

NEEDS AND POTENTIAL FOR RURAL YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN LAO PDR



RAP PUBLICATION 2006/11

**NEEDS AND POTENTIAL FOR RURAL YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
IN LAO PDR**

Anne Nielsen and Dr Vanhmany Chanhomphou

**FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
REGIONAL OFFICE FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC
Bangkok, 2006**

The designation and presentation of material in this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers and boundaries.

All rights reserved. Reproduction and dissemination of material in this information product for educational or other non-commercial purposes are authorized without any prior written permission from the copyright holders provided the source is fully acknowledged. Reproduction of material in this information product for sale or other commercial purposes is prohibited without written permission of the copyright holders. Applications for such permission should be addressed to the Senior Extension, Education and Communications Officer, FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, Maliwan Mansion, 39 Phra Atit Road, Bangkok 10200, Thailand or by e-mail to Malcolm.Hazelman@fao.org

© FAO 2003

Photo: FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific

For copies write to: Malcolm Hazelman
Senior Extension, Education and Communications Officer
Sustainable Development Department Group
FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific
Maliwan Mansion, 39 Phra Atit Road
Bangkok 10200, THAILAND
Tel: (+66) 2 697 4000
Fax: (+66) 2 697 4445
E-mail: Malcolm.Hazelman@fao.org

Acknowledgements

This study could not have been done without support from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Lao People's Revolutionary Youth Union (LYU).

On behalf of the study team, we thank Vanhpheng Thammavong, Head of International Relations, Deputy Chief of Cabinet of the LYU, who explained the union's structure and referred us to other individuals and documents for additional information.

Khampoune Keoviphakone, Deputy Director of Development and Vocational Department, was instrumental in the meetings with rural youth in both provinces studied. He also participated in the assessment activities.

We also extend thanks to the provincial and district youth union general secretaries who arranged village youth meetings and to:

Village Committee members from Ban Phonesavanh, Ban Noy and Ban Phonetong in Phonhon district, Vientiane province, and Ban Houy Kha, Ban Houy Jhong, Ban Mai and Ban Houy Dong in Boun Neua district, Phongsaly province, who gave their time and energy to ensure that we understood the situation in their villages.

Youth of those same villages who participated in the participatory assessment, which was instrumental for the data collection.

Friends from the Ministries of Education, Health and Agriculture and Forestry, who, through informal talks, provided us with information related to youth in their jurisdictions.

The participants of the National Rural Youth Workshop in Vientiane, 26–27 January 2005, who provided us with useful information.

Dr Phet Phomphiphak, Deputy Director-General, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, for an informative meeting.

Last but not least, Malcolm Hazelman, Senior Extension, Education and Communications Officer, FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok, and Annika Kaipola, FAO Lao Country Office, for their technical supervision and guidance throughout the study period.

Foreword

In recent years much international attention has focused on the plight of youth, many of whom live in abject poverty with minimal education and opportunities. Data indicate that almost one in five young persons – 18 percent of the 1 158 million 15 to 24 year olds worldwide – survive on less than US\$1 per day while as many as 45 percent live on less than US\$2 per day. The situation in Asia and the Pacific region is even graver, especially in rural locations where the majority of the population in the region live.

Against this background, FAO's rural youth programme has the mission to provide rural youth with the tools and support they need to become healthy individuals and take part in the fight against hunger in their communities. However, to be effective, such efforts must be guided by accurate data on rural youth, which are at present lacking in the Lao People's Democratic Republic. It was with this aim that the FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific collaborated with local partners, in particular the Lao Youth Union and the FAO Office in Lao People's Democratic Republic, in activities to address this information gap.

In 2005, two complementary activities were implemented: a *National workshop on rural youth in the Lao People's Democratic Republic* and a case study on *Needs and potential for rural youth development in the Lao People's Democratic Republic*. The report of the national workshop was published last year and is available online,¹ while the latter case study has culminated in this report. It is our hope that both reports, together with others by FAO and partners relating to Asia and the Pacific region, will guide and stimulate action within the Lao People's Democratic Republic as well as within the region, together with the involvement of all relevant stakeholders, to address the grave situation facing rural youth. FAO will assist within its areas of expertise and resource availability.



He Changchui

Assistant Director-General and
FAO Regional Representative for Asia and the Pacific

¹ <http://www.fao.org/docrep/008/ae933e/ae933e00.htm>

Executive summary

There is currently substantial focus in Lao PDR on poverty alleviation and rural development in order to reach the global Millennium Development Goals by 2015 and also implement the National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy by 2020. However, there is no specific national youth policy that would help achieve these goals. Where reference to youth occurs, it is general and does not reflect the differences between rural and urban youth situations. There is a great need to develop a strategy to benefit rural youth.

