were tall and dense, becoming a habitat for squirrels and black pod disease. The harvest was at most three to four hundred kilos per hectare a year. And even then, the quality was poor. Income was unpredictable... sometimes enough for food, sometimes not." (SCPP Participant Farmer 1, 2025)

Non-participant farmers shared relatively similar baseline conditions with SCPP participant farmers, particularly in terms of landholding size, farming experience, low productivity, and dependence on middlemen. However, their later economic trajectories diverged because they did not access the same combination of training, collective organization, market linkage, and technical facilitation provided through SCPP. This comparison becomes important for understanding that economic transformation in Mataiwoi was not simply the result of individual farmer motivation, but was mediated by unequal access to economic, cultural, and social capital.

Dynamics of Strategic Partnerships in the SCPP Program

The findings reveal an asymmetric tripartite partnership model involving SCPP, farmer groups, and the local government. The partnership did not operate through equal power among actors, but through functional complementarity based on each actor's comparative advantage. SCPP acted as the primary driver by providing technical expertise, training resources, access to premium markets, and intensive field-based facilitation. Farmer groups functioned as local institutional intermediaries that coordinated members, managed peer learning, operated the Internal Control System (ICS), and strengthened collective quality control. Meanwhile, the local government played a supporting and legitimizing role by facilitating initial meetings, assisting group formation, and strengthening community trust in the program.

This finding shows that asymmetry does not necessarily weaken a partnership when the division of roles is clear and mutually reinforcing. In Mataiwoi, SCPP pos-

sessed stronger financial, technical, and market resources; farmer groups possessed local social networks and collective learning mechanisms; while the village government possessed administrative authority and social legitimacy. The interaction among these roles enabled the program to function effectively despite unequal power among actors. Figure 1 summarizes this asymmetric but complementary partnership model.

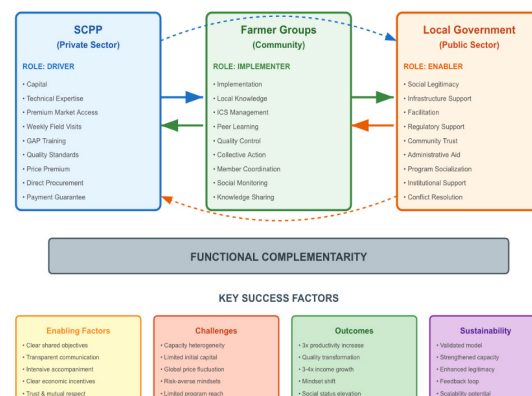


Figure 1. Tripartite Partnership Model in the Sustainable Cocoa Production Program (SCPP)
Source: Author's Data, 2025

The key supporting factors and challenges identified from field data are summarized in Table 2. The key supporting factors and challenges identified from field data are summarized in Table 2. The empirical evidence is presented in paraphrased analytical form to show how each factor shaped the implementation and outcomes of the partnership.

The intensive facilitation model became one of the main mechanisms through which the partnership produced change. SCPP facilitators regularly visited farmers' cocoa farms and provided hands-on guidance on pruning, sanitation, fermentation, and quality control. This field-based learning process strengthened farmers' practical knowledge and reduced the gap between technical recommendations and local farming realities. The farmer group also became an important social infrastructure for innovation adoption because it enabled farmers to exchange experiences, monitor one another's farms, and collectively

Table 2. Supporting Factors and Challenges in the Tripartite Partnership of the SCPP Program

