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RESEARCH ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

From Power to Sustainability? Unpacking the Role of Justice in Agricultural Commodity Supply Networks

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ABSTRACT

Agricultural commodity supply networks in the Global South are essential for securing the global supply of crops and livestock. However, they are challenged by power asymmetries, which cause injustice and jeopardize social equity, environmental stewardship, and economic viability for disadvantaged actors. To address this challenge, it is imperative to understand how power impacts justice and sustainability. To this end, we examined a supply network in Mato Grosso, Brazil, that faced power asymmetries through 49 semi-structured interviews, field observations, and archival data. The analysis unveiled three forms of power use—excessive, strategic, and balanced—and associated tactics, impacting justice and sustainability outcomes in various ways. We illustrate, for example, how excessive power manifested in traders' abusive tactics, who compelled farmers to accept quality discounts due to external factors, such as heavy rain or poor road conditions. In response to these injustices, farmers cascaded the pressure through the supply network, disproportionately affecting disadvantaged actors, for instance, by withholding rural workers' wages for low productivity or eradicating wildlife deemed detrimental to profitability. Based on these findings, we provide a set of six propositions and a theoretical model that elucidate how power can be leveraged to foster fairer and more sustainable agricultural commodity supply networks.

1 | Introduction

Agricultural commodity supply networks in the Global South play a pivotal role in ensuring the global supply of crops and livestock. However, these networks are increasingly confronted with a multitude of profound social and environmental challenges. Exploitative labor conditions, stakeholder marginalization, deforestation, and environmental degradation are among the challenges that not only impact the livelihoods of millions but also the long-term sustainability of food systems (del Giorgio et al. 2022; FAO 2022; Newton et al. 2013; Pullman and

Wu 2021). More critically, these challenges are not isolated but rather deeply intertwined with power asymmetries that enable dominant actors, such as large agricultural corporations, to abuse their power. As such, they dictate inequitable terms and generate negative social and environmental externalities, contributing to systemic injustices and negative sustainability outcomes that mostly affect disadvantaged groups.

Power dynamics thus play a critical role in shaping agricultural commodity supply networks, determining who benefits from them and who experiences adverse effects. For example, traders

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Summary

- Excessive and strategic power use in supply networks can undermine justice and sustainability, often triggering negative social and ecological impacts throughout the entire network, especially for marginalized actors.
- Balanced power relations—rooted in shared responsibility, knowledge transfer, and fairness—can enhance justice and cascade sustainability throughout supply networks.
- Addressing systemic power asymmetries requires inclusive policies, cross-sector collaboration, and the integration of justice principles into the governance of both local and global supply networks.

strategically leverage their influence to dominate the production, trade, and distribution of agricultural commodities, often at the expense of farmers. In response, farmers must navigate stringent requirements imposed by traders while receiving insufficient technical support for sustainable agricultural practices. These constraints frequently foster perceptions of injustice among farmers and rural communities, leading to resistance or disengagement from sustainability initiatives that are perceived to be externally imposed (Touboulic et al. 2014). This underscores a fundamental yet unresolved issue: how the exercise of power influences sustainability outcomes and how those subjected to power imbalances perceive and respond to these dynamics from a justice viewpoint.

Although power has been extensively investigated in operations and supply chain management (OSCM), much of the existing research focuses on how focal firms use power to enforce compliance with suppliers (Maloni and Benton 2000; Nyaga et al. 2013; Reimann and Ketchen 2017). Less scholarly attention has been paid to the perspectives of those subjected to power and how their perceptions of (in)justice influence their commitment to sustainability. In this respect, there remains a need to empirically examine how power use fosters or inhibits specific social, environmental, and economic sustainability outcomes (Marttinen and Kähkönen 2022; Meqdadi et al. 2019; Rivera-Valle and Silva 2024). Conceptually, power is defined as an actor's ability to influence another actor's intentions and actions (Choi et al. 2021; Emerson 1962; Maloni and Benton 2000). In buyer-supplier relationships, this influence has been conceptualized in terms of power bases or tactics. For example, buyers employ coercion to ensure that suppliers meet their requirements, threatening penalties for non-compliance. A critical and overlooked aspect is analyzing how both the holder and the target of power perceive these power bases from a justice viewpoint. Consequently, further empirical research is needed to address this gap in knowledge (Karaosman et al. 2023). This conceptualization requires an expansion beyond the perspectives of buyers and suppliers, as supply networks encompass a multitude of actors who can foster novel forms of power use.

In this context, justice is a subjective and context-dependent concept shaped by what individuals believe to be right (Alghababsheh et al. 2023; Cropanzano et al. 2007). This concept

is also crucial for explaining how power interlinks with sustainability, as a growing body of research suggests that justice perceptions can influence sustainable behaviors and practices in supply chains (Alghababsheh et al. 2020; Jabbour et al. 2020; Lim et al. 2022). A comprehensive examination of justice has been undertaken in studies focusing on buyer-supplier relationships (Narasimhan et al. 2013), with a call to investigate it from the perspective of traditional (e.g., traders, farmers) and non-traditional supply network actors (e.g., rural workers, Indigenous people) (Alghababsheh et al. 2023; Stephens et al. 2025; Touboulic et al. 2020). Alghababsheh et al. (2020) and Chen and Chen (2019) have also argued for the inclusion of the triple bottom line (TBL) framework of sustainability in the analysis of power and justice, as previous research has primarily considered economic performance.

Given the existing gaps in OSCM research, this study explores the following research questions:

RQ1. *How does the use of power trigger (in)justice perceptions in an agricultural commodity supply network?*

RQ2. *How do these (in)justice perceptions foster or hinder social, environmental, and economic sustainability outcomes in the supply network?*

Thus, this study seeks to bridge the identified gaps by empirically examining the interconnections between power, justice, and sustainability outcomes from multiple perspectives. The analysis extends beyond traditional buyer-supplier relationships to incorporate a diverse range of actors, such as commodity traders, farmers, rural workers, and Indigenous communities. Furthermore, it considers the implications of power use both at the dyadic and network levels. By integrating the TBL framework, which encompasses the social, environmental, and economic dimensions of sustainability, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of power in shaping sustainability outcomes within agricultural commodity supply networks. To this end, we conducted a single-case study with the aim of theory elaboration (Ketokivi and Choi 2014) in an agricultural commodity supply network in Mato Grosso, Brazil. From a Global South context, the supply network has contributed to the global production, processing, and distribution of agricultural commodities. However, this network has been hindered by strong power asymmetries that have largely impeded the achievement of sustainability outcomes.

Our case study uncovered three forms of power use—excessive, strategic, and balanced—and associated tactics that impact justice perceptions and sustainability outcomes in varied ways. These findings extend the OSCM knowledge on power-balancing tactics through justice (Ireland and Webb 2007), explaining how power is perceived in terms of procedural, distributive, and interactional justice. Furthermore, we explain how power use cascades across the agricultural commodity supply network, often negatively impacting the sustainability of rural workers, Indigenous people, and nature. We thus enrich the existing literature on power in complex network relationships (e.g., Shaheen et al. 2024) and respond to calls to consider a Global South context, where power imbalances are often detrimental to marginalized actors (Karaosman and Marshall 2023; Oyedijo

et al. 2023). Overall, this paper provides new perspectives on the intricate relationship between power dynamics, perceived justice, and sustainability outcomes in supply networks. It presents novel evidence of cascading injustices that extend beyond direct supplier relations, potentially jeopardizing broader sustainability efforts. By incorporating justice as a fundamental element, this study redefines OSCM and advances theoretical discussions in the field. Consequently, this paper urges the OSCM community to further explore the pivotal role of justice in addressing power imbalances and sustainability challenges within global agricultural commodity supply networks.

We examine power use based on a comprehensive TBL framework, thereby offering critical insights into the related OSCM literature (e.g., Chen et al. 2017; Marttinen and Kähkönen 2022; Marshall et al. 2019). Particularly, we elaborate on how power use both fosters and hinders social, environmental, and economic sustainability outcomes in the supply network. These insights help us to better understand, for example, how “excessive” power cascades into negative sustainability outcomes that impact the entire supply network. These outcomes include unfair labor standards, limited accountability for agrochemical misuse risks, use of fake certificates of non-demarcated Indigenous lands, deforestation, and the eradication of wild animals near agricultural production. Conversely, our findings also provide insights concerning the use of “balanced” power, fostering justice and sustainability outcomes for dyads and across the supply network. We thus expand research examining justice in fostering buyer–supplier relationships and financial performance (e.g., Narasimhan et al. 2013) by highlighting the multifaceted sustainability outcomes of balanced power for multiple actors.

Our case study findings highlight various lessons for OSCM practice. We recommend that traders and suppliers of agricultural inputs rethink their excessive or strategic use of power with farmers. They should prioritize the balanced use of power to promote justice perceptions and sustainable outcomes for all parties. For instance, traders could collaborate with suppliers to offer farmers fair conditions for exchanging commodities for agricultural inputs. First, this could create business opportunities for traders and suppliers. Second, this could reduce the financial and operational challenges for farmers, who often struggle to sell commodities, obtain seeds, fertilizers, or agrochemicals at fair prices, and organize the logistics to transport them. Our findings also indicate that traders and suppliers can benefit further from the provision of fair incentives to farmers, who are likely to comply with their requirements in a more proactive way. In receiving proper incentives, knowledge, and resources, farmers are not only able to thrive financially but also be more considerate of other disadvantaged actors in the extended supply network. Moreover, some farmers benefited from the non-homologation of Indigenous territories and could legally use them for commodities production. Consequently, policymakers in Brazil should recognize these territories to foster Indigenous people’s justice and sustainability. In the case of farmers disregarding nature, we recommend coordinated initiatives from traders and the federal government to create incentives that help tackle unsustainable practices and behaviors. Therefore, we hope that our case study findings encourage practitioners to critically reassess their influence, provide equitable incentives, and ensure transparency in information sharing. By adopting

these practices, practitioners can help to mitigate power imbalances and promote a more equitable and sustainable agricultural sector.

2 | Relevant Literature and Theoretical Background

2.1 | Power in Supply Networks

Power is often outlined as a function of dependence (Cheng et al. 2021; Handley and Benton 2012). According to Emerson (1962), actor A’s power over actor B is directly proportional to B’s dependence on A. This dependence and the power distribution it creates in the relationships between actors arise from different power bases. French and Raven (1959) provide a widely known framework that has aided OSCM scholars in conceptualizing power bases (Brito and Miguel 2017; Handley and Benton 2012; Maloni and Benton 2000; Nyaga et al. 2013; Zhao et al. 2008); they identified five power bases: reward, coercive, legitimate, referent, and expert power. These power bases have been largely considered in buyer–supplier relationships with the former as the power holder and the latter as the power target (Chen and Chen 2019; Reimann and Ketchen 2017; Touboulic et al. 2014). In this regard, *reward power* refers to the buyer’s capacity to offer beneficial resources to the supplier in exchange for compliance. In terms of *coercive power*, the buyer threatens the supplier, indicating that negative treatment or the withholding of valuable resources will occur in the event of non-compliance with the buyer’s demands. The buyer’s use of contracts or legal threats is an example of *legitimate power*. While *referent power* is evidenced by the supplier’s pride in being affiliated with the buyer, *expert power* is observed when the supplier recognizes the buyer as a source of extensive specialized knowledge. These power bases can be further differentiated as mediated and non-mediated (Benton and Maloni 2005; Handley and Benton 2012; Maloni and Benton 2000). Reward, coercive, and legitimate power are categorized as mediated, as they denote the buyer’s capacity to persuade or coerce the supplier into specific actions through calculated means. In contrast, referent and expert power are categorized as non-mediated, as they neither involve the exertion of force nor the intimidation of the supplier but instead arise from the supplier’s willingness to be associated with the buyer.