This report reflects the findings of a study looking at how rural youth, and thus rural communities, are missing out on development opportunities more readily available to urban youth and what can be done to turn the situation around. The research was conducted through interviews with relevant officials, surveys and group discussions with youth in seven villages in two provinces and supplemented with a literature search. For the purpose of the study, the researchers adopted the LYU definition of youth as anyone aged between 15 and 30.

Lack of or limited education remains one of the primary obstacles to the development of rural youth. This includes lack of options or access to vocational training. Improving access to basic education and to vocational training is critically needed.

The findings indicate that rural youth are interested in agriculture endeavours – if it is not subsistence agriculture and cash income is possible. There is considerable potential to use agriculture to improve rural youth's livelihoods if they are taught new techniques, how to grow new crops and how to sell crops locally. This requires improving the knowledge and skills of agricultural extension staff, improving access to vocational training centres with a curriculum that includes agriculture subjects and even providing alternative training options, such as farmer-to-farmer approaches.

Rural youth are open-minded and have ideas on how to improve the current situation – if financial aid and transfer of knowledge were provided. But they need basic support and improved knowledge and skills to begin their development.

The lack of access to credit and markets discourages youth farmers from intensifying their production; the further lack of knowledge regarding production intensification and the lack of extension services consequently hamper general development in the rural areas. Promoting and improving rural youth's access to funds and microfinance for investment in agricultural production, either through bank loans or revolving funds in villages, are recommended approaches to addressing the challenging situations outlined in this report. Improving female farmers' access to credit and other financial services are also highlighted as needed elements to develop rural communities.

Given their exposure to modern life through the media and the limited employment opportunities in the countryside, more and more rural youth are opting to migrate to urban areas for work and a better life. However, due to their limited education, they often end up in low-paid jobs, such as in the construction sector, in garment factories or in prostitution. Human trafficking is also a growing problem in Lao PDR, with more and more youths ending up as victims. Young girls, especially those from rural ethnic groups, are most vulnerable to human traffickers.

Different government and international organizations in Lao PDR do not adequately address the needs and situations of youth, especially rural youth, in their policies, programmes and

projects. There are agencies implementing specifically targeted programmes to address some of the critical concerns challenging rural youth. And these programmes offer valuable opportunities. However, more explicit focus on rural youth in the development and implementation of projects is needed, as youth are not a specific target group for any organization implementing agricultural and rural development activities in Phongsaly or Vientiane provinces or across the country.

Among the concluding recommendations of this report is the call for more institutions and international organizations to look specifically at rural youth and target their needs and development. This includes policies aimed at keeping youth in their rural communities.

The recommendations also suggest that youth be included in international organizations' development activities in the early phases of projects when they can express their needs and thus develop ownership of the activities. During group discussions for this study, rural youth noted that creating youth interest and management groups with specific emphasis on animal rearing, crop production, fishponds, handicrafts, etc., would greatly benefit the implementation of development activities.

Rural youth have considerable potential as a workforce and a willingness to help develop their rural communities. But they need good income-generating opportunities to remain in the rural areas. This requires that government, institutions and agencies respond with specific policies and programmes directed at rural youth.

Contents

	<i>Page</i>
Acknowledgements	iii
Foreword	v
Executive summary	vii
Acronyms	xi
1. Introduction	1
2. Research methodology	2
Study limitations	3
Structure of the report	3
3. National context	4
National development policies	6
NGPES and youth issues	8
Institutional setting	9
Government ministries	10
National organizations with a focus on rural youth	10
International agencies and INGOs focusing on rural youth	11
Situation of rural youth	12
Rural youth and education	12
Rural youth and employment	14
Rural youth and health	15
Conclusions	16
1a. Obstacles regarding rural youth and education	16
1b. Opportunities regarding rural youth in education	17
2a. Obstacles regarding rural youth and employment	18
2b. Opportunities regarding rural youth and employment	18
3a. Obstacles regarding rural youth health	19
3b. Opportunities regarding rural youth health	20
4. Village context in two provinces	21
The situation of rural youth in selected villages	21
Agencies and INGOs active in the two provinces of the study	23
5. Conclusions and recommendations	26
Policies	26
Education	26
Employment opportunities	27
Access to credit and funding	28
Give rural youth a chance	28
References	29

