

Factors shaping youth participation in agriculture

A systematic analysis in the northern Lao PDR

Valentine Copt¹

Introduction

- **Youth as majority:** 51% of the Lao PDR's population is between 10 and 35 years old.
- **Limited opportunities:** 39% of the youth (15-24) are not in education, employment or training (NEET).
- **Youth in rural areas:** 62% of Lao youth under 25 reside in rural areas
- **AGREE intervention:** HELVETAS supports rural youth through agripreneurship training, start-up grants and market linkages.

Methods

Quantitative survey

- Conducted with youth (n=130) across four provinces
- Comparison of AGREE (n=48) and non-AGREE (n=84) youth
- Analyses: descriptive statistics and binary logistic regression to identify determinants of participation in the AGREE project

Qualitative study

- 19 FGDs with youth (n=96) in 14 districts
- Key informants' interviews with parents and teachers (n=21)
- Thematic analysis conducted

Comparison domains

- Livelihood strategies
- Challenges and constraints
- Perceptions and aspirations

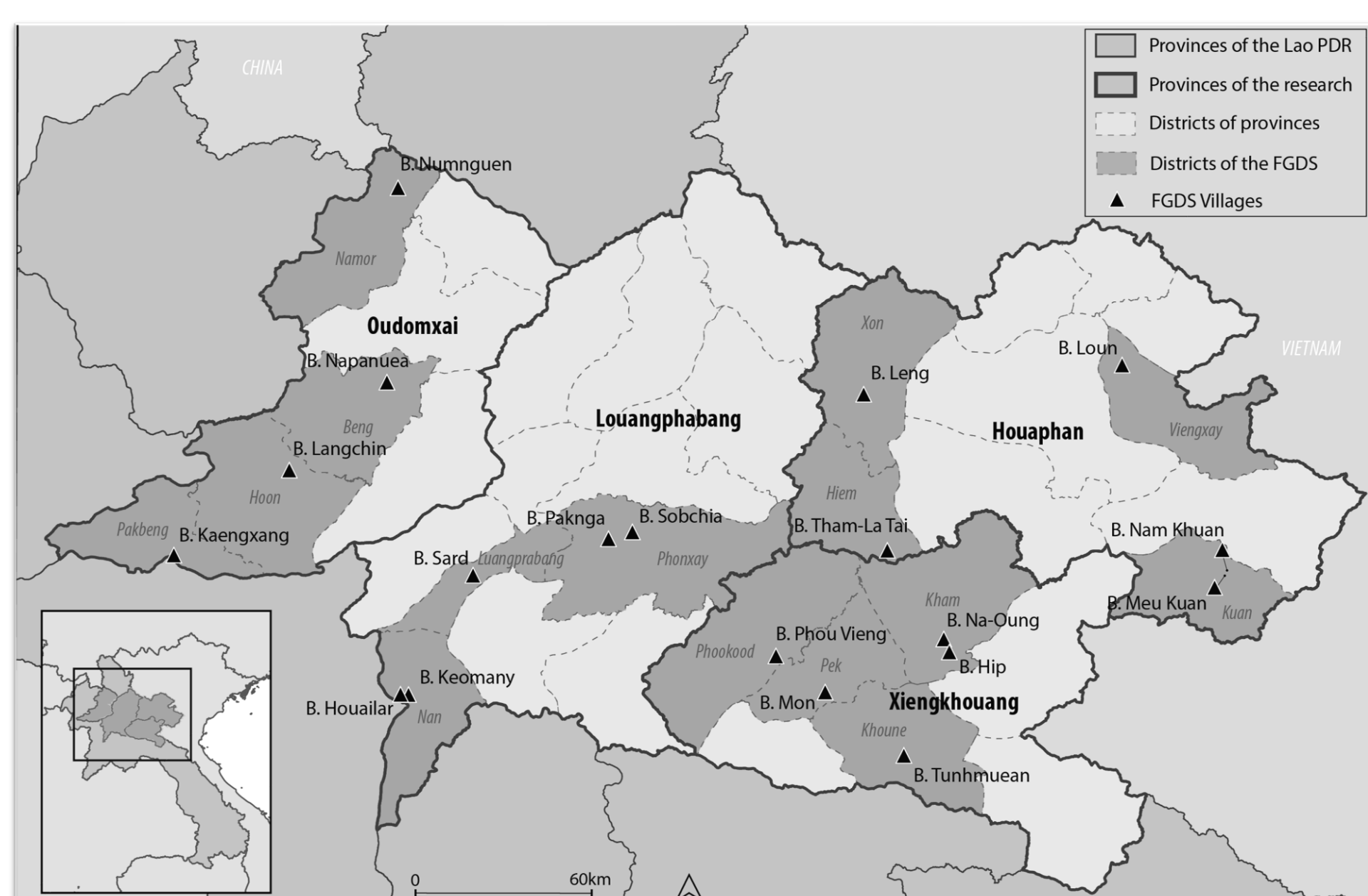
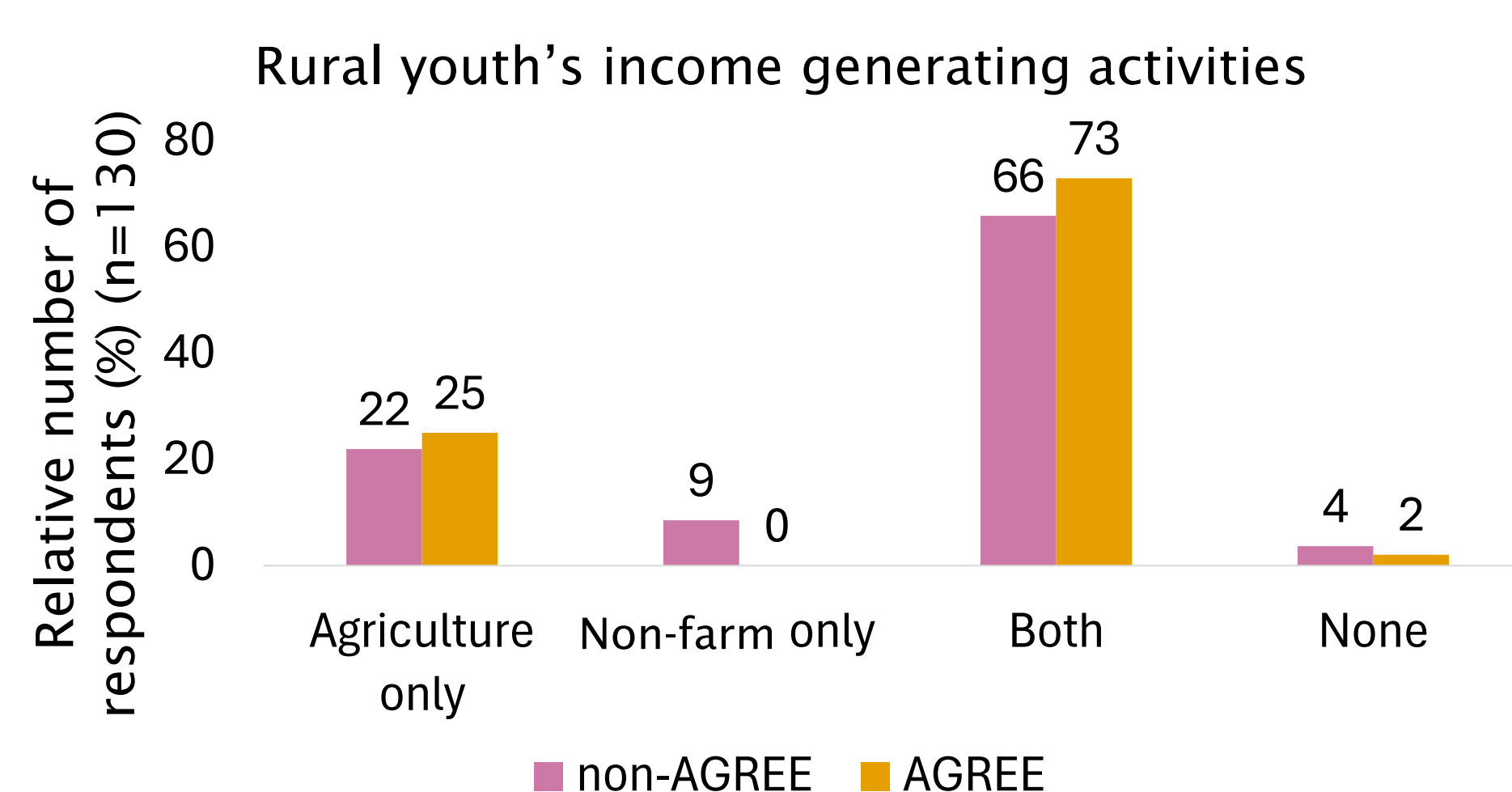