Category	Factor	Description	Empirical Evidence from Field Data
Supporting Factors	Clarity of Shared Goals	All parties share a common understanding of the goal of improving farmer welfare	Interviews indicate that SCPP, farmer groups, and village actors understood the program as a long-term effort to improve productivity, quality, and farmer income.
	Transparent Communication	Openness regarding prices, quality standards, and payment systems	Farmers reported that price differences, quality requirements, and payment procedures were explained through meetings and field facilitation.
	Intensive Facilitation	Facilitators visit almost every week	Participant farmers emphasized that direct farm visits helped them understand pruning, sanitation, fermentation, and quality control more effectively.
	Clear Economic Incentives	Guaranteed market access and price premiums of IDR 5,000–10,000/kg	Participants associated program participation with access to higher prices and more stable market channels.
Challenges	Capacity Heterogeneity	Not all farmers show the same level of commitment	Farmer group leaders observed variation in attendance, consistency, and willingness to change long-standing cultivation habits.
	Limited Capital	GAP implementation requires initial investment	Several farmers faced difficulty financing pruning tools, fermentation boxes, and other farm rehabilitation needs.
	Global Price Fluctuations	Concerns over volatility of international cocoa prices	Local actors expressed concern that international cocoa price changes could affect the sustainability of premium purchasing schemes.

Source: Author's Data, 2025

maintain quality standards through the ICS mechanism.

“The SCPP team, called the Field Facilitators (FL), comes to our farms almost every week. They do not just talk at the village hall; they go straight into the fields. They inspect each cocoa tree and teach us proper pruning techniques through hands-on practice. They literally guide our hands, showing which branches to cut and why. That is why we learn quickly.” (Participant Farmer 4, 2025)

Contrary to conventional assumptions in PPP literature that emphasize balanced roles among partners (Hodge & Greve, 2017; Jayasena et al., 2022), this study demonstrates that partnership effectiveness does not necessarily depend on power symmetry. Instead, it depends on clear role

differentiation based on comparative advantage. SCPP's financial and technical capacity enabled intensive facilitation; farmer groups provided local social networks and peer-based control mechanisms; and the local government supplied administrative legitimacy. Thus, the partnership worked not because actors were equal, but because their unequal capacities were organized into complementary functions.

The key success factors of the partnership were shared goals, transparent communication, intensive facilitation, and clear economic incentives through guaranteed market access and price premiums. These factors created a pathway through which training and market access could be converted into productivity gains and higher household income. However, the same part-

nership also contained challenges: farmers differed in motivation and capacity, some lacked capital to invest in GAP practices, and global cocoa price fluctuation created uncertainty over long-term incentives. These constraints show that partnership effectiveness is inseparable from the social and economic conditions of the farmers who participate in it.

Capital Conversion and Economic Transformation

The economic transformation experienced by SCPP participant farmers was multidimensional. It involved changes in production practices, product quality, market access, income, asset accumulation,

and farmers' perceptions of their own economic agency. This transformation did not occur through land expansion, but through the conversion of knowledge, networks, and market access into improved economic outcomes. Figure 2 illustrates the six-stage transformation pathway and the mediating role of pre-existing inequalities.

Based on the analytical framework outlined above, the findings indicate that the economic transformation experienced by farmers is multidimensional and substantive, extending beyond mere increases in productivity or income. A comparison of conditions before and after the program is presented in Table 3.