Contents (continued)

	<i>Page</i>
Annex 1: Field map of villages studied in Vientiane province	31
Annex 2: Field map of villages studied in Phongsaly province	32
Annex 3: Information summaries on Phongsaly and Vientiane provinces	33
Annex 4: Rural youth-suggested activity plans	36
Annex 5: Conceptual schema on youth and family support	38
Annex 6: Problem tree for lack of funds	39
Annex 7: Problem tree for low education level	40
Annex 8: Problem tree for rice shortage	41
Annex 9: Problem tree for poor health	42

List of Figures

Figure 3.1: Map of Lao PDR	4
----------------------------------	---

List of Tables

Table 2.1: Example of one methodological approach used during the village survey .	2
Table 2.2: Number of interviewed youth, by age and sex	3
Table 3.1: Age structure in Lao PDR	5
Table 3.2: Access to primary and secondary schools	13
Table 3.3: Youth schooling	13
Table 3.4: Awareness about contraceptive methods, HIV/AIDS and STDs	16
Table 4.1: Village school attendance in secondary and university education	22
Table 4.2: INGOs operating in Phonhon district, Vientiane province	25

Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency of the United States of America
CL	Comité de Coopération avec le Laos
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CLCs	Community Learning Centres
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CWS	Church World Service
DAFEO	District Agriculture and Forestry Extension Offices
EC	European Commission
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GAA	German Agro Action
GOL	Government of Lao PDR
JVC	Japan International Volunteer Centre
HIV/AIDS	Human Immuno Deficiency Virus/Acquired Immuno-Deficiency Syndrome
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
INGOs	international non-government organizations
Lao PDR	Lao People's Democratic Republic
LDC	least-developed country
LPRP	Lao People's Revolutionary Party
LPRYU	Lao People's Revolutionary Youth Union
LYU	Lao People's Revolutionary Youth Union
MOAF	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MLSW	Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare
MOE	Ministry of Education
Mt	metric tons
NAFES	National Agriculture and Forestry Extension Service
NAFRI	National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute
NCAW	National Commission for the Advancement of Women
NGPES	National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy
NPADP	North Phongsaly Alternative Development Project
NPEP	National Poverty Eradication Programme
NTFPs	non-timber forest products
NUOL	National University of Lao PDR
IOs	international organizations
PAFEC	Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Extension Centres
PDDP	Rural Development Project of Phongsaly district
STDs	sexually transmitted diseases
UNDCP	United Nations Drug Control Programme
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

1. Introduction

This report is the result of a study on rural youth, their needs and potential at both the national and local levels in the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR). The findings were obtained through interviews with rural youth representatives and supplemented with a literature search. The study findings show that current national development policies in Lao PDR do not focus enough on rural youth and their needs. There is attention to youth, but it is a general perspective that fails to reflect awareness of the significant differences between rural and urban youth and the growing disparities between the rural and urban areas across the country. As well, there is no explicit focus on rural youth in the national development policies regarding how they can contribute to agricultural and rural development.

The study also reveals that national development policies when discussing youth, largely concentrate on academic education and improved access to primary (in particular) and secondary education; they give little attention to improved access to education through non-formal education and vocational training, with which rural youth can develop and improve their knowledge and skills about handicrafts, agriculture and other trades. There is also a need for training that can improve rural youth's opportunity to engage in alternative income-generating activities. Although vocational training centres offer literacy courses and training, these appear not to fully satisfy the needs and aspirations of rural youth. As well, there are a limited number of vocational training centres in the country, and very few of them have agricultural subjects included in the curriculum. Opportunity to receive training is further hindered by long travel distances to schools, lack of financial means to pay for school fees and accommodation, and ethnic traditions and customs. Another finding of this study is that students attending training schools fear that they will not have any possibility to use the newly acquired skills in their local community – a concern supported by the reality.

Due to the lack of training opportunities and weak extension services in rural areas, most rural youth are engaged in traditional subsistence agriculture where the main activities are rice production and small-scale animal husbandry. However, youth do not regard traditional subsistence agriculture as employment and many desire a job in other non-agriculture-based livelihood activities with higher income possibilities.

Despite the importance of youth to the nation, information about them is inadequate, especially information on the situation of rural youth. Thus, in cooperation with the Lao People's Revolutionary Youth Union (LYU), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) decided to conduct this rural youth study as a baseline understanding for future development activities.

This report presents an overview of the situation on rural youth in terms of their economic development and the main issues challenging them and thus the development of rural communities.

