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“Reconcile land system changes  
with planetary health”

## A systematic analysis of factors shaping youth participation in agriculture in northern Laos

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### Abstract

The Lao People's Democratic Republic has one of the youngest populations in Asia, set to become a significant driving force behind the country's social and economic development. Although agriculture remains the primary source of employment for many young Lao, an increasing number are now choosing career paths outside farming, driven by growing opportunities for migration and non-agricultural work, especially as rural areas face unstable economic conditions, limited income, and rising inflation. This study draws on the AGREE project, implemented by Helvetas in four northern provinces, which aims to support rural youth through technical and business training, as well as start-up grants, with the objective of making agriculture a viable livelihood option. Using a mixed-method approach - including surveys (n=130), focus group discussions, and key informant interviews - the research analyses rural youth livelihoods, aspirations, and barriers to agricultural involvement. A multi-stage purposive sampling method was employed. The data were analysed using a combination of descriptive statistics, logit regression, and thematic analysis. Preliminary findings indicate that while most rural youth are actively engaged in agriculture, they often rely on off-farm activities to supplement income, as farming alone rarely provides sufficient support. Youth generally perceive farming as a socially acceptable and potentially fulfilling vocation, yet few consider it financially profitable. Many manage their own farm but face significant barriers such as limited capital, poor infrastructure, and weak institutional support, which restrict their access to programmes and increase their need for financial assistance and skills development. With limited support and information available, youth frequently rely on informal networks that cannot fully replace institutional resources. Addressing infrastructural and institutional gap is essential to support youth aspirations and willingness to remain in agriculture, while integrating climate resilience and risk management to ensure sustainable livelihoods.

**Keywords:** Agriculture, Laos, rural youth, systems thinking