While these power bases provide an initial framework to identify power use in our case study, we aim to elaborate on a more nuanced power theory that describes novel patterns of power use and associated tactics in supply networks. This aligns with the need for a further investigation of intricate supply chain operations (Karaosman and Marshall 2023; Shaheen et al. 2024), especially agricultural commodity supply networks from the Global South that involve a variety of actors. These networks are highly susceptible to power asymmetries that lead to disparities in sustainability outcomes, particularly to the detriment of weak actors influenced by powerful ones (Gómez and Lee 2023; Pullman et al. 2009; Touboulic et al. 2020).

Although there has been extensive research investigating power imbalances in buyer–supplier relationships, less attention has been paid to understanding how different forms of power use

can influence specific justice dimensions and, in turn, shape the sustainability of power targets. The role of justice in linking these different forms of power use to sustainability outcomes remains underexplored in the context of supply networks. OSCM studies have pinpointed the urgent need for a more nuanced disentangling of power dynamics, linking them to concepts of justice (Karaosman et al. 2023) and sustainability (Porteous et al. 2015). In a conceptual study discussing social enterprises, Pullman et al. (2018) argued that more research is required to understand the complexities of power dynamics in supply chain relationships in contexts where different objectives are at play, such as the pursuit of profit alone or the pursuit of broader sustainability goals. Marttinen and Kähkönen (2022) suggested further investigation into the dynamics of active, mediated, and non-mediated power in networks with multiple actors, considering the influence of various forms of power on sustainable practices.

2.2 | Justice in Supply Networks

Although justice was not initially our focus, it emerged as a critical concept during the data collection and examination of the implications of power use. This subsection conceptualizes justice and its role in linking power to sustainability outcomes in the supply network. Justice is a socially constructed concept (Colquitt et al. 2001), reflecting people's perceptions of fairness (Cropanzano et al. 2007). In OSCM, justice focuses on perceived fairness in supply chain relationships (Brito and Miguel 2017; Liu et al. 2012). In this regard, buyers can foster justice to establish, maintain, or strengthen their relationships with suppliers (Narasimhan et al. 2013), thereby reducing supplier opportunism and conflicts while enhancing engagement, trust, and knowledge sharing (Alghababsheh et al. 2023; Ireland and Webb 2007).

The concept of justice encompasses three core dimensions: procedural, distributive, and interactional (Karaosman et al. 2023; Luo 2007; Narasimhan et al. 2013). *Procedural justice* pertains to the fairness of decision-making processes (Narasimhan et al. 2013), which means that procedures are perceived as transparent, unbiased, and in accordance with contractual agreements (Luo 2007). Meanwhile, *distributive justice* concerns fair compensation for tasks performed and is founded on equality, equity, and need (Cropanzano et al. 2007; Karaosman et al. 2023). *Interactional justice* has two dimensions (Alghababsheh et al. 2023): *interpersonal justice*, which encompasses respect, honesty, dignity, and politeness (Luo 2007), and *informational justice*, which concerns the sufficiency, timeliness, and clarity of information exchange (Alghababsheh et al. 2023; Narasimhan et al. 2013).

Addressing the role of justice in interlinking power and sustainability outcomes is at a nascent stage and points to some insights in OSCM literature (Chen and Chen 2019; Karaosman et al. 2023). For example, rewarding suppliers appropriately for higher sustainability performance has been shown to enhance supplier satisfaction and motivation, thereby driving positive sustainability outcomes across the supply network (Meqdadi et al. 2019; Pagell and Wu 2009). In addition, strengthening the link between power use and justice has been considered pivotal

for enhancing trust and social sustainability outcomes in supply chains, especially in Global South countries (Jabbour et al. 2020; Lim et al. 2022). Conversely, the excessive use of power can be detrimental to supply chain relationships (Kähkönen 2014; Schleper et al. 2017) by the creation of conflicts and hostility, which erode established social ties (Alghababsheh et al. 2023; Cropanzano et al. 2007).

These insights highlight the role of justice in aligning power use with sustainability outcomes within buyer-supplier relationships. However, the extent to which power tactics trigger (in)justice perceptions while fostering or impeding sustainability outcomes for an entire supply network remains under-researched. Reimann and Ketchen (2017) posited that conducting such research could enhance our understanding of power distribution within supply networks and its effects on perceptions of injustice, resentment, and disengagement, particularly for weaker parties.

2.3 | Sustainability Outcomes in Supply Networks

Sustainability is attainable by simultaneously considering the social, environmental, and economic dimensions integral to TBL (Elkington 1998). Despite increasing criticism of TBL concerning its potential for allowing firms to prioritize economic over social or environmental sustainability (Nichols et al. 2019), we use it as a guiding framework because it is accepted in practice and emphasizes balancing the three pillars of sustainability in pursuit of long-term goals (Montabon et al. 2016; Wilhelm, Blome, Bhakoo, et al. 2016; Wu and Pagell 2011).

We conceptualize sustainability outcomes in alignment with performance indicators, which have been increasingly adopted in OSCM theory and practice to measure a firm's social, environmental, and economic performance (Saeed and Kersten 2017, 2020). For instance, a human rights indicator identifies and evaluates cases of human rights violations, such as discrimination, forced labor, and child labor (Saeed and Kersten 2017, 2020). This is measured, as supply network operations can impact a firm's conformance to social standards, environmental stewardship, and production efficiency. Moreover, in measuring sustainability outcomes in the context of agricultural supply chains, we respond to calls for understanding how agribusinesses can be more socially, environmentally, and financially sustainable. This can particularly guide agricultural supply chains in the Global South to mitigate production inefficiencies, enhance value creation, and tackle ecological degradation and social inequalities (Gómez and Lee 2023; Pullman and Wu 2021; Wiengarten and Durach 2021).

Sustainability outcomes of supply network operations under the social dimension encompass human rights, health and safety, decent labor conditions, training, expenditures on benefits for employees/society, employment opportunities, and anti-corruption (Chen and Chen 2019; Pullman and Wu 2021; Saeed and Kersten 2017). The environmental dimension includes the reduction of environmental pollution, avoidance of deforestation, prevention of fake certificates, animal welfare, sustainable

land, water, and energy use, waste management, emissions control, the reduction of virgin resource use, environmental assessment, and environmental awareness (Gómez and Lee 2023; Pullman and Wu 2021; Saeed and Kersten 2017). The economic dimension comprises cost reduction, profits, speed, quality, and the prevention of financial loss (Narasimhan et al. 2013; Saeed and Kersten 2017). The analysis of these sustainability outcomes allows us to draw conclusions about the sustainability of the supply network, which operates within a complex agricultural context and includes a variety of actors.

To foster positive sustainability outcomes in operations and supply chains, firms need to encourage their suppliers to adopt sustainable practices and behaviors (Choi et al. 2021; Villena and Gioia 2018). These sustainability outcomes include significant reductions in ecological impacts (e.g., carbon reductions, waste minimization, biodiversity protection), improvements in social standards (e.g., working conditions, fundamental human rights, societal well-being), and the fair distribution of financial resources and risks (e.g., profit sharing, cost reduction, financial loss mitigation) (Matthews et al. 2025). Consequently, the literature highlights that achieving these outcomes depends on a firm's ability to leverage its power to successfully influence suppliers across multiple tiers (Meqdadi et al. 2019; Wilhelm, Blome, Wieck, et al. 2016).

As the power holder, a firm can foster sustainability in its operations and supply chains in several ways. For instance, it can closely collaborate with first- and lower-tier suppliers to share resources and knowledge to tackle environmental issues, promote the adoption of certification, and work with NGOs to detect and respond to violations of social and environmental standards (Tachizawa and Wong 2014). Empirical evidence indicates that firms that work closely with their suppliers through training programs, monitoring, and incentives are likely to benefit from supplier compliance and innovation in the area of sustainability (Villena 2019). For instance, large food companies have pushed suppliers to meet their sustainability requirements by diffusing codes of conduct, integrating social and environmental criteria into purchasing policies, and providing financial and technical incentives for sustainability compliance (Gómez and Lee 2023; Wilhelm, Blome, Bhakoo, et al. 2016).

However, if a firm abuses its power through, for example, pressuring cost reductions and imposing strict social and environmental requirements without providing any support, suppliers may respond poorly to its demands and hinder the achievement of sustainability outcomes throughout the supply chain (Hoejmoose et al. 2013). Empirical evidence suggests that a firm's coercive use of power can lead to poor supplier compliance, as the “use of buyer power on dependent suppliers creates resistance, which impairs the long-term achievement of sustainability goals” (Touboulic et al. 2014, 604). Without sufficient collaboration through training, knowledge sharing, financial support, or sustainability orientation provided by focal firms, suppliers become hesitant not only to meet sustainability requirements but also to pass them on to their sub-suppliers (Gold et al. 2020; Marshall et al. 2019).

Therefore, to foster positive sustainability outcomes, firms need to use power appropriately across their operations and supply

chains, providing knowledge and resources for sustainability implementation and fostering long-term relationships with suppliers (Pagell and Wu 2009). This approach can help embed sustainability in operations and supply chains rather than force suppliers to treat it as a compliance burden (Wu and Pagell 2011). Further research on how power impacts sustainability from a supply network perspective is needed (e.g., Marttinen and Kähkönen 2022; Meqdadi et al. 2019) to shed light on power dynamics and associated TBL implications considering a variety of actors beyond the focal firm and its suppliers. Consequently, our empirical investigation will guide OSCM knowledge and practice about the implications of power use from a TBL perspective in the extended supply network based on a variety of perspectives and voices—some of which are silent, marginalized, or go unheard.

2.4 | Linking Power to Sustainability Outcomes Through Justice in Supply Networks

In reviewing the literature, we identified three critical gaps that we aim to address through an empirical investigation of how justice links power use to sustainability outcomes in an agricultural commodity supply network.

First, the study of power within OSCM has contributed to a broad understanding of how power triggers (in)justice perceptions in supply chain relationships. An in-depth empirical analysis will further conceptualize this interplay between power and justice within supply networks (Reimann and Ketchen 2017). Hence, we follow a theory-elaboration approach to conceptualize how power is exercised within a supply network and, consequently, perceived from a justice viewpoint. This approach enables us to empirically ground the power bases and conceptualize them according to the perspectives of traditional and non-traditional supply network actors.

Second, there remains a need to examine the relationship between power and justice while considering TBL, going beyond economic performance considerations within buyer–supplier relationships. Investigating social and environmental outcomes of power use in a supply network helps us understand the success or failure of achieving long-term sustainability. For example, a trader's misuse of power can negatively affect farmers' justice perceptions and undermine the achievement of social sustainability outcomes, such as fostering fair trade conditions and adequate training. Agricultural commodity supply networks in the Global South contribute to a range of social and environmental issues (e.g., land disputes, stakeholder marginalization, deforestation) (Newton et al. 2013) that remain unresolved and are linked to unseen forms of power use.

Third, the perspectives of buyers and suppliers from the Global North often represent the focus of prior research on power and justice within OSCM. However, these perspectives emphasize the discourse of firms that can “control and shape their supply chains according to their own agendas” (Touboulic et al. 2020, 47). By analyzing a supply network of the Global South, we embrace the perspectives of traders, farmers, rural workers, suppliers of agricultural inputs, Indigenous communities, and government agencies, contrasting their varying points of view.

