

When Conflict Meets the Farm: Youth Disengagement and System Collapse in Myanmar

Swe Zin Moe^{1,4}, Josephine Kyi², Lin Ko², Jamaluddin Fitrah Alam³, Inkyin May⁴, Vanni Lian⁴, Htoo Myat Naing⁵, Julius H. Kotir⁶

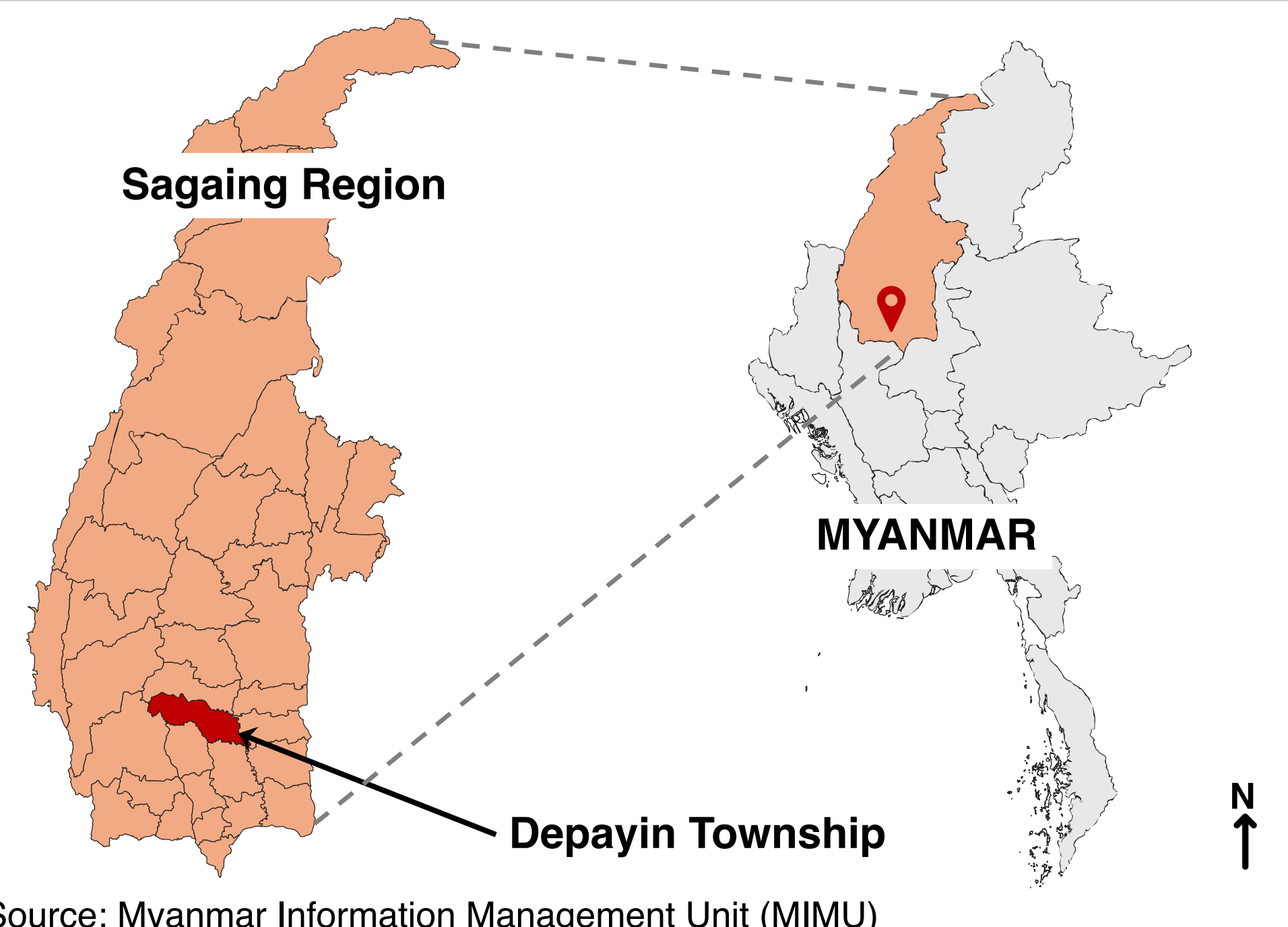
¹University of Bonn, Inst. Crop Sci. and Res. Conserv. (INRES), Germany | ²Independent researcher based in Depayin Township, Myanmar | ³Hasanuddin University, Dept. of Marine Science, Indonesia

⁴Project Swallow, Research Unit, Myanmar | ⁵Center for Operational Analysis and Research (COAR), Myanmar | ⁶The University of Queensland, School of Agriculture and Food Sustainability, Australia

Introduction

- Myanmar faces a severe hunger crisis amid civil war, natural disasters, and economic collapse (WFP, 2025)
- Conflict and declining farm profitability challenge youth engagement in agriculture.
- This study explores the systemic drivers and feedback dynamics shaping youth engagement in farming in Depayin Township.