2. Research methodology

For the purpose of this study, the researchers adopted the LYU definition of youth as anyone aged between 15 and 30.²

The study focused on Lao national policies related to rural youth, the organizations that work with them and the situation of rural youth in selected villages. The research methodology included a combination of literature review, survey questionnaires, interviews and participatory rural assessments (Table 2.1). During the research phase, the study team³ reviewed existing literature on social issues related to rural youth and identified possible gaps in the information. The study team then selected three villages in Vientiane province and four in Phongsaly province (chosen by the District Youth Union) from which research data were collected. During the field research, the team interviewed 63 youth, seven village headmen, two provincial Youth Union Secretaries and two District Youth Union Secretaries. The team also visited two ethnic vocational training centres: the North Phongsaly Alternative Development Project, which is part of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MOAF) and the Department of Health in Phongsaly province, and the Vocational Training Centre of Vientiane province.

Table 2.1: Example of one methodological approach used during the village survey

Step	Activity
1	A youth group was identified to interview.
2	The participants were divided into three groups: men only, women only and a combined group.
3	Each person drew a map of his/her village in its current form and explained it to his/her group.
4	Each person drew a picture of his/her village, as he/she would like to perceive it in the future.
5	Each group listed its priorities and identified activities that could address those needs.
6	The proposed activities were prioritized.
7	Each participant indicated which activities they were willing to participate in and/or take responsibility for implementation. Seasonal calendar information was also collected.

The team interviewed government officials working with rural development and youth at national, provincial and district levels to assess the current situation as well as the capacity and extent for improvement in the rural youth situation.

For the participatory rural assessments, youth were responsible for the village mapping exercises that examined their present and future situations and an activity calendar as well as a wealth ranking of household income sources. Also, a village survey was conducted to collect baseline data on rural youth development characteristics, conditions, situations, needs, interests and aspirations, problems and priorities. This allowed a preliminary analysis of the data and the preparation of a shortlist of priority needs and potential.

² The United Nations defines youth as anyone aged between 15 and 24.

³ The preliminary part of the study was undertaken by Dr Vanhmany Chanhomphou and her research assistant, Mr Phuaphet, who carried out the field research and writing of primary findings. The case study was then taken over by Anne Nielsen, who verified the data, redid the desk study and finalized the report. The change of consultants caused some trouble, as the field-level data had already been collected and because the data had proven to be rather weak and lacking different aspects. This has affected the outcome of this report and especially the analysis on the village level and the linkages between the national and village levels.

Various techniques were then used to refine priorities and concerns for planning. This included group work to map present and future village plans that were consolidated into one village map. Common lists of priorities and proposed activities in the villages were created.

Study limitations

The interviews with youth, which were carried out in the seven villages and at two vocational training centres, are not representative for the age group in the study’s focus. As Table 2.2 illustrates, there is a significant difference in the number of interviewees in each of the three age groups and in the sex representation within the three age groups.

Table 2.2: Number of interviewed youth, by age and sex

Age group	Male	Female
14–18	9	23
19–20	6	3
21–25	20	2
Total	35	28

These constraints impacted on the collected data in relation to some of the questions contained in the questionnaires. For instance, there was a difference in the way a 14-year-old answered compared with a 25-year-old regarding the breakdown of household income from agriculture and forestry. But because many girls marry and become a parent at a young age and are not considered as “young people” anymore – by themselves or the local community, there were fewer of them among the older age group to respond.

Also, some girls were shy to respond while some others were working when the interviews were taking place in their village.

With this in mind, the data collected in the field were used as pointers for the desk research, and thus the conclusions in the report are not solely based on the field study.

Also, the study was conducted in only seven villages and may not represent the situation in the whole country. Further studies in other regions of the country should be undertaken to ensure a complete and accurate understanding of the needs and potential of rural youth.

Structure of the report

Chapter 3 focuses on the national situation in Lao PDR. There is a general introduction to the country, with socio-economic facts presented, followed by a review of the overall national development policies and policies regarding youth. The chapter also outlines the institutional framework, including national and international organizations that focus on youth issues. Rural youth issues regarding education, employment and health are then highlighted. The chapter concludes with discussion on the obstacles and opportunities for rural youth in relation to the national development policies, including ways that rural youth are or are not addressed within national policies. Chapter 4 presents information collected in selected villages in Phongsaly and Vientiane provinces, with discussion of these findings regarding opportunities and obstacles confronting rural youth. The report concludes in Chapter 5 with a summary of the main aspects identified during the study and recommendations for further action.