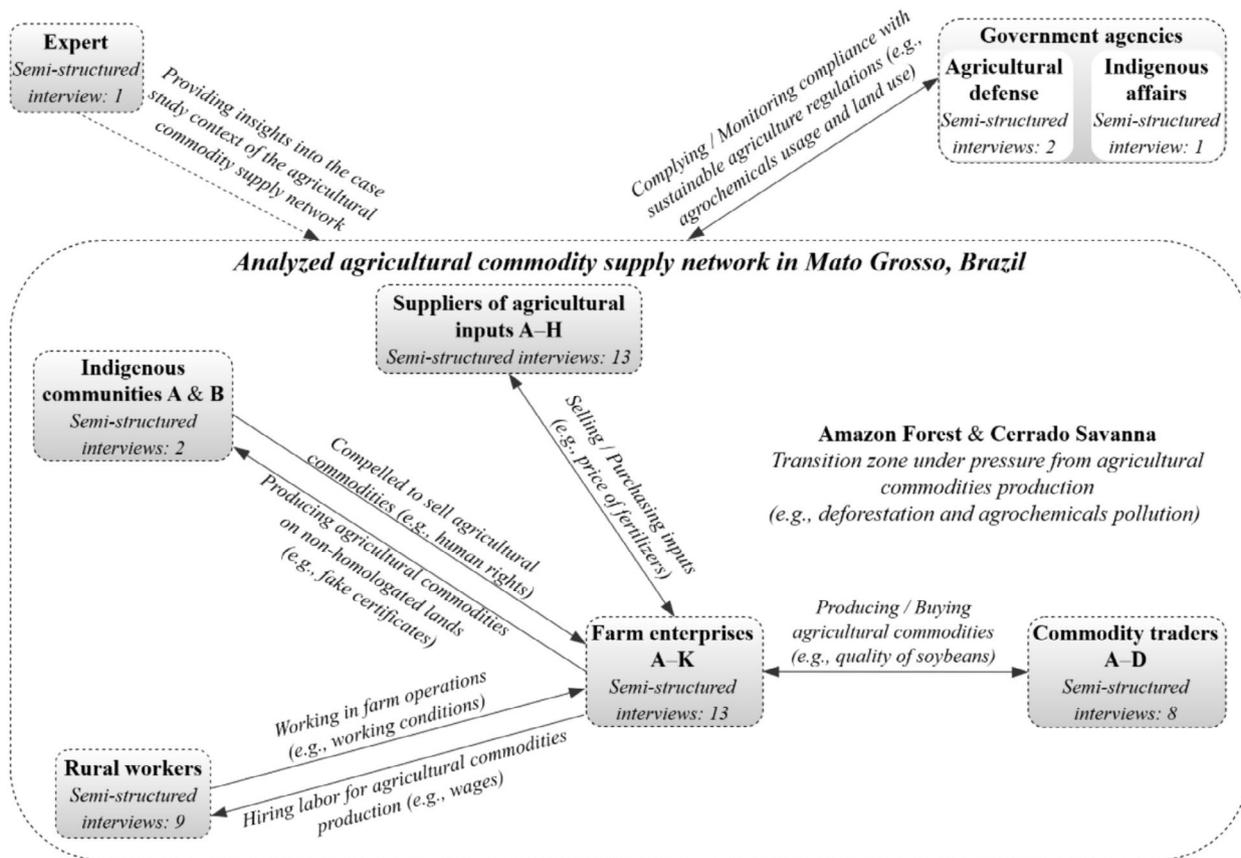


FIGURE 1 | Analyzed agricultural commodity supply network in Mato Grosso, Brazil. *Note:* The figure illustrates examples of power relationships between actors and associated sustainability outcomes. The solid arrows show the direction of interaction and influence between the supply network actors. For instance, farm enterprises purchase fertilizers from suppliers of agricultural inputs and require price fairness. The dotted arrow shows the interviewee who provided insights on the case study's context.

3 | Research Method

As research on power, justice, and sustainability outcomes in supply networks is nascent, we adopted a single-case study design (Barratt et al. 2011; Yin 2018). We followed the recommendations of Ketokivi and Choi (2014) to theoretically elaborate on how power links to sustainability outcomes through justice within an agricultural commodity supply network in Mato Grosso, Brazil. This approach allowed us to iteratively link our empirical data with existing literature (Dubois and Gadde 2002). Through our findings and abductive reasoning, we expand the power theory by identifying new types of power use and related tactics while linking them to justice and sustainability outcomes. Consequently, we developed a theoretical model explaining this complex interlinkage in the context of a supply network in the Global South.

Our single-case study of an agricultural commodity supply network in Mato Grosso is a particularly revelatory case (Yin 2018). First, the supply network is geographically bounded in Mato Grosso, where agricultural commodities are grown, processed, and distributed. Second, it has a range of actors connected to each other (e.g., farmers and traders). Thus, the chosen design allowed us to deeply investigate the phenomena in a given context (Voss et al. 2002; Yin 2018), revealing insightful relational patterns of power use while enabling the meticulous triangulation of perspectives. While the actors are the unit of observation

in our case study, the supply network—consisting of its actors and relationships—is the unit of analysis. Accordingly, we analyze the way the actors exercise their power and the targets of their influence within the supply network. On a dyadic level, we consider the power targets' perspectives by inquiring on how they perceive the power holders' tactics from a justice viewpoint. On the network level, we examine sustainability outcomes related to the exercise of power. Therefore, we empirically ground the phenomena based on a deep analysis of relationships across the supply network. Figure 1 illustrates the supply network, actors, relationships, and examples of sustainability outcomes related to power use. The power relationships between actors and associated sustainability outcomes are further elaborated in Section 4.

3.1 | Empirical Context

The broader empirical context of our case study is Brazil, a Global South country and one of the largest worldwide producers and exporters of agricultural commodities, including soybeans, corn, sugar, and cattle beef (Guaraldo 2021). According to data from Cepea/CNA (2023), in 2022, the agribusiness sector constituted 24.8% of Brazil's gross domestic product (GDP). In the 2022/23 crop year, nearly 44 million hectares of soybeans were planted (Conab 2023a). In 2022, the number of cattle heads reached approximately 228 million (Conab 2023b). Projections

indicate that this growth will persist, increasing the demand for agricultural lands, particularly in the Amazon Forest and the Cerrado Savanna (Mapa 2023a). However, the expansion of agribusiness in Brazil has raised concerns about justice, particularly regarding the abuse of power by lobbyists. In particular, *ruralistas* have been at the forefront of this expansion, exerting influence over the executive, legislative, and judicial branches and working to obscure the sustainability impacts of agricultural commodity supply networks. *Ruralistas* encompass large landowners or agribusiness representatives who engage in political lobbying to defend the interests of agribusiness/*latifundia* (Paulino 2014). Nevertheless, *ruralista* power abuses have a detrimental effect on vulnerable actors and entities, such as rural workers, local communities, and nature (Paulino 2014).

The region of the agricultural commodity supply network under study is in Mato Grosso. The exact region's name is not specified to ensure the confidentiality of interviewees and their respective organizations. In 2022, this region was included in Brazil's top 20 richest agribusiness municipalities (Mapa 2023b). It is commonly referred to as one of the country's breadbaskets and is renowned for its agricultural commodity output and participation in export markets. The state of Mato Grosso is one of the primary contributors to Brazil's GDP in terms of soy, corn, and cattle beef exports (Ioris 2018; Mapa 2023a). However, its agricultural commodities production has been associated with the rapid growth of power, influence, and control over the food supply, processing, and trade by large multinational agribusinesses. These actors operate with limited risk and are in a strong bargaining position (Ioris 2016). In Mato Grosso, agricultural commodities production has caused profound social and environmental issues, such as ecological degradation and illegal farming of Indigenous territories (Ioris 2015). For instance, an investigation revealed that the cattle raised on Mýky territory were ultimately processed at Marfrig's slaughterhouse, which is linked to a global supply chain that includes Nestlé, McDonald's, and Burger King (Mendonça et al. 2022). The use of disputed Indigenous lands for cattle ranching can have negative sustainability impacts, encompassing land disputes, violations of Indigenous peoples' rights, and losses to biodiversity and cultural heritage. Additionally, the discovery that cattle raised on disputed Indigenous land were destined for a global food supply chain underscores the lack of transparency and traceability in the commodities production sector.

3.2 | Case Selection

Following Barratt et al.'s (2011) and Yin's (2018) case selection recommendations, we purposefully identified a variety of traditional (traders, suppliers of agricultural inputs, and farmers) and non-traditional actors (rural workers, Indigenous communities, government agencies, and the natural environment) within the outlined supply network. Table S1 presents the theoretical sampling criteria (Eisenhardt 1989) for selecting actors. By selecting traditional and non-traditional actors, we extend the analysis beyond the perspectives of buyers and suppliers (Pagell and Wu 2009; Touboulic et al. 2020). Multiple perspectives enrich the dataset, mitigate biases, and increase the reliability of the findings (Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007). As incorporating multiple perspectives increased the analytical complexity of our

case, we followed a systematic data collection and analysis protocol (Yin 2018), as described in the following subsections, to ensure transparency and rigor in presenting actors' perspectives on power use within the supply network.

3.3 | Data Collection

To collect empirical evidence for our case study, we conducted semi-structured interviews, structured observations, and archival research, as summarized in Table 1. Detailed information about the data collection can be found in Tables S2 and S3.

Based on the collected interviews, observations, and documents, we built a dataset for our case study. To do so, we translated all the validated and triangulated data from Portuguese into English and converted the data into an electronic format using MAXQDA Analytics Pro 2022. This qualitative data analysis software facilitated the systematic and secure saving, coding, and retrieval of the data. Our approach to gathering evidence from interviews, observations, and documents aligns with Patton's (2002) recommendations for data triangulation. Specifically, we aimed to corroborate the case study findings using multiple sources of the same phenomenon, thereby increasing quality and rigor.

We deemed the data saturation point reached when additional interviews, observations, and documents began to yield incremental insights (O'Reilly and Parker 2013). The number of semi-structured interviews varies across the groups of actors because of their distribution and importance within the supply network. For example, the number of semi-structured interviews conducted with farmers ($N=13$) exceeds those conducted with government agencies ($N=3$). In the supply network, the farming community is represented by producers with varied sizes and backgrounds. Consequently, more interviews with farmers were deemed necessary to obtain a comprehensive range of perspectives. In contrast, government agencies have more standardized processes, and fewer interviews were sufficient to understand their roles and perspectives. Importantly, when selecting the supply network actors, we ensured that a sufficient range of perspectives was obtained. Regarding the structured observations, we had the opportunity to engage closely with the field and gain a profound understanding of supply network operations. The lead author ceased fieldwork only after it became clear that the last data collected did not yield new insights but merely corroborated the established patterns identified in the preliminary analysis. For the archival research, we extensively searched for internal and external documents, building up a comprehensive textual corpus.

3.4 | Data Analysis and Theory Elaboration

Consistent with a theory-elaboration approach and abductive reasoning (Fisher and Aguinis 2017; Ketokivi and Mantere 2021), we initially drew upon the concepts outlined in Section 2 to develop a theoretical model that further elaborates on power and its linkage to justice and sustainability outcomes within the agricultural commodity supply network. Thus, we started data analysis with a degree of structure (Dubois and Gadde 2002) and

TABLE 1 | Data collection summary.