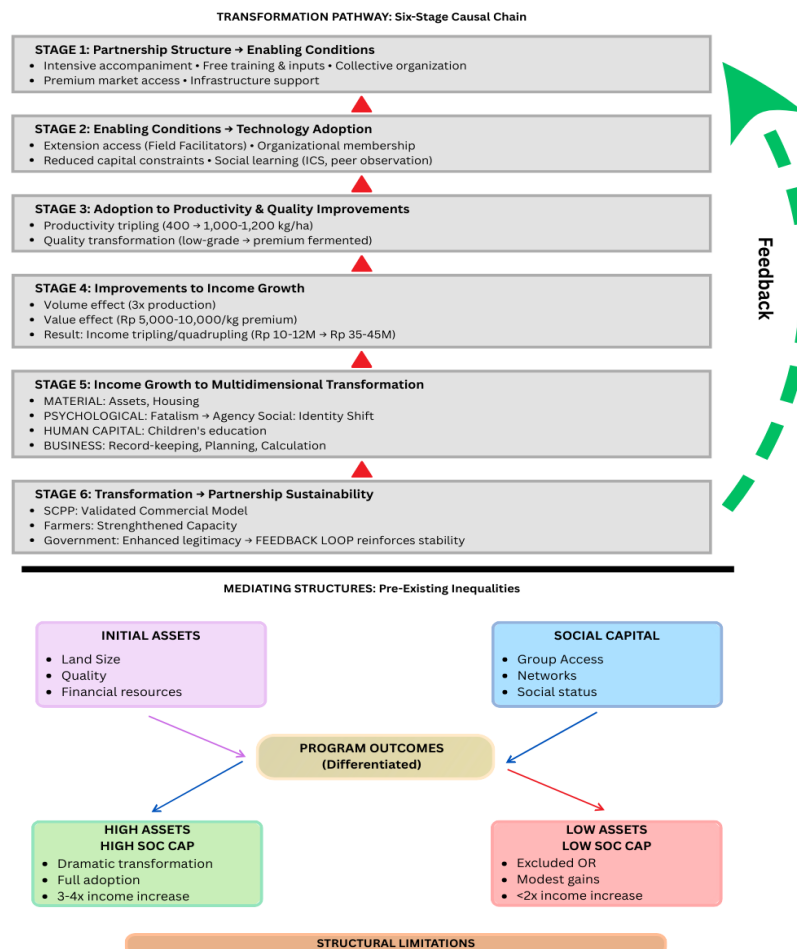


Figure 2. Six-Stage Economic Transformation Pathway Model and the Mediating Structure of Pre-Existing Inequalities Source: Author's Data, 2025

Description: The model illustrates the causal mechanisms of economic transformation from the partnership structure (Stage 1) to sustainability (Stage 6), and makes explicit the mediating structure of pre-existing inequalities in initial assets and social capital, which generate differentiated outcomes between farmers with high and low asset endowments

Table 3. Comparison of Farmers' Productivity and Income Before and After the SCPP Program

Indicator	Before the Program	After the Program
Productivity	Low: Most farmers reported yields of approximately 400 kg/ha/year	High: Participant farmers consistently reported a two- to threefold increase, reaching 1–1.2 tons/ha/year
Net Income	Minimal: Farmers reported earning IDR 8–12 million per year, with unstable income that was often insufficient for daily household needs.	Significant: Farmers reported earning IDR 35–45 million per year, enabling investment in education and household assets
Product Quality	Low-grade dried cocoa beans, generally sold without fermentation.	Premium-quality cocoa beans produced through fermentation and quality control procedures.
Market Access	Long marketing chain and dependence on middlemen.	Shorter value chain through farmer groups and buyers linked to SCPP.
Subjective Orientation	Fatalistic view of farming and limited sense of control over outcomes.	Greater economic agency through knowledge, recordkeeping, and quality-based production.

Source: Author's Data, 2025

Note: The productivity and income figures presented are estimates provided by informants during in-depth interviews and not results of direct quantitative measurement by the researcher. Data credibility is ensured through triangulation with SCPP program documents, verification by farmer group leaders, and field observations of farm conditions and household assets.

The first dimension was productivity improvement. Before joining the program, farmers generally reported yields of approximately 400 kg per hectare per year. After adopting GAP, participant farmers reported yields ranging from 1 to 1.2 tons per hectare per year. This increase was associated with improved pruning, farm sanitation, pest and disease management, and more systematic farm maintenance. From Bourdieu's perspective, this reflects the conversion of cultural capital, in the form of technical knowledge and cultivation skills, into economic capital through increased productivity.

The second dimension was product quality transformation. Prior to the program, cocoa beans were generally dried immediately after harvesting without fermentation, resulting in lower quality and weaker bargaining value. Through SCPP training, farmers learned fermentation techniques, quality-control procedures, and post-har-

vest management. These skills enabled farmers to produce higher-quality cocoa beans and access better prices. Product quality therefore became a mechanism through which technical knowledge was converted into economic value.