3. National context

Lao PDR is a landlocked country situated in the centre of Indo-China and is surrounded by Cambodia, China, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam. The total land area is 236 800 km², of which approximately 87 percent is mountainous with sloping hills ranging from 100 m above sea level to 2 800 m above sea level; only 16 percent of the total area is below 200 m (CIA, 2005; MOAF, 2002).



Source: Laos-travel

Figure 3.1: Map of Lao PDR

Lao PDR has a population of 6 217 141, which gives a population density of 26 persons/km². The population growth is estimated at 2.42 percent (July 2005 estimate, CIA, 2005).

The Laotian population is demographically classified as young. One estimate, as shown in Table 3.1, indicates that 41.6 percent of the population is aged between birth and 14 years, and that only 3.2 percent of the total population is 65 or older.

Table 3.1: Age structure in Lao PDR

Age structure	Total in percent (est.)	Male (est.)	Female (est.)
0–14 years	41.6	1 300 094	1 289 227
15–64 years	55.2	1 693 494	1 737 196
65+ years	3.2	88 744	108 386

Source: CIA, 2005

The Government and the UN estimate that more than 60 percent of the population is younger than 25 (2004), which also reflects a low proportion of adults who are older than 65. Life expectancy is 55.08 years for the total population. Men have a life expectancy of 53.07 years, whereas women’s life expectancy is 57.17 years (CIA, 2005).

The average fertility rate in Lao PDR is 4.77 children born per female (2003), with an infant mortality rate of 85.2 deaths/1 000 live births. Women living in Phongsaly and Vientiane provinces have, on average, 5.6 children and 4.1 children, respectively (Ministry of Health, 2000).

Some 43 percent of the population has access to piped water or protected wells; 38 percent of the rural population and 66 percent of the urban population have piped water or a protected well. Around 24 percent of the total population uses adequate sanitation facilities; 61 percent of the population living in urban areas has access to adequate sanitation facilities, while this figure falls to only 14 percent of the rural population. Some 98 percent of urban populations have access to primary health care compared to only 71 percent of the rural populations (UNICEF, 2005; CIA, 2005; UNDP, 2001).

The country has considerable diversity in its ethnicity, with 47 recognized ethnic groups divided into four ethno-linguistic family groups that have very different cultures, traditions and livelihood systems. Other studies have identified more than 200 ethnic groups (ADB, 2004). Across the country, ethnic and gender differences are reflected in inequities in access to fertile land, basic social services, transport and communications.

Lao PDR is one of the poorest countries in the world and is classified by the United Nations as “a least-developed country” with a gross domestic product (GDP) per capita of US\$375 and with 26.3 percent of the population living on less than US\$1 per day⁴ (NGPES, 2003). In 2005, Lao PDR ranked 133 out a total of 177 countries in the United Nations Development Programme’s (UNDP) Human Development Index.⁵ Lao PDR ranks 102 in the UNDP Gender-Related Development Index (2005).

⁴ In this study, the UN definition of poverty (people living on less than US\$1 per day) is used.

⁵ In comparison, Thailand ranks at 73, Cambodia at 130, Viet Nam at 108 and Myanmar at 129 on the list. From 2002 to 2005, Lao PDR moved from 143 to 133 (UNDP, 2005).

Around 80 percent of the population lives in rural areas and is dependent upon agriculture and the rearing of livestock as their main income sources (Government of Lao PDR (GOL) and UN, 2004). The Government estimates that 620 000 households depend on agriculture, of which 490 000 rely on subsistence farming (2003). Agriculture accounts for 49.5 percent of the GDP, with rice production as the main agricultural activity, either upland rice production or lowland rice production.

Upland farmers used to rely heavily on the cultivation of opium, for which Lao PDR remains the fourth largest producer worldwide (Colombia is number three, Myanmar number two and Afghanistan number one).⁶ In addition to income from agriculture, many rural upland households rely on the collection of non-timber forest products (NTFPs). Collecting NTFPs plays a significant role across the country, especially as a way to counteract rice deficiencies during the year and to help people purchase consumer goods. NTFPs collected for sale are sold in other areas of Lao PDR or are exported,⁷ without any local processing (UNDP, 2001).

Although there are indications that poverty levels are decreasing, poverty remains widespread with many households unable to meet daily food requirements and satisfy basic human needs. On average, 40 percent of the Lao population live in poverty; in rural areas this figure jumps to 53 percent of the rural population, compared with 24 percent of the urban population. The rural northern areas and ethnic minorities in remote areas are most associated with poverty. Approximately 30 percent of the total population suffers from food shortages for more than six months a year (Danida, 1999; WFP, 2005).