Data collection method	Details	References
<p><i>Semi-structured interviews:</i> Conducted with a variety of actors, using a predetermined set of questions with flexibility for elaboration (see Table S4 for interview questions)</p>	<p><i>Pre-test:</i> Two external scholars, three external practitioners</p> <p><i>Procedures:</i> Conducted in Portuguese, in person, and audio recorded with signed consent</p> <p><i>Average duration:</i> 1 h 03 min</p> <p><i>Timeframe:</i> Between December 2022 and February 2023, with additional interviews in early March 2024</p> <p><i>Total:</i> 49 interviews; commodity traders ($N=8$); farm enterprises ($N=13$); rural workers ($N=9$); suppliers of agricultural inputs ($N=13$); Indigenous communities ($N=2$); government agencies ($N=3$); and an expert ($N=1$)</p>	<p>Arksey and Knight (1999); Villena and Gioia (2018)</p>
<p><i>Structured observations:</i> Conducted concurrently with interviews to gather direct observations of supply network operations during field visits and cross-validate the interview data (see Table S5 for observation guide)</p>	<p><i>Observational data:</i> 58 A4 pages of direct quotations ($N=60$ additional informants), and notes and photo documentation of the field visits</p> <p><i>Timeframe:</i> Between December 2022 and February 2023</p> <p><i>Example:</i> Observed gradual deforestation on a farm while interviewing the owner (see Figure S1)</p>	<p>Villena and Gioia (2018); Wästerfors (2018)</p>
<p><i>Archival research:</i> Systematic search for internal and external documents to obtain written accounts and cross-validate the interview and observational data</p>	<p><i>Sources:</i> Internal management reports (e.g., contracts between farmers and suppliers), publicly available corporate reports (e.g., sustainability impacts of agricultural inputs), news articles (e.g., land disputes between producers and Indigenous people)</p> <p><i>Search criteria:</i> Recency (last 5 years), reliability of sources, and direct cross-validation of claims by interviewees (internal documents)</p>	<p>Ventresca and Mohr (2002)</p>

moved on to conceptualizing novel forms of power use as the research progressed.

To do so, we systematically adopted the three steps in new concept development and grounded theory proposed by Gioia et al. (2013). In particular, we developed a theoretical model close to the interviewees' perspectives (first-order analysis) and added our interpretations of these perspectives (second-order analysis). We then distilled them into aggregate theoretical dimensions that resonate with our and the interviewees' understanding (Gehman et al. 2018; Langley and Abdallah 2011) of how power links to sustainability outcomes through justice in the supply network under investigation.

As the first step, we coded the power bases (reward, coercive, legitimate, referent, and expert), justice (procedural, distributive, and interactional), and sustainability (TBL dimensions and related sustainability outcomes) in the dataset through MAXQDA. In parallel, we started to form the first-order concepts by drawing upon the interviewees' detailed perceptions and experiences of how the power bases were used. Following multiple rounds of coding and discussion, we derived a set of 30 first-order concepts. As the second step, and based on abduction, we moved between the data, first-order concepts, and conceptual framework to arrive at the second-order themes. As a result, we identified 10 themes that describe novel patterns of the utilization of power tactics and their implications for justice and sustainability outcomes. As the third step, and at a more abstract

level, we structured the second-order themes according to our and the interviewees' interpretations of the power tactics used. Consequently, we derived three aggregate sets of power use to theorize how the actors used their power in the supply network. Table S6 presents these steps in detail and gives an illustrative example of the data coding.

To ensure rigor, a variety of measures were adopted during the data analysis process (Gioia et al. 2013). Evidence was exclusively coded when consistent with the theoretical constructs and when the data indicated the materialization of power use, perceptions of (in)justice, and sustainability outcomes. Power use was coded when the data demonstrated the presence of a power base and established its utilization within the supply network relationships. The presence of justice was identified when an interviewee expressed a positive perception of procedural, distributive, or interactional fairness, while injustice was assessed through negative remarks on any violation of procedural, distributive, or interactional fairness. Concrete and detailed evidence was required to code positive or negative social, environmental, or economic sustainability outcomes. The first-order concepts, second-order themes, and aggregate theoretical dimensions were subjected to multiple iterative rounds of revisions and refinements until a coherent theoretical model was formulated. Regular meetings were held to discuss the coding process, leading to the construction of a robust and well-supported interpretation of the data. In instances where interpretations differed, further data analysis was conducted to refine interpretations.

The analysis is supported by detailed empirical data, thereby ensuring the confidence and transparency of the chain of evidence from the data to the conclusions. Table S7 shows the interview quotations alongside the conceptual measures. Additional interview quotations can be provided upon request.

Beyond the data analysis, the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and reflexivity were employed to ensure rigor throughout the phases of the qualitative case study (Korstjens and Moser 2018; Lincoln and Guba 1985), as detailed in Table 2.

4 | Findings

In alignment with our objective of conducting case research as theory elaboration, we employed an overarching conceptual framework (Figure 2) to initially analyze the relationship between power and sustainability outcomes. This analysis focused on uncovering the role of justice in explaining how power is linked to sustainability outcomes within the agricultural commodity supply network in Mato Grosso, Brazil. The theoretical framework proposes that power use leads to perceptions of (in)justice, which then fosters or hinders social, environmental, and economic sustainability outcomes.

As the case study progressed, our analysis uncovered distinct forms of power use in the relationships within the supply network, namely, excessive, strategic, and balanced. These emerged from how the different actors perceived power from a justice perspective. Their perceptions of (in)justice either contributed to fostering or hindering sustainability outcomes, as shown in Figure 3.

To illustrate the linkages between power, justice, and sustainability outcomes, Table 3 presents key examples from the case study findings. Particularly, it presents the power tactics under excessive, strategic, and balanced power and associated implications for power holders and power targets in the dyads. It also provides implications for justice and sustainability outcomes in the supply network. A more complete version of this table, including 30 first-order concepts, can be obtained upon request.

4.1 | Linking Power Use, Justice, and Sustainability Outcomes Within the Supply Network

In the following subsections, we outline the three forms of power use. For each, we present a comprehensive analysis that incorporates key examples of a power tactic and its corresponding first-order concept, as identified in the case study. See Table S8 for a more detailed examination of the entire data structure.

4.1.1 | Excessive Power Use Within the Supply Network

Excessive power use occurred when the power holder exceeded the acceptable or fair limits set by the power target. The power target primarily objected to the power holder's use of coercive and legitimate power, perceiving it as unfair due to the severe violation of procedural, distributive, and interactional justice.

Our analysis identified five main power tactics that characterize excessive power use and lead to perceptions of injustice. These include abusive, illegitimate, selfish, deceitful, and aggressive power tactics. We describe abusive power tactics using one first-order concept and highlight its link to justice.

Abusive power tactics refer to instances where farmers were penalized for issues outside of their direct control (first-order concept A1). For example, Farm enterprises A and C received financial penalties when commodity quality issues arose as a result of excess rain or poor road conditions. Trader A forced financial discounts on these farmers, shifting the risk onto them rather than sharing it. Farmers perceived this power tactic as abusive, as they had no control over the external factors but were still held financially accountable. Consequently, the farmers' procedural justice was violated. Farmer #I14 discussed this violation: "If the soybeans get wet because of a heavy rainy season, they [commodity traders] will apply a discount and we will have a financial loss [...]. These discounts are already established in the contract, so we are forced to accept them, even though we find them abusive." This power tactic shows a power imbalance in contractual agreements between traders and farmers. Whereas traders justify their penalties or discounts as a risk-mitigation strategy, farmers see them as abusive and as furthering their financial vulnerability. The coercive and legitimate nature of the traders' measures established in the contracts undermines farmers' right to fair payment and consideration of external events. This also illustrates how contractual imbalances foster an economic disadvantage within the supply network.

Furthermore, our case study revealed that excessive power use not only violated the principles of justice but also hindered the achievement of social, environmental, and economic sustainability outcomes, particularly for the power target. Deploying different power tactics, power holders caused disparate sustainability outcomes for power targets.

Regarding selfish power tactics, contracts that excluded shared accountability facilitated the transfer of environmental and social risks from suppliers (e.g., Supplier E) to farmers (e.g., Farm I) regarding the use of agricultural inputs (first-order concept C3). Supplier #I40 elucidated on this power tactic:

My role as an agronomist is to proffer technical recommendations, but if the clients [farmers] make a mistake in their application, they do so at their own risk. My role is to disseminate information. Furthermore, the products have a detailed prescription indicating the appropriate dosage. In the current era, we request that our clients sign a document attesting to their understanding of our recommendations and the product's characteristics, potential dangers, and other pertinent details. Therefore, in the event of an adverse outcome, the client is already aware that the decision in question was their own. Ultimately, it is their business.

While suppliers justify this power tactic as necessary, it results in unsustainable agricultural practices. Specifically, farmers with limited access to knowledge and resources might be unable to

TABLE 2 | Criteria and steps to ensure rigor, based on Korstjens and Moser (2018) and Lincoln and Guba (1985).

Criteria	Steps
<p><i>Credibility</i> determines whether the research findings represent plausible information drawn from the interviewees' original data. It also regards the correct interpretation of the original views of the respondents.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close engagement with interviewees and a thorough observation of the phenomena. • The triangulation of data and methods was ensured by collecting multiple sources of evidence using different techniques (i.e., semi-structured interviews, structured observations, archival research). • The triangulation of data analysts was ensured by independent coding. • Peer debriefing (e.g., regular discussions among the research team, exposition of the findings to peers). • The interview transcripts and notes were double-checked and validated by the interviewees.
<p><i>Transferability</i> concerns the degree to which the research findings can be transferred to other contexts and be considered valuable.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In addition to describing the research context in detail, we thoroughly explain the phenomena by showing the dynamics between power use, (in)justice perceptions, and sustainability outcomes within the analyzed agricultural commodity supply network. This detailed description can be meaningful to readers, as it enables their own judgments about transferability to more familiar contexts.
<p><i>Dependability</i> concerns the extent to which the research findings are consistent. <i>Confirmability</i> refers to the extent to which the research findings are clearly derived from the data and are not biased.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All research steps were transparently described, allowing the verification of the chain of evidence. • MAXQDA was used to systematically and securely store, analyze, and retrieve the data. • The raw data, including the interview transcripts and direct quotations, were carefully transcribed and translated from Portuguese into English. • The first-order concepts are deeply grounded in the dataset. They do not come from a single but from multiple dyads.
<p><i>Reflexivity</i> concerns the process of critical self-reflection about oneself as a researcher (e.g., biases, preferences, preconceptions) and the researcher's relationship with the interviewees (e.g., how this relationship affects their answers to the questions).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The creation of a research diary, from which information derived from the structured observations, and the lead author's reflections were kept. Particularly, the lead author reflected on the study's theory, method, and research ethics. These reflections were discussed with the research team, and appropriate action was taken as needed.

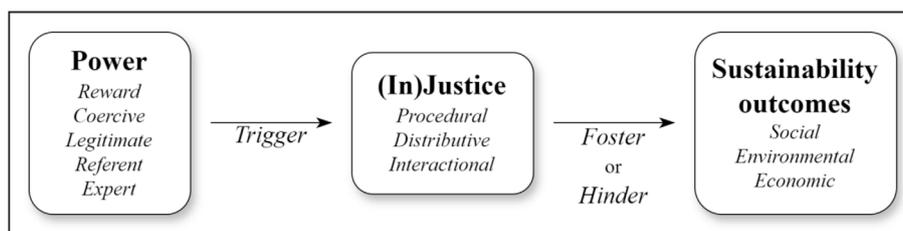


FIGURE 2 | Overarching conceptual framework interlinking power, justice, and sustainability outcomes.

identify the environmental and social consequences of misusing agricultural inputs. Moreover, the pressure to accept this type of commercial demand makes farmers the only parties held accountable for sustainability risks related to the usage of agricultural inputs. This power imbalance jeopardizes the sustainability of the agricultural commodity supply network since it isolates accountability and promotes suppliers' economic gains over environmental and social sustainability.