Fig. 1 Study sites ©Valentine Copt



Fig. 2 Young participant to the AGREE intervention with his cattle. ©Helvetas Laos

Results



Regression results: significant determinants of participation in the AGREE intervention

- **Marital status:** married youth show 75% lower odds of participation
 - **Leadership role:** Youth who hold a household leadership role show 4x higher odds
 - **Education:** each additional years is associated with a 24% increase in odds
- ➔ Youth who join tend to have more independence, stronger leadership positions, and greater educational attainment.

Conclusion

- Youth are leading **adaptive, pluriactive, and mobile** livelihoods as resilience strategies.
- Youth are **constrained**, like their parents, by structural and institutional barriers
- Youth hold **positive affect and cultural value** towards agriculture but recognise its **economic limits**.
- AGREE intervention is **necessary** but not sufficient; it improves capacity and agency within **unchanged structural constraints**.

Key barriers for youth agricultural participation

- **Limited capital:** Lack of funds restricts investment in inputs, equipment, and farm expansion.
- **Weak infrastructure:** Poor roads and transport raise costs, reduce market access, and limit services.
- **Pests and diseases:** High vulnerability of crops/livestock, combined with costly inputs and limited training, hinders risk management.

Key enablers for youth agricultural participation

- **Positive perceptions and cultural ties:** Agriculture valued as livelihood and tradition.
- **Family support:** Families provide land, labour, training, and guidance in place of institutional safety nets.
- **Income opportunities:** Strong interest when farming offers stable and profitable returns, especially via value addition or diversification.

Tab 1. Youth perception score calculated from a five-point Likert scale of statements. The higher the score the more the respondent has positive perceptions about agriculture.

	Non-AGREE (n=48)	AGREE (n=84)	Total (130)
Min/Max	2.4 / 5.0	2.6 / 5.0	2.4 / 5.0
Med [IQR]	3.8 [3.4; 4.0]	4.0 [3.8; 4.4]	3.8 [3.4; 4.2]
Mean (std)	3.8 (0.6)	4.0 (0.5)	3.8 (0.6)

Recommendations

- **Lower entry barriers** to existing interventions
- **Targeted training** on resilience to climate and environmental shocks
- **Financial, market and policy literacy** to facilitate market linkages and support rural resilience
- Development of **youth-friendly peer networks** to bridge information and extension gaps