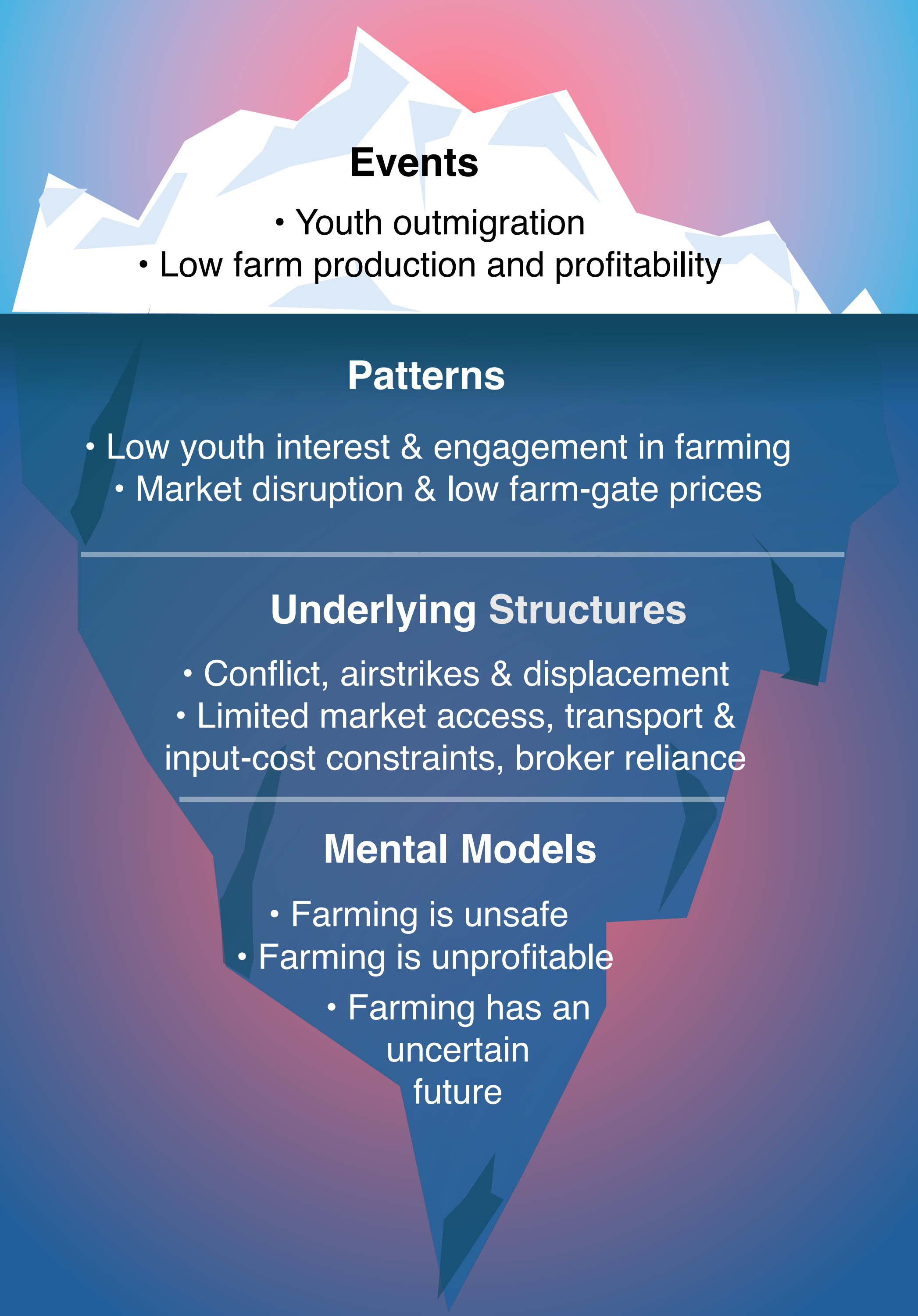
Study area: Depayin Township, Sagaing Region, Myanmar



Source: Myanmar Information Management Unit (MIMU)