4.1.2 | Strategic Power Use Within the Supply Network

Strategic power use revealed how the power holder employed artful or overt tactics to manipulate the power target. In

particular, two primary power tactics were identified under this dimension, mainly based on expert and referent power, which elicited a combination of positive and negative perceptions of justice. These are subdivided into two themes: insidious and instrumental power tactics.

Regarding instrumental power tactics, a key example shows traders' deliberate exploitation of knowledge asymmetries and control over market access within the supply network (first-order concept G1). Traders (e.g., Trader A and C) utilized their specialized knowledge to reinforce their position as intermediaries, facilitating connections between farmers and export markets. Farmer #I19 recounted a rare opportunity to directly negotiate beef cattle with a European slaughterhouse, which facilitated

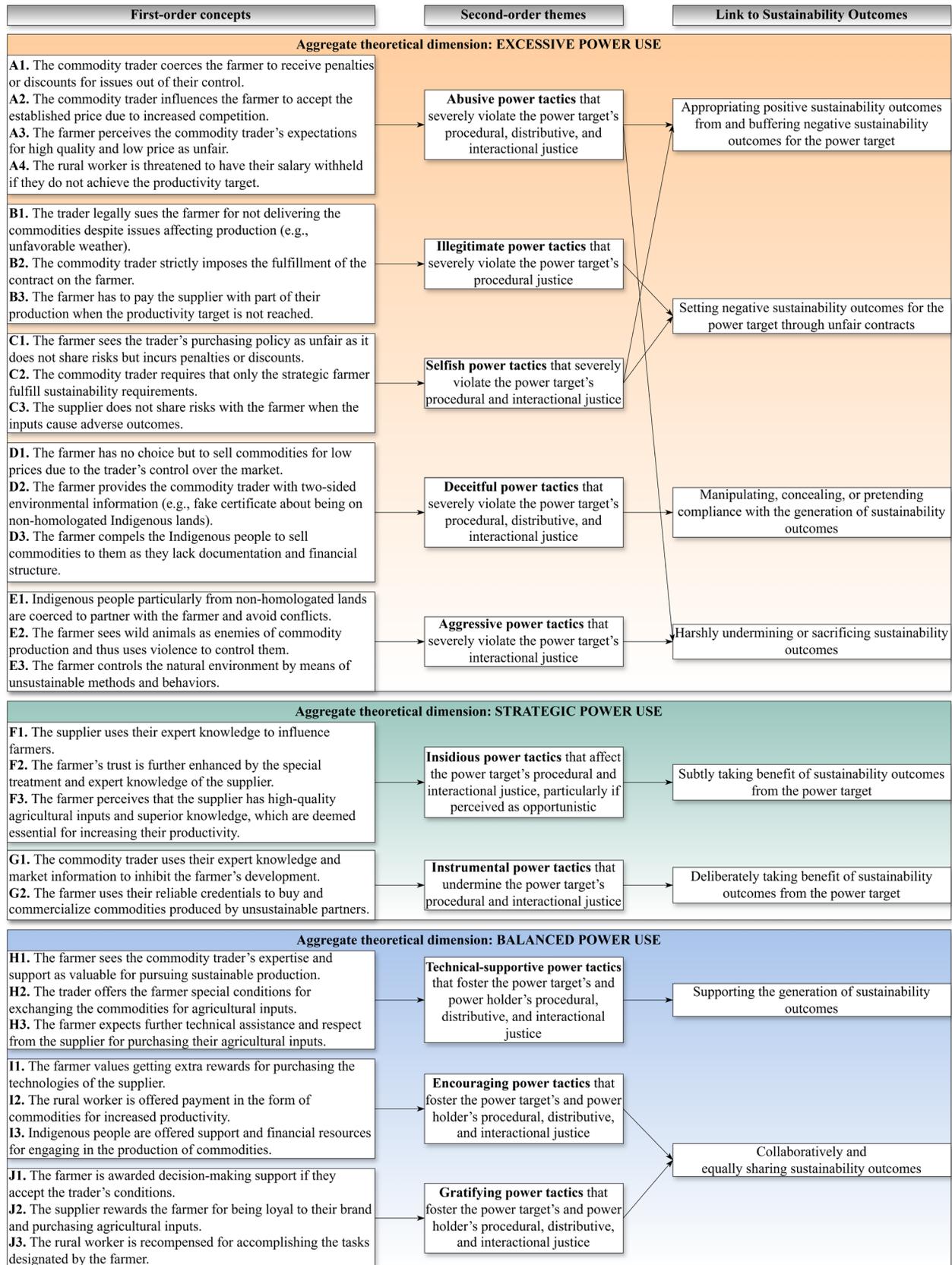


FIGURE 3 | Data structure.

the exportation process and whose support was perceived as adequate and fair. In contrast, this farmer described the supply network's traders (e.g., Trader C) as gatekeepers of opportunities,

citing their control over market access as a means of restricting farmers' development and autonomy. Farmers perceived themselves to be instrumentally used in this type of relationship with

TABLE 3 | Case examples of how power links to sustainability outcomes through justice and associated implications at the dyadic and network levels.

Summarized findings of the data structure	Power holder (power base)	Power target	Context	Implications at the dyadic level	Implications at the network level
Excessive power use					
Abusive power tactics					
Forcing penalties or discounts	Traders (coercive and legitimate power)	Farmers	Traders impose penalties or apply price reductions when farmers fail to meet strict quality, volume, or delivery requirements, especially due to external factors such as heavy rainy season and poor road conditions.	<i>Justice:</i> Violates farmers' procedural justice by penalizing them unfairly. <i>Sustainability:</i> Weakens farmers' financial ability.	<i>Justice:</i> Creates economic instability, reinforcing power imbalances and injustice. <i>Sustainability:</i> Farmers' inability to invest in sustainable agricultural practices weakens sustainability in the supply network.
Illegitimate power tactics					
Imposing contractual agreements	Traders (legitimate power)	Farmers	Traders enforce one-sided contracts with fixed agreements (e.g., price), preventing farmers from securing fairer terms.	<i>Justice:</i> Limits farmers' procedural justice by restricting their negotiation power. <i>Sustainability:</i> Farmers commercialize commodities under terms that solely benefit traders, undermining their own economic sustainability.	<i>Justice:</i> Reinforces systemic inequalities in trade relationships. <i>Sustainability:</i> One-sided agreements discourage the implementation of sustainable agricultural practices.
Selfish power tactics					
Avoiding adverse sustainability risks to oneself	Suppliers of agricultural inputs (legitimate power)	Farmers	Suppliers shift responsibility for sustainability risks entirely onto farmers.	<i>Justice:</i> Violates farmers' procedural justice by burdening them with risks without offering technical support. <i>Sustainability:</i> Increases farmers' exposure to risks.	<i>Justice:</i> Reinforces supplier dominance and avoids shared accountability for risks. <i>Sustainability:</i> Leads to systemic financial, ecological, and social harm across the supply network.

(Continues)

TABLE 3 | (Continued)

Summarized findings of the data structure	Power holder (power base)	Power target	Context	Implications at the dyadic level	Implications at the network level
Deceitful power tactics					
Compelling Indigenous people to sell commodities	Farmers (coercive and legitimate power)	Indigenous people and traders	Farmers pressure Indigenous people to sell their commodities under unfair conditions due to their limited market access.	<i>Justice</i> : Undermines Indigenous people's and traders' interactional justice by exploiting them. <i>Sustainability</i> : Threatens traditional farming, ecological balance, and transparency.	<i>Justice</i> : Conceals key information about the provenance of the commodities for traders and undermines the Indigenous people's rights. <i>Sustainability</i> : Hampers the community's right to decide on its food production and economically thrive with the commercialization of commodities in formal markets.
Aggressive power tactics					
Eradicating wildlife	Farmers (coercive power)	Nature	Farmers eliminate wildlife (e.g., through poisoning) to protect their crops and livestock, prioritizing financial security.	<i>Justice</i> : Disregards interactional justice by treating nature as expendable. <i>Sustainability</i> : Decreases biodiversity.	<i>Justice</i> : Leads to concerns regarding environmental responsibility. <i>Sustainability</i> : Disrupts ecosystems and threatens endangered animal populations (e.g., jaguars).
Strategic power use					
Insidious power tactics					
Using expert knowledge for influence	Suppliers of agricultural inputs (expert power)	Farmers	Suppliers promote agricultural inputs as essential while withholding key information on sustainability impacts.	<i>Justice</i> : Violates farmers' procedural and interactional justice by limiting their informed decision-making. <i>Sustainability</i> : Increases overuse of agrochemicals.	<i>Justice</i> : Fosters input-driven dependency cycles. <i>Sustainability</i> : Contributes to lower-than-expected production efficiency and output and negative environmental (e.g., poor soil analysis) and social outcomes (e.g., lack of training to use the inputs).

(Continues)

TABLE 3 | (Continued)

Summarized findings of the data structure	Power holder (power base)	Power target	Context	Implications at the dyadic level	Implications at the network level
Using special treatment, social ties, and expertise	Suppliers of agricultural inputs (expert and referent power)	Farmers	Suppliers leverage close relationships to influence farmers' purchasing decisions.	<i>Justice</i> : Undermines farmers' interactional justice by pressuring them through personal connections. <i>Sustainability</i> : Reduces accountability in supplier-farmer relationships.	<i>Justice</i> : Weakens trust and transparency. <i>Sustainability</i> : Promotes unsustainable input use due to limited transparency.
Using exaggerated performance claims	Suppliers of agricultural inputs (expert and referent power)	Farmers	Suppliers overstate input effectiveness, which increases farmers' dependency.	<i>Justice</i> : Undermines farmers' procedural and interactional justice by misleading them. <i>Sustainability</i> : Encourages input overuse, harming long-term agricultural viability.	<i>Justice</i> : Creates widespread misinformation about inputs in supply networks. <i>Sustainability</i> : Reduces long-term agricultural resilience.
Instrumental power tactics					
Using expert knowledge and access to information for deliberate manipulation and self-gain	Traders (expert power)	Farmers	Traders reinforce farmers' dependency on them to supply international markets, given their expertise and access to information.	<i>Justice</i> : Violates farmers' procedural and interactional justice. <i>Sustainability</i> : Undermines farmers' economic and social sustainability.	<i>Justice</i> : Farmers become dependent on traders while missing opportunities to develop relationships with buyers who can offer fairer conditions. <i>Sustainability</i> : Hampers farmers' autonomy and ability to economically and socially thrive in the supply network.
Misusing reliable credentials	Farmers (referent power)	Partner farmers and traders	Farmers purchase embargoed commodities from partner farmers and sell to traders using their positive credentials.	<i>Justice</i> : Violates interactional justice of partner farmers and traders. <i>Sustainability</i> : Hampers transparency as commodities are mixed with regular outputs.	<i>Justice</i> : Leads to a lack of trust and transparency in supply networks. <i>Sustainability</i> : Increases the likelihood that traders unknowingly purchase commodities produced by farmers fined for violations of environmental or social standards.