The third dimension was integration into a shorter and more profitable value chain. Before SCPP, farmers depended heavily on middlemen and sub-district collectors, which placed them in a weak bargaining position. Through the partnership, participant farmers were connected to farmer groups and buyers linked to SCPP. This reduced intermediary layers and improved access to premium markets. As a result, farmers' dependence on conventional middlemen was reduced, while their bargaining position improved through quality-based production.

The fourth dimension was household income growth. Participant farmers reported that annual net income increased

from approximately IDR 8-12 million before the program to around IDR 35-45 million after adopting improved production and post-harvest practices. The increase in income enabled farmers to invest in farm tools, household improvements, and children's education. In this sense, economic transformation was not limited to higher income but extended to the strengthening of household capabilities and intergenerational investment.

"The biggest change is not actually in the income numbers, Sir, but in the way we think. Previously, our farming was careless. Plant, wait for harvest, accept whatever price the middleman offers. We felt we had no control over our own fate. If the harvest was good, alhamdulillah; if bad, it was just fate. Now our thinking has completely changed. We know that our harvest outcomes can be controlled by managing the farm properly." (Participant Farmer 3, 2025)

This statement captures the sociological core of the transformation: a shift from fatalism to economic agency. Farmers began to understand cocoa farming not merely as a subsistence activity shaped by weather, pests, and middlemen, but as a manageable economic activity that could be improved through knowledge, discipline, recordkeeping, and quality control. This shift indicates that the partnership transformed not only farmers' income, but also their subjectivity, aspirations, and sense of control over economic outcomes.

Within the Sustainable Livelihood Framework (Scoones, 2015), improvements occurred across several forms of capital: human capital through GAP knowledge and children's education, social capital through strengthened farmer groups and buyer networks, natural capital through improved land productivity, physical capital through modern tools and home improvements, and financial capital through higher income and savings. These concurrent improvements indicate that the transformation was holistic rather than merely financial. Nevertheless, the transformation remained uneven because not all farmers possessed equal ca-

capacity to access and convert program opportunities.

The Politics of Inclusion and Exclusion in Rural Economic Transformation

Despite the significant transformation experienced by participant farmers, the program also revealed important limitations in terms of accessibility and inclusion. Administrative data from the farmer group and SCPP show that out of 240 cocoa farmers in Mataiwoi Village, only 63 participated in the program, while 177 farmers remained outside the intervention. This indicates that the program's success was not evenly distributed across the rural community.

The politics of inclusion and exclusion in Mataiwoi cannot be understood merely as an administrative issue of program participation. It reflects deeper rural social structures that shape who is able to convert program opportunities into economic gains. This interpretation is in line with Murlianti et al. (2024), who demonstrate that farmers' positions within rural communities can be reconfigured by broader political-economic processes, producing new forms of marginalization and vulnerability. From Bourdieu's perspective, farmers entered the SCPP field with unequal volumes and compositions of capital. Those with sufficient economic capital were better able to invest in pruning tools, fermentation boxes, and farm maintenance. Farmers with stronger cultural capital were more capable of absorbing GAP knowledge, maintaining records, and complying with quality standards. Social capital also played a decisive role, as access to farmer groups, trust-based networks, and proximity to local leaders influenced who received information, encouragement, and peer support. These forms of capital were convertible: social capital enabled access to training and buyers, cultural capital improved product quality, and economic capital allowed continued investment in farm rehabilitation.

At the same time, the program partially disrupted existing patron-client relations between farmers and middlemen. Before SCPP, many farmers depended on middle-

men for immediate market access, cash liquidity, and price-setting, placing them in a weak bargaining position. The shortened value chain introduced through SCPP reduced this dependency for participating farmers by linking them to farmer groups and premium buyers. However, non-participant farmers remained embedded in the older patron-client structure, where limited bargaining power and dependence on middlemen continued to reproduce economic vulnerability. Thus, the partnership created transformative opportunities, but these opportunities were unevenly distributed because they interacted with pre-existing inequalities in rural class position, group membership, and value-chain power relations.