National development policies

The Government's overall development priorities aspire "towards total eradication of mass poverty" (Committee for Planning Co-operation 2002). The development of the Government's objectives and guidelines for poverty eradication and sustainable economic growth began in 1996 with the aim of reaching the overall goal of graduating out of the least-developed country status by 2020 through sustainable and equitable development. The Government has devised two strategies for its development policies (UN, 2000):

- *High economic growth with equity and*
- *Access to social services and markets for everybody, particularly those in rural areas.*

These two strategies are to be achieved through the eight National Socio-Economic Priority Programmes for: 1) food production, 2) commercial production, 3) stabilization and reduction of shifting cultivation, 4) rural development, 5) infrastructure development, 6) improved socio-economic management and foreign economic relations, 7) human resource development and 8) services development.

At the eight Roundtable Meeting in 2003, the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NPEP)⁸ was presented as the strategy to eradicate mass poverty in the country by 2020. Acknowledging that most of the population is involved in subsistence agriculture, that they have limited education, that they have limited access to health care and that some areas are not accessible by road for some parts of the year, the NPEP targeted agriculture, education,

⁶ There was a massive focus on the total eradication of opium poppy cultivation in Lao PDR by the end of 2005. Although Lao PDR remains the fourth largest producer, there are big differences in production per country: Afghanistan is estimated to produce 4 200 metric tons (mt); Myanmar 370 mt; Colombia 73 mt and Lao PDR weighs in at 43 mt.

⁷ The main markets for NTFPs include China, Thailand and Viet Nam.

⁸ NPEP was changed to the national growth and poverty eradication strategy (NGPES). NGPES is the Government's blueprint for achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

health and infrastructure (especially rural roads and rural electricity). Supporting sectors include rural electrification, agroforestry, tourism, mining and the construction material industries. As well, the NPEP addresses trade facilitation and market linkages in most sectors. Cross-cutting issues included in the strategy cover preservation of the environment, gender, information and culture, population, social security and capacity building (Committee for Planning and Co-operation 2002).

The National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy (NGPES) captures the Government's policies in order to reach its Vision 2020 on Agricultural Development goals and to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Further focus is set on development and poverty reduction in the poorest districts; the NGPES is expected to have a big influence on rural livelihoods (GOL and UN, 2004). Some 47 districts have been identified as the poorest districts in the country and will, together with 25 classified as poor districts, be the target areas for the NGPES.

NGPES aims to improve livelihoods through rural development and access to markets, which includes developing the agriculture sector from subsistence to commercial production, with improved access to credit facilities and improved infrastructure (GOL, 2003).

As mentioned, 80 percent of the population is engaged in agricultural production; as such, the development of the agriculture sector with focus on higher productivity is a primary focus for the Government in its poverty-eradication strategy. The NGPES has three priority development objectives for the agriculture sector: 1) to ensure food security; 2) to enhance agricultural production with a focus on modernization and promoting commercial production; and 3) to stabilize shifting cultivation (GOL, 2003).

To facilitate the development of the agriculture sector, several areas are emphasized in the NGPES. Among others, formal education and non-formal education⁹ are seen as the decisive factors for farmers to gain knowledge about modern agricultural techniques.

The Government wants to encourage rural farmers to diversify their agricultural production through cash crops, horticulture and raising livestock instead of rice cultivation only. The Government will assist farmers with better access to credit and infrastructure, especially road access, for the farmers to intensify production and sell their products. Because these goals are part of the NGPES, all government agencies have an obligation to help implement them; but the main actor will be the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MOAF) and all its subdepartments (GOL, 2003).

However, farmers need training to be more productive and to cultivate new crops. Thus the Government will provide training and capacity building to help them apply modern agricultural techniques for improving yields and horticulture and livestock production. Vocational training and on-the-job training, such as farmer-to-farmer training opportunities. The National Agriculture and Forestry Extension Service will take the lead role.

Provincial and district agriculture staff will facilitate the training and education in agricultural techniques to the rural farmers. However, this will require capacity building of staff in order for them to train and support rural farmers.

⁹ Non-formal education: *"Learning activities typically organized outside the formal education system. The term is generally contrasted with formal and informal education. In different contexts, non-formal education covers educational activities aimed at imparting adult literacy, basic education for out-of-school children and youth, life skills, work skills, and general culture. Such activities usually have clear learning objectives, but vary in duration, in conferring certification for acquired learning, and in organizational structure."* (UNESCO, 2005:421) Vocational training can be formal and non-formal education.