(Continues)

TABLE 3 | (Continued)

Summarized findings of the data structure	Power holder (power base)	Power target	Context	Implications at the dyadic level	Implications at the network level
Balanced power use					
Technical-supportive power tactics					
Offering expertise for sustainable agriculture	Traders (expert and reward power)	Farmers	Traders offer training and resources to guide farmers toward sustainability.	<i>Justice:</i> Enhances farmers' procedural, distributive, and interactional justice by equipping them with necessary skills and resources. <i>Sustainability:</i> Encourages the implementation of sustainable agricultural practices.	<i>Justice:</i> Strengthens equitable access to sustainability knowledge and resources. <i>Sustainability:</i> Enhances environmental (e.g., forest preservation, by-product use) and social sustainability (e.g., health and safety in farm operations) in the supply network.
Providing technical assistance for purchasing agricultural inputs and services	Suppliers of agricultural inputs (reward power)	Farmers	Suppliers provide tailored training on the responsible use of agricultural inputs.	<i>Justice:</i> Promotes farmers' interactional justice by ensuring their access to knowledge. <i>Sustainability:</i> Minimizes agrochemicals misuse, reducing environmental and social harm.	<i>Justice:</i> Enhances farmer empowerment and decision-making. <i>Sustainability:</i> Contributes to the health of water sources, soil, and ecosystems.
Encouraging power tactics					
Offering extra payments to boost productivity	Farmers (reward power)	Rural workers	Farmers provide financial incentives to rural workers to align efforts with sustainability requirements.	<i>Justice:</i> Increases rural workers' procedural, distributive, and interactional justice by offering them proper compensation. <i>Sustainability:</i> Encourages sustainable farm management.	<i>Justice:</i> Enhances sense of fairness regarding farm management and productivity. <i>Sustainability:</i> Enhances financial security, labor conditions, and efficiency (e.g., animal welfare, feedstock, and medication efficiency).
Supporting Indigenous people in commodities production	Farmers (reward power)	Indigenous people	Farmers collaborate with Indigenous groups to integrate them into supply networks while fostering their financial stability, autonomy, and technical capacity.	<i>Justice:</i> Promotes Indigenous people's distributive and interactional justice by providing them with economic opportunities. <i>Sustainability:</i> May threaten traditional agricultural practices if industrial farming is prioritized.	<i>Justice:</i> Increases Indigenous people's formal participation in the supply network. <i>Sustainability:</i> Must balance modernization with cultural and ecological preservation.

(Continues)

TABLE 3 | (Continued)

Summarized findings of the data structure	Power holder (power base)	Power target	Context	Implications at the dyadic level	Implications at the network level
Gratifying power tactics Compensating work performance	Farmers (reward power)	Rural workers	Farmers offer performance-based incentives and recognition.	<i>Justice:</i> Improves rural workers' procedural, distributive, and interactional justice through fair compensation and skills development. <i>Sustainability:</i> Improves adherence to environmental and labor standards.	<i>Justice:</i> Enhances fairness and trust in employment. <i>Sustainability:</i> Aligns labor incentives with long-term sustainability goals.

traders, negatively affecting their perceptions of procedural and interactional justice.

Moreover, strategic power use yielded disparate outcomes across the social, environmental, and economic dimensions of sustainability. For instance, by utilizing market information, traders restrict farmers to a dependent relationship, thereby undermining their potential for financial and social advancement. Farmer #I10 explained that traders have contact with major buyers abroad. As such, they are adept at the processes related to exporting commodities and managing the related documentation. Furthermore, they possess the capacity to oversee the management of storage and transportation to ports. Farmer #I10 said,

Buyers have disparate requirements pertaining to quality, environmental legislation, and other factors. If the buyers were to negotiate directly with us, there would be no need for intermediaries. Traders are able to conduct such negotiations with relative ease, given their established reputation in the market. I am not in possession of that information. It is unlikely that any farmer in Brazil will be able to meet all of the aforementioned requirements in their entirety. Buyers only extend trust when the commodities are handled by traders, as this is a practice that is known worldwide.

This strategy underscores the pivotal role of traders as intermediaries in the global supply chain, reinforcing their influence while eroding farmers' autonomy.

4.1.3 | Balanced Power Use Within the Supply Network

Balanced power use illustrates how the power holder and power target collaborated effectively while utilizing their respective power in a balanced manner, eschewing any tendencies toward domination, undue influence, or exploitation. Our findings revealed three principal tactics of balanced power use, predominantly based on reward power (with expert power being a significant contributor), and ultimately leading to perceptions of justice for both parties. These are classified as technical-supportive, encouraging, and gratifying power tactics.

An example of gratifying power tactics illustrates how suppliers provided appropriate compensation to farmers and acknowledged their contributions within the supply network. This included offering incentives for long-term loyalty (first-order concept J2). The farmers who had established long-term relationships with Supplier H were offered rewards, such as assistance in cattle farming or artificial insemination packages. Farmer #IQ52 stated:

I was awarded this incentive due to my long-term affiliation with [Supplier H's proprietary and administrator]. I have purchased trace mineral salt for cattle since the inception of the store, and

subsequently, I was afforded the chance to introduce artificial insemination on my property. I am grateful to them for providing me with a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. The technology in question has proved instrumental in enhancing the quality of the cattle in my care. It is an excellent arrangement, and I believe our partnership is more than fair.

Similarly, Supplier F's provision of software tools for farm management supported farmers in optimizing their operations while reinforcing long-term relationships based on trust and mutual benefit. This strategy contributed to the realization of justice by acknowledging and rewarding farmers' loyalty and enhancing the efficiency of their agricultural operations.

In addition, balanced power use reinforced social, environmental, and economic sustainability outcomes for all parties involved in the supply network. To illustrate this, a gratifying power tactic was evidenced by the fair compensation and recognition of rural workers, which aligned their efforts with the farm's sustainability goals (first-order concept J3). Rural worker #118 at Farm D highlighted the pivotal role of promotion and recognition within wood production and crop management in fostering engagement with positive sustainability outcomes:

As my supervisor noted that I was performing the tasks in an appropriate manner and that I was proficient in completing the necessary documentation for transporting wood, he promoted me and assigned me additional responsibilities related to crop production management. I considered this a significant benefit because it demonstrated that my work and potential were recognized and appreciated within the company. In the context of wood-related activities, it is imperative to adhere to established safety protocols to prevent injuries and, in some cases, fatalities. However, the precautions required for the handling of soybeans differ from those for wood due to the additional processes involved. At times, I experienced confusion and inadvertently combined the appropriate safety precautions for different tasks. However, with the assistance of my superior, I was able to discern which procedure to follow since I have become well-versed in the regulations. The process became straightforward, and I am now able to provide guidance to other employees.

By implementing a structured reward system, Farm D was able to ensure that rural workers were fairly compensated for their contributions, which led to enhanced productivity and sustainability outcomes. Moreover, the training provided to rural workers in areas such as health and safety and environmental standards (including certifications such as FSC and ISO 14001) reinforced the alignment of their tasks with the farm's sustainability goals. This strategy not only enhanced the farm's operational efficiency but

also facilitated social and environmental sustainability outcomes by fostering a well-trained and motivated workforce.

4.2 | Framework Linking Power Use, Justice, and Sustainability Outcomes

Based on the three forms of power use emerging from our case study, we summarize here the linkages between power use, justice, and sustainability outcomes (see Figure 4).

The framework underscores the following core insights: (i) the excessive use of power undermines justice and sustainability outcomes for power targets while also generating cascading effects throughout the supply network; (ii) strategic power allows power holders to exert influence over power targets, particularly in the context of complex power imbalances and structural disparities between the Global North and South; and (iii) a balanced distribution of power fosters justice and sustainability by promoting a more equitable and responsible use of power, ensuring respect for all actors within supply networks.

5 | Discussion

This case study identified three forms of power use—excessive, strategic, and balanced—each linked to specific tactics that influence justice perceptions and sustainability outcomes in different ways. Building on these forms of power use, we developed a set of six propositions aimed at consolidating the case study findings and providing a structured framework for theory development and future research.

5.1 | Propositions

5.1.1 | Cascading Injustice Through Excessive Power Use in Supply Networks

Our findings suggest that the negative implications of excessive power use extend beyond dyadic relationships, cascading throughout the supply network via two interconnected mechanisms.

First, power asymmetries result in the economic exploitation of farmers as traders and suppliers of agricultural inputs shift costs and risks onto them. Farmers, in turn, may deprioritize social and environmental sustainability requirements, transferring these pressures to more vulnerable actors, including rural workers, Indigenous communities, and ecosystems. By imposing unfavorable contractual terms, the dominant actors exacerbate exploitative labor conditions, discourage investment in sustainable agriculture, and contribute to environmental degradation and social harm. These adverse effects ultimately undermine local communities and ecosystems while creating systemic inefficiencies and injustices that weaken the entire supply network's sustainability. Second, traders and suppliers of agricultural inputs face growing reputational risks with the increasing pressure for more transparency and sustainability. However, their excessive use of power causes operational challenges and

environmental and social costs for farmers, who negatively react to their requirements and cascade the felt pressures upward in the supply network. As a result, farmers often engage in sustainability efforts reactively rather than proactively, addressing compliance requirements in a superficial or symbolic manner instead of integrating sustainable agricultural practices into their farm enterprises. Thus, we propose the following:

Proposition 1a. *The excessive use of power in agricultural commodity supply networks triggers procedural, distributive, and interactional injustice for farmers. These injustices cascade throughout the supply network, as economically exploited farmers shift pressures onto more vulnerable actors, such as rural workers, Indigenous communities, and ecosystems, thereby exacerbating labor exploitation, environmental degradation, and systemic inefficiencies.*

Proposition 1b. *When dominant actors impose unfavorable contractual terms and shift financial, social, and environmental*

risks onto farmers, the latter deprioritize sustainability investments. As a result, sustainability initiatives in the supply network become fragmented and short-term, and fail to address systemic environmental and social challenges.

Proposition 1c. *When dominant actors in supply networks face reputational and regulatory pressures for sustainability, they are more likely to engage in symbolic compliance efforts, such as superficial adherence to sustainability standards, rather than foster substantive environmental and social improvements. This, in turn, reduces farmers' motivation to engage in long-term sustainable practices, leading to a gap between stated commitments and actual sustainability outcomes.*

Beyond the cascading impact of power imbalances on sustainability outcomes at the network level, the use of excessive power within dyadic relationships also results in procedural, distributive, and interactional injustices that limit sustainability efforts. For example, traders often capture a disproportionate share