This finding shows that inclusive agribusiness partnerships do not automatically produce inclusive outcomes. Formal openness to participation does not guarantee equal access when farmers differ in capital ownership, social networks, technical readiness, and bargaining position. In Mataiwoi, the SCPP partnership successfully transformed farmers who were able to enter and sustain participation in the program. However, those lacking economic capital, weakly connected to farmer groups, or still dependent on middlemen were less able to benefit from the same opportunity. The politics of inclusion and exclusion therefore emerged not from explicit exclusion, but from the interaction between program requirements and pre-existing rural inequalities.

Partnership, Capital Conversion, and Inclusive Rural Development

The findings of this study demonstrate that the SCPP partnership generated economic transformation through a process of capital conversion. Technical training and field facilitation increased farmers' cultural capital by improving their knowledge of GAP, fermentation, recordkeeping, and quality standards. Farmer-group participation strengthened social capital by connecting farmers to facilitators, peer-learning networks, and collective quality-control mechanisms. Improved production and ac-

cess to premium markets increased economic capital through higher productivity and income. Over time, recognition as premium cocoa producers also generated symbolic capital, improving farmers' self-confidence and social status within the community.

This process shows that the partnership did not simply transfer technology to farmers. Rather, it reorganized farmers' position within the local cocoa economy by enabling them to convert knowledge, networks, and quality standards into economic gains. Farmers who were able to combine economic, cultural, and social capital experienced more substantial transformation. Conversely, farmers with limited capital and weaker institutional connections remained more vulnerable to exclusion. This explains why the same program produced different outcomes among farmers living in the same village.

Therefore, the SCPP case provides two major insights. First, intensive facilitation, farmer-group strengthening, and premium market access can generate meaningful economic transformation for smallholder cocoa farmers. Second, inclusive partnership models must address pre-existing inequalities in capital, networks, and bargaining power. Without such mechanisms, agricultural development programs may improve the welfare of included farmers while simultaneously leaving a large proportion of rural households outside the pathway of transformation.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that a significant and sustainable economic transformation has occurred among cocoa farmers in Konawe, Southeast Sulawesi. This transformation is the result of the implementation of the Sustainable Cocoa Partnership Program (SCPP), a strategic partnership model that has successfully generated a substantial increase in real productivity, from 400 kg/ha/year to 1–1.2 tons/ha/year, and a marked rise in average annual net income. Farmers have strategically translated this income growth into investments in social capital, particu-

larly in their children's education, which constitutes a vital step in breaking intergenerational structural poverty. Nevertheless, a key finding of this phenomenological case study reveals the presence of a "politics of inclusion and exclusion" operating beneath the program's achievements. De facto selection mechanisms have created social and economic boundaries, resulting in only a subset of farmers being fully included. The three identified exclusion mechanisms, access to capital, managerial capacity, and mastery of ICS certification, underscore that despite the program's success, equity and distributional justice remain fundamental challenges that must be acknowledged within the context of sustainable agricultural development.

Given the tensions between program success and the persistence of exclusion, several practical implications warrant serious attention. For cooperatives or farmer groups, it is crucial to broaden program outreach and mitigate exclusion risks by developing collective enterprises, such as processing units or joint marketing initiatives, to strengthen their collective bargaining position. Cooperatives are also encouraged to document their ICS system as a best practice that can be replicated by other groups, and to develop learning exchange networks. Meanwhile, for individual farmers, openness to innovation, knowledge sharing, and preparing for farm succession by involving younger generations are essential for long-term sustainability. Theoretically, this study opens avenues for further inquiry to deepen the understanding of inclusive rural development. Longitudinal studies spanning 5 to 10 years are needed to examine the sustainability of economic transformation in the post-intervention phase. Additionally, comparative studies across various SCPP locations are essential to identify context-specific factors influencing inclusion or exclusion. To enrich the analysis, an in-depth examination of gender dimensions in the adoption of agricultural practices, an area currently underexplored, is highly recommended. Finally, the use of quantitative designs such as quasi-experimental methods

will strengthen these qualitative findings by providing more robust causal evidence regarding the program's impact on household income improvements.

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