Important agricultural policies and strategies

The MOAF has promoted several strategies in line with the objectives of the NGPES. The most important ones are the Vision 2020 on Agricultural Development and the Strategy for the Agriculture sector (2001–2010).

These strategies aim to help farmers move from subsistence agriculture to market-oriented production with cash crops. Because of the dramatic differences between agricultural production in the Mekong Valley and the remote upland farming areas, the agriculture sector will have to be developed via two different strategies and in two tempi. The transition process in the Mekong Valley has started but needs further support to develop fully. When that is completed, the MOAF will shift to the rural uplands in which a very different approach is needed because of the remoteness and the different problems encountered in the sloping areas (UNDP, 2001).

Vision 2020 on Agricultural Development and the Strategy for the Agriculture sector (2001–2010) acknowledge that the present organization within the MOAF is insufficient and understaffed and points to a need for human resource development, especially the staff located in the provinces. Improving their capability is necessary to upgrade the knowledge and skills of the local staff and to ensure their direct contact with ethnic minority groups, which has been an obstacle to developing agricultural practices in upland areas so far. These strategies also represent an acceptance that the top-down approach previously followed has proven to inhibit the development of agricultural practices in these areas (UNDP, 2001).

In 2000, the prime minister issued Order No. 14, which pushed for the eradication of opium production by 2005. This declaration requires that all provinces eradicate opium production. The only exception is that elderly people addicted to opium are allowed to grow opium for personal consumption (UNDP, 2001).

There are no specific youth strategies regarding rural youth. There are provisions to improve the lives of youth in general, as the next section explains.

NGPES and youth issues

The NGPES draws attention to the need for developing the potential of youth as a way to reduce poverty in the country. However, the main focus is on formal education, with improved equity and quality in education through improved access to primary and secondary education and quality improvement of the curriculum.

To fulfil the second goal of the MDGs, *achieving universal primary education*, the Government has introduced an Education For All (EFA) scheme. Increased access to attend and complete primary school should provide education for all. The scheme also aims to encourage parents to enrol their children, especially girls and children from ethnic minority groups. Because many of the remote villages do not have teachers or even children for each grade level, special training will be provided to teachers to work in these areas and to teach multi-grades.

The Government intends also to establish vocational training schools in poor regions and provinces to improve youth's technical skills and expand vocational, technical and higher education. The NGPES recommends improvement of women's and young girls' educational levels and opportunities for income-generation activities through skills training and microfinance.

Rural youth are only mentioned briefly in the agricultural policies, and the NGPES does not specifically focus on vocational training centres with agricultural development activities or other income-generating activities for rural youth. Nor does it give any immediate guidelines on how to contribute to the improvement of rural youth livelihoods.

International agreements targeting youth

Some of the national policies that are formulated and implemented in Lao PDR are anchored in international conventions of the United Nations or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

The Government has signed and ratified some of the following UN conventions focusing on children and youth issues:

- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (ratified in 1981)
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (ratified in 1991)
- Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation Against Trafficking in Persons in the Greater Mekong subregion (signed 2004)
- The Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (signed in 2005)
- The Minimum Age Convention (signed in 2005)

Within the ASEAN framework, the responsible ministers for youth issues developed “The Yangon 2000 declaration on preparing ASEAN youth for the challenges of globalization”, with programmes targeting skills training for out-of-school youth, sustainable development and entrepreneurship (Aseanyouth, 2005).

By signing and ratifying such international and regional conventions, the Government has an obligation to promote and work within the spirit of the conventions, though it has been slow in some areas. For example, regarding the Yangon declaration, senior staff in LYU have not heard of it and therefore cannot incorporate it into their overall union work (personal communication, LYU, 2005).

Institutional setting

The Lao National Assembly is the primary governing institution and elects the president and the prime minister. The prime minister’s office has its own secretariat and is responsible for the delegation of assignments to the different ministries. All ministries have the same organizational structure with their own offices and representatives at provincial and district levels. In addition to responsibility for the legislative functions, the National Assembly also has the overall responsibility for the executive functions within the national court system.