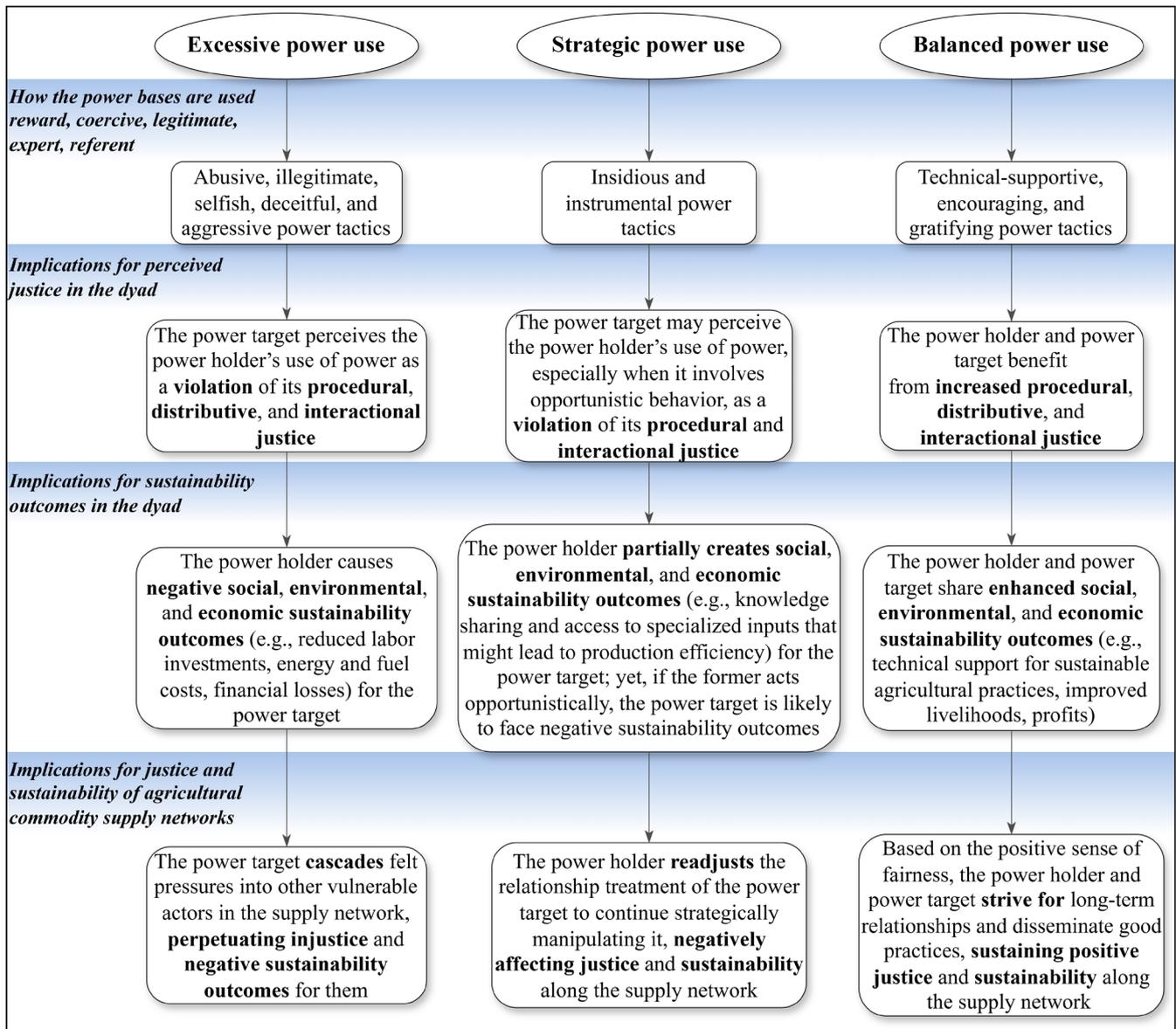


FIGURE 4 | Theoretical model linking power, justice, and sustainability outcomes at the dyadic and network levels.

of the economic value while shifting financial risks and environmental and social externalities onto farmers. This unequal distribution of value and risks leaves farmers with minimal financial returns and increased vulnerability, ultimately reducing their ability to foster sustainable agriculture, fairly compensate rural workers, and properly care for the environment and local communities, such as Indigenous people.

When their economic sustainability is threatened, farmers are more likely to deprioritize broader sustainability goals in favor of short-term financial survival. Without sufficient economic stability, they lack the resources and incentives to enhance labor standards or adopt sustainable methods in the production of commodities. Consequently, power asymmetries not only perpetuate financial hardship among farmers but also create a structural barrier to sustainability improvements across the supply network. This leads us to propose the following:

Proposition 2a. *When powerful actors in supply networks capture a disproportionate share of economic value while shifting financial, social, and environmental risks onto farmers, this results in procedural, distributive, and interactional injustices. These injustices increase farmers' economic vulnerability, limiting their ability to invest in sustainable agriculture, fairly compensate rural workers, and protect the environment.*

Proposition 2b. *As farmers face economic hardship due to power asymmetries, they prioritize short-term financial survival over long-term sustainability initiatives, leading to weakened labor standards, environmental degradation, and social instability, thereby creating a structural barrier to sustainability improvements across the supply network.*

5.1.2 | Cascading (In)justice Through Strategic Power Use in Supply Networks

Power use in the agricultural commodity supply network does not operate in isolation but interacts with broader fairness perceptions to shape sustainability outcomes. While excessive power use leads to injustice and negative sustainability outcomes, power can be exercised strategically, producing nuanced (in)justice perceptions and varied sustainability outcomes for power targets. Unlike excessive power use, which overwhelmingly furthers the disadvantages of weaker actors, strategic power use often involves the careful exercise of influence, wherein dominant actors further their economic interests while offering certain benefits.

A key example of strategic power use occurs in supplier–farmer relationships, where suppliers of agricultural inputs leverage their expert and referent power to influence farmers' purchasing decisions. In some cases, this influence is perceived as insidious, particularly by technically knowledgeable farmers who can assess the inputs' sustainability outcomes. These farmers recognize when suppliers provide superficial or exaggerated information, leading to perceptions of procedural and interactional injustice. They perceive that their right to transparent and comprehensive product information is disregarded, and they often view suppliers' relationship-building efforts as manipulative rather than supportive. Such injustice

perceptions are likely to undermine long-term trust, damage suppliers' reputations, and raise concerns about the sustainability of the promoted inputs.

However, many farmers in the supply network lacked the agronomic expertise to evaluate the sustainability outcomes of the inputs offered. These farmers perceived suppliers as knowledgeable, technically proficient, and reliable, reinforcing positive perceptions of procedural and interactional justice. As a result, they are more likely to accept suppliers' recommendations without questioning associated sustainability risks. These power dynamics allow suppliers of agricultural inputs to conceal or downplay sustainability risks while continuing to pursue economic self-gain. At the network level, this insidious power tactic can amplify power imbalances, enabling suppliers to promote their products with limited scrutiny and accountability. Therefore, we propose the following:

Proposition 3. *The strategic use of power in dyadic relationships, such as supplier–farmer interactions, reinforces the use of insidious power tactics. When perceived as opportunistic, these tactics trigger procedural and interactional injustice, thereby fostering economic self-gain at the detriment of comprehensive sustainability outcomes within the extended supply network.*

Beyond supplier–farmer relationships, strategic power use also manifested in trader–farmer dyads in a more instrumental manner. Some traders relied on their expert power to influence farmers' decision-making and shape contractual terms in ways that primarily benefit the traders. When farmers recognize that traders use their expertise to gain advantages, such as imposing restrictive contract conditions or withholding critical market information, they perceive procedural and interactional injustice. However, due to traders' control over markets, farmers would still accept the imposed conditions. This instrumental power tactic undermines farmers' autonomy in the supply network and generates feelings of injustice toward traders.

As justice perceptions deteriorate, power holders who strategically use their influence face reputational damage and increased skepticism among power targets about their true intentions and commitment to sustainability. In fact, farmers and other actors may detect power holders' profit-driven intentions and question whether their efforts to improve environmental and social sustainability for both are genuine. This erosion of perceived justice can also extend beyond dyadic relationships, contributing to broader perceptions of injustice and doubts about sustainability claims across the supply network. When strategic power use is detected and interpreted as self-serving, it negatively affects justice perceptions and sustainability outcomes. Consequently, we formulate the following proposition:

Proposition 4. *When traders leverage expert power to impose restrictive contracts and withhold critical market information, farmers perceive procedural and interactional injustice but comply due to market dependency. Rather than indicating trust, this compliance fosters skepticism about traders' sustainability commitments. As these justice concerns spread, they undermine trust across the supply network, weakening collective engagement in sustainability initiatives.*

5.1.3 | Cascading Justice Through Balanced Power Use in Supply Networks

When power is used in a balanced manner, a strong sense of fairness enables power holders and power targets to cultivate long-term relationships. Our findings indicate that some suppliers of agricultural inputs and traders not only recognized the potential for financially profitable relationships with farmers but also actively promoted sustainable agricultural practices within their dyads. This form of power use fostered positive justice perceptions across all dimensions—procedural, distributive, and interactional—benefiting suppliers, traders, and farmers while improving sustainability outcomes. For instance, Trader D acknowledged that fostering sustainable agricultural practices among farmers required offering both expertise and technical support. Farmers, in turn, perceived these incentives as fair and beneficial, as they enhanced their ability to effectively implement the trader's sustainability requirements. A key example involved the reuse of agricultural by-products, a practice that generated multiple sustainability outcomes: farmers reduced fertilization costs, received detailed technical guidance, and managed waste sustainably.

Balanced power use cascades fair and sustainable practices across the supply network, including the nurturing of long-term relationships, the promotion of sustainable agriculture, the alignment of goals between power holders and targets, and the fostering of trust and justice perceptions. For example, when suppliers of agricultural inputs provide technical assistance tailored to farmers' agronomic backgrounds, the latter experience greater interactional justice. This, in turn, increases their willingness to adopt sustainable agriculture: farmers implement measures that reduce soil and water contamination, mitigate the risk of poisoning themselves and rural workers, protect nearby communities and ecosystems, and avoid fines for disregarding social and environmental standards. As such, we propose the following:

Proposition 5. *Power holders who balance the use of power foster perceptions of procedural, distributive, and interactional justice among power targets. These positive justice perceptions contribute to social, environmental, and economic sustainability outcomes that benefit both parties and can be cascaded throughout the extended supply network.*

Moreover, balanced power use is particularly important for the justice and sustainability of non-traditional actors, such as rural workers and Indigenous communities. Rather than excessively using power over rural workers, such as withholding salaries as a penalty for low productivity, some farmers recognized the benefits of providing workers with fair incentives, such as commodities or performance-based rewards. These incentives enhanced rural workers' perceptions of fairness across all justice dimensions, increasing their commitment to fulfilling the farmers' requirements, such as improving animal welfare, optimizing feedstock use, and ensuring medication efficiency. Another similar pattern was observed between farmers and Indigenous people. Rather than exploiting the latter's labor and disregarding their rights, some farmers provided technical guidance and financial resources to the members of Indigenous community B. Farmers encouraged their participation in commodity

production while respecting their autonomy and cultural heritage. These balanced power dynamics created mutually beneficial outcomes, reinforcing fairness perceptions and promoting long-term sustainability.

However, the willingness of power holders to balance their influence with the needs and contexts of power targets reflects motivations that go beyond purely economic considerations. When power holders prioritize fairness, they are likely to sustain positive justice perceptions and drive sustainable agricultural practices across the supply network. Conversely, when power is used primarily to maximize economic benefits from a relationship, such as when farmers take advantage of Indigenous people from non-homologated lands, justice and sustainability are severely compromised, often with irreversible consequences. Thus, we propose the following:

Proposition 6a. *When power holders offer fair incentives, technical guidance, and respect for autonomy, marginalized actors, such as rural workers and Indigenous communities, experience greater procedural, distributive, and interactional justice, thereby reinforcing trust, engagement, and long-term collaboration in supply networks.*

Proposition 6b. *As justice perceptions improve among marginalized actors, their commitment to sustainability initiatives increases, leading to better agricultural practices, such as improved animal welfare, optimized resource use, and environmental stewardship.*

Proposition 6c. *When power holders prioritize economic self-interest over fairness, such as exploiting Indigenous labor or imposing financial penalties on workers, justice perceptions deteriorate, leading to disengagement, reduced compliance, and long-term sustainability failures in the supply network.*

5.2 | Theoretical Implications

This case study offers five major theoretical implications concerning power theory in supply networks by elaborating on excessive, strategic, and balanced power use and on linkages to justice and sustainability outcomes.