Iceberg Model

Underlying system structures shaping youth engagement in farming



Methodology

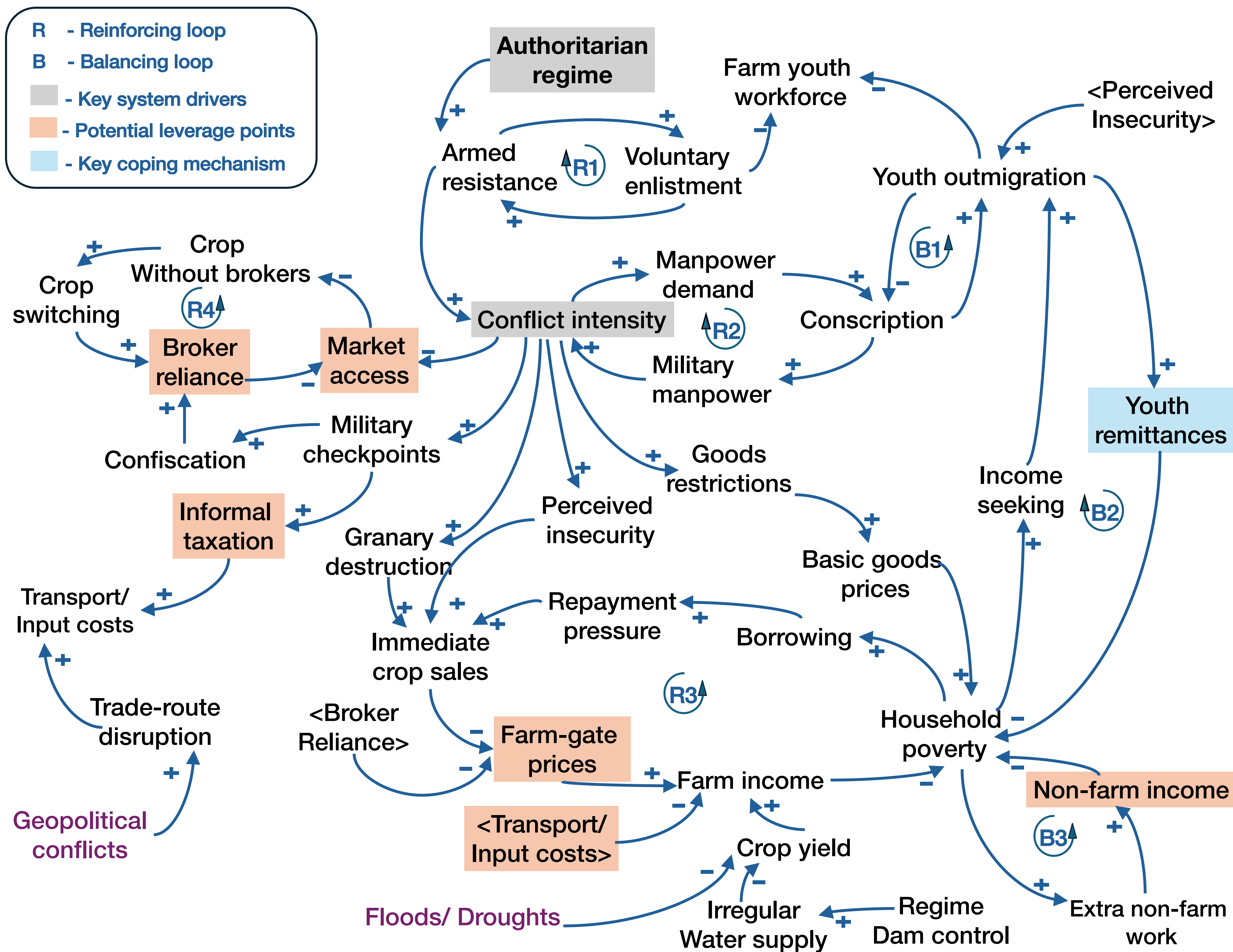
- 53 semi-structured farmer interviews & literature/secondary sources** built a **preliminary causal loop diagram (CLD)**
- 4 focus group discussions (20 stakeholders)** to review and refine the CLD
 - Local authorities, policymakers, NGOs, drivers, farmers, business owners, women entrepreneurs
- Iceberg Model** explored underlying structures and mental models
- Influence-dependence analysis** identified potential leverage points

Key Takeaway

- Myanmar's fragile farming system reflects its severe food insecurity.
- Protecting civilians and economic infrastructure is vital for food security.
- Low returns, insecurity, and uncertainty push youth out of farming.
- More resilient farming systems are needed to withstand multiple shocks.
- International pressure to prevent airstrikes is critical.

Key Findings

Preliminary causal loop diagram of factors influencing youth disengagement from farming in Depayin Township, Myanmar.



Farmers' Voices

"We can't get by farming. Without money from our children abroad, we would have starved long ago."

"Farming brings little profit because farm-gate prices are very low. But we still sow because we have nothing else to do."

"We used to get good prices by storing grain. Now we don't dare store rice because it could be destroyed at any time."

"Farming has become increasingly unsafe. Young people fear conscription. Now most farm workers are women and men in their 50s."

"Water was released from Thaphan Seik Dam without warning. Seven female farm workers were swept away and killed."

"When we need water for sowing, there is no water. Those who can't risk it just don't sow."

"We must sell our rice at whichever price the brokers give."

"A trip to the mill or to sell our crops used to take two hours. Now it can take half a day to several days because of safety concerns."

— Depayin farmers

Photo: Flooding in Depayin Township, August 7, 2026 | Credit: Citizen journalist

Reference:

World Food Programme (WFP). (2025). *WFP warns that Myanmar faces rising displacement and unacceptable hunger levels in 2026*.



Contact:
Swe Zin Moe
ilasmoe2@gmail.com