First, it highlights that the excessive use of power not only violates perceived justice (Alghababsheh et al. 2023) and undermines sustainability (Touboulic et al. 2014) within dyadic relationships but also triggers negative repercussions at the network level, often cascading to less prominent actors. This important finding highlights the need to move beyond the study of power holders' narrow perspectives, advocating instead for an examination of power from the viewpoints of vulnerable or marginalized actors. Thus, we underscore how the power tactics of prominent actors propagate throughout the supply network, impacting justice and producing adverse sustainability outcomes. By contrasting power holders' and power targets' perspectives, we demonstrate that coercive and legitimate power bases (Benton and Maloni 2005; Brito and Miguel 2017) lead to severe violations of procedural, distributive, and interactional justice, resulting in negative TBL outcomes. Power targets perceived such use of power, for example, as abusive, deceitful, or

aggressive, reinforcing systemic injustices that deteriorate supply chain relationships (Alghababsheh et al. 2023; Reimann and Ketchen 2017) and create negative implications for the entire supply network. For example, when farmers coerced Indigenous communities into partnerships to avoid disputes, they perpetuated violence, further undermining justice and sustainability. Thus, excessive power use not only destabilizes supply chain relationships but also generates irreversible network-wide consequences.

Second, this study highlights a critical threshold where the strategic use of power shifts into what is also called a “power-play” (Chen and Chen 2019). Particularly, a novel contribution of our case study is the critical examination of expert and referent power in supply chain relationships (Huo et al. 2017; Marshall et al. 2019; Meqdadi et al. 2019). For example, the findings indicate that while strategic power can foster economic outcomes, it can also lead to critical concerns in terms of justice and social and environmental outcomes, particularly when farmers are unable to detect or resist opportunistic behaviors. In this regard, suppliers of agricultural inputs strategically manipulated farmers who lacked agronomic knowledge. This insidious power tactic fostered dependency and prevented farmers from recognizing sustainability risks, such as the overuse of agrochemicals, which leads to ecological degradation. These insights deepen our understanding of expert and referent power by highlighting various pitfalls when power holders influence power targets and ultimately conceal adverse sustainability outcomes. Therefore, we contribute to research on non-mediated power misuse (e.g., Schleper et al. 2017) by showing critical implications for the justice and sustainability of power targets and the cascading effects across the supply network.

Third, this study contributes to research on justice and sustainability in supply chains by showing that when both parties in a dyadic relationship refrain from domination and instead share responsibilities and risks, they can foster perceptions of justice and enhance sustainability outcomes (Jabbour et al. 2020; Karaosman et al. 2023; Marculetiu et al. 2023; Marttinen and Kähkönen 2022; Oyedijo et al. 2023). We shed light on the positive implications of balanced power, not only for power holders but also for power targets. More importantly, we found that providing power targets with proper rewards, training, knowledge, and support (Pagell and Wu 2009; Porteous et al. 2015) helps cascade sustainability outcomes throughout the supply network. This cascading can occur through, for example, technical-supportive power tactics, which strengthen farmers’ equitable access to sustainability knowledge and resources while fostering sustainable agriculture. Nonetheless, we highlight a significant challenge: certain actors may be unwilling to balance power, opting instead to exploit power asymmetries or cascade felt pressures onto disadvantaged actors. This challenge, for instance, is evident when farmers exploit Indigenous people from non-homologated lands, prioritizing economic gain over the justice and sustainability of the Indigenous community.

Fourth, our theoretical model (Figure 4) offers a novel characterization of power use to OSCM scholars and practitioners. This model is particularly valuable for addressing the urgent need to achieve higher levels of supply chain justice (Narasimhan et al. 2013) and develop truly sustainable supply chains

(Montabon et al. 2016). In this model, we grounded the perspectives of traditional and non-traditional actors of an agricultural commodity supply network in Mato Grosso, Brazil. In doing so, we address a crucial gap in OSCM by considering perspectives from the Global South that are often overlooked in the study of power and sustainability outcomes based on justice (Oyedijo et al. 2023; Pagell and Wu 2009; Stephens et al. 2025; Touboulie et al. 2020). This nuanced conceptualization can guide OSCM scholars and practitioners to comprehend and operationalize power bases (French and Raven 1959) while considering justice and sustainability outcomes within supply networks.

Finally, this study adds to research on sustainable agricultural supply chains (Gómez and Lee 2023; Pullman and Wu 2021; Wiengarten and Durach 2021) by showing how power asymmetries affect marginalized and voiceless actors and ecosystems. While traders and suppliers of agricultural inputs often exercised excessive or strategic power, some farmers, when subjected to financial challenges and environmental and social risks, also wielded power against rural workers, Indigenous people, and the environment. As noted, the stakes of these actors remain largely absent from OSCM discourse (Stephens et al. 2025). Using a TBL lens, we expose several systemic sustainability issues associated with commodities production, ranging from labor exploitation and unfair wages to the use of fake certificates, lack of transparency, land disputes, and deforestation. Furthermore, our case study describes constructive power tactics that can foster justice and sustainability outcomes within commodities production. Although the supply network in Mato Grosso illustrates power-driven sustainability issues (Ioris 2018), it also points to various pathways for more equitable and sustainable agricultural practices.

5.3 | Practical Implications

Based on how power affected justice and sustainability in the supply network, we make several recommendations for practice.

To avoid the perceptions of injustice and negative sustainability outcomes associated with the strategic use of power, we recommend that suppliers accurately assess and communicate their products’ sustainability outcomes, considering farmers’ agronomic background and technical capacity. Importantly, offering rewards can help suppliers leverage their relationships with farmers. For example, soil analysis packages that identify fertility problems or agrochemical contamination could be rewarded. This power tactic should foster a sense of fairness and facilitate the achievement of sustainability outcomes that benefit both suppliers and farmers, ultimately cascading throughout the supply network.

To reduce the risk of being instrumentally exploited by traders, farmers could consider joining farm associations, obtaining or sharing market expertise with partner farmers, and exploring alternative channels. Consequently, contacting overseas clients directly generates business prospects based on fair conditions and mutual sustainability outcomes. Farmers could also cooperate with agricultural institutions (e.g., Embrapa) while adopting sustainable farming practices to create visibility and access potential markets.

Our findings suggest that farmers can improve commodity productivity while promoting environmental and social sustainability outcomes in the supply network by properly compensating rural workers. Farmers could, for example, consider the agronomic background of workers and train them according to fair labor standards rather than impose financial penalties or show disrespectful behavior.

For policymakers in Brazil, our findings indicate that the government agency for agricultural defense in the supply network in Mato Grosso needs financial support to improve its infrastructure and operations. This support could further enhance the agency's ability to verify the production of agricultural commodities in accordance with the rules of sustainable agriculture established by the Brazilian Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock. In addition, the government agency for Indigenous affairs has been negatively affected by political issues, including the legitimization of aggressive power tactics used by *ruralistas* against Indigenous people, as well as a lack of financial investment. It is therefore incumbent upon the relevant authorities in Brazil to take adequate action to prevent the excessive use of power against Indigenous people, nature, and other vulnerable actors or entities. Key actions could be taken to expedite the homologation process for non-demarcated Indigenous territories, empower local enforcement agencies to impede any form of coercion against Indigenous people, enhance the transparency and accountability of government agencies (e.g., holding to account public officials who collude with environmental wrongdoers), monitor aggressive power tactics affecting fauna and flora, and foster environmental awareness through public and NGO campaigns.

We advise international policymakers to integrate the principles of justice into their sourcing policies. This integration should manifest in implementing regulations that mandate transparency from sourcing countries and require buyers to compensate farmers properly. Additionally, these policymakers should ensure the provision of resources and knowledge to farmers, facilitating sustainable production. Furthermore, policymakers from countries in the Global North could collaborate with their counterparts in the Global South to pool efforts and expertise, thereby aiming to enhance the international production and trade of agricultural commodities within the justice framework and the TBL of sustainability. In particular, policymakers from the Global North could develop policies that consider the local conditions of supply networks while diminishing the likelihood of actors engaging in excessive or strategic forms of power use. For instance, these policies could promote the recognition and reward of farmers who conserve forests.

5.4 | Limitations and Future Research Opportunities

Our study has limitations that offer potential areas for future investigation. It employed a single-case study design, focusing on an agricultural commodity supply network in Mato Grosso, Brazil. It is important to exercise caution when considering the generalizability and transferability of the findings to different contexts, operations, and supply chains. Comparative case studies could be conducted to gather further evidence on the

transferability of the results presented in this study while also elaborating on additional power tactics that trigger (in)justice and impact sustainability outcomes on a dyadic and supply network level. Future research could examine other Global South countries and collect data from a range of industries (e.g., fashion, food retailing, and manufacturing) in which power issues emerge. Alternatively, researchers might adopt a longitudinal and intervention-based approach to the study of power, justice, and sustainability outcomes, and how related implications cascade throughout supply networks. This would enable them to capture not only changes in power use but also their effects on justice and sustainability outcomes, as well as co-constructed solutions to mitigate issues resulting from power imbalances.

Further statistical testing is required to ascertain the generalizability of our propositions. Accordingly, we propose the implementation of large-scale surveys to evaluate and enhance the theoretical model (Figure 4). Additionally, researchers may develop and examine specific hypotheses based on the emerging concepts of excessive, strategic, and balanced power, as well as our propositions, based on data collected from buyer-supplier relationships or multi-tier supply chains. Further quantitative research techniques (e.g., event studies) may statistically assess the impact of distinct power tactics on justice and sustainability outcomes.

Researchers could adopt other theoretical perspectives to examine the implications of power use. For example, paradox theory could help to develop a deeper understanding of the paradoxes associated with the use of power in extended supply networks (e.g., traders aiming to empower farmers to meet their sustainability requirements may simultaneously seek maintaining control, ultimately thwarting their sustainability efforts). Applying paradox theory could assist OSCM scholars in comprehending and addressing the barriers that impede the transition toward sustainability.

A more detailed examination of the operations and supply chains of major industries, such as oil, mining, and garment manufacturing, may provide insights into how powerful firms resort to excessive power, including violence against, intimidation of, or control over workers, disadvantaged suppliers, local communities, activists, and nature. Some of the power tactics from our case study were observed in specific actor relationships, such as traders and farmers. The study of supply networks in other contexts may point to similar power tactics, although these may manifest in different actor constellations due to the distinct power dynamics unique to each context. Thus, future research could explore variations in power tactics across various supply networks.

6 | Conclusion

This case study examined the use of power in shaping perceptions of justice within an agricultural commodity supply network in Mato Grosso, Brazil. Our findings revealed three new forms of power exertion: excessive, strategic, and balanced. These forms correspond to specific power tactics, each influencing perceptions of justice in different ways. When those in positions of power excessively use influence, justice is violated

for individuals or groups subject to that power, leading to negative reactions and resistance, also triggering cascading power abuses throughout the supply network. The strategic deployment of influence by the power holder shapes the power target's justice perceptions in a mixed manner. Ultimately, the balanced use of power fosters a positive perception of justice for all parties involved in the supply network.

Furthermore, our findings indicated that excessive power harms sustainability outcomes for the power target and the broader supply network. The strategic use of power yields mixed sustainability outcomes. For instance, when traders influenced farmers to maximize profits, they impeded the farmer's autonomy. Finally, a balanced approach to power promotes positive sustainability outcomes, enhancing economic gains, environmental stewardship, and social well-being for the power holder, the power target, and the broader supply network. In conclusion, this study provided a comprehensive analysis of how power dynamics cascade within the supply network. By highlighting the implications of power use, we encourage critical reflections on the equity and long-term sustainability of the agricultural commodity supply network in Mato Grosso and beyond.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section.