The Communist Lao People’s Revolutionary Party (LPRP) has governed Lao PDR since 1975. Lao PDR is a one-party state with a constitution, which mandates the LPRP as the only political party allowed to exist. The central organization of LPRP is the Central Party Committee, which is in charge of appointing an 11 member Politburo; of these 11 members, none are women. LPRP has an extended organization with party representatives at all administrative levels of the country, from national down to the village level. Thus, LPRP has enormous influence on the election of representatives. As LPRP is the only legal political party and thus controls the National Assembly, it has absolute power of the executive and the legislative functions (UNDP, 2001).

Government ministries

There are a number of government ministries operating in the institutional setting, but the following ministries are the main actors regarding development of rural youth:

The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry has a specific role in promoting sustainable use of natural resources (soil, forest, water, fish, biodiversity and atmosphere), together with agricultural crop and livestock genetic resources through its network of research and extension. Research is undertaken at the National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute (NAFRI) and extension services are provided via NAFES. The MOAF is represented at the provincial level by Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Extension Centres (PAFEC) and at the district level by the District Agriculture and Forestry Extension Offices (DAFEO). In 2002/2003, government expenditure on agriculture accounted for only 17.66 percent of total public investment (DANIDA, 1999; JICA, 2001; GOL, 2003).

The Ministry of Education (MOE) is responsible for formal and non-formal education at all levels and also shares responsibilities with authorities at the provincial and district levels. The MOE is also responsible for higher education, technical schools and teacher training colleges. Provincial authorities are responsible for secondary and vocational education, whereas district authorities are responsible for preschool, primary and non-formal education. MOE manages the entire budget for public educational activities and decides on curricula and standards for education and training (GOL, 2003; UNDP, 2001). The public expenditure on education in Lao PDR in 2003 was 11 percent of the Government's total expenditure. Some 47 percent of public expenditure on education was spent at preschool and primary education levels, 19 percent for secondary education, with 12.6 percent spent for the tertiary level (UNDP, 2005).¹⁰

The Ministry of Health (MOH) has responsibility for managing and implementing health policies and for medical training nationwide. The provincial health authorities manage provincial hospitals and the district health authorities have responsibility for district hospitals and primary health care facilities locally. Drug control programmes also come under the MOH administration. In 2001, health expenditure was 3.1 percent of the Government's total expenditure (WHO, 2005).

The Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MLSW) is responsible for labour management and social issues such as human trafficking, people with disabilities and vulnerable children.

National organizations with a focus on rural youth

The Lao People's Revolutionary Youth Union (LPRYU, although LYU is more commonly used) is a mass organization under direct guidance of the ruling LPRP. The LYU has youth member representatives in all government ministries and departments and is active at the national, provincial, district and village levels through LYU youth representatives and youth committees. Today the organization has approximately 270 000 members aged between 15 and 30 years; of them, approximately 80 000 are female. This age group includes 50 percent of the total youth population. The Young Pioneers, youth aged 6–17, are also part of the LYU (LYU no date, Aseanyouth, 2005; personal communication, LYU, 2005).

¹⁰ Where the remaining 21.6 percent goes is not possible to extract from the data in the *UNDP human development report 2005*.

As an organization, LYU is mainly involved in educational training activities that focus on promoting LPRP's political ideology, including socialism ideals and revolutionary discipline, and is currently working towards the following objectives:

- To maintain solidarity among youth and children;
- To mobilize youth to implement national development goals, based on state and party policy guidelines; and
- To encourage youth to help safeguard national issues aimed at developing Lao PDR towards peace, independence, democracy, unity and prosperity (Aseanyouth, 2005).

LYU's mandate is to promote the physical, social and economic well-being of young people to promote national policies and youth issues, and to represent youth's views. The LYU is currently involved in nine development projects across Lao PDR, with emphasis on education and promoting sexual and reproductive health education¹¹ (personal communication, LYU, 2005; UN, 2005). None of the projects that the LYU is involved in focus on rural youth in agriculture or rural development.¹²

The Lao Women's Union (LWU) is a broad organization that includes non-Party members and concentrates on issues regarding the development of women in Lao PDR. The LWU is involved at the national, provincial, district and village levels. LWU's work centres on the development of women's rights and gender equality via skills training, income-generating activities, non-farming activities, health issues, family planning, financial support and awareness raising on women's rights (ADB, 2004). The LWU is also involved in rural development projects with various donors.

International agencies and INGOs focusing on rural youth

Several international agencies and international non-government organizations (INGOs) work with the rural community and agriculture development throughout the country. Most of the projects do not explicitly target rural youth, but they are implicitly targeted as the activities implemented include agriculture, animal rearing, income generating, primary health care, etc.

The following organizations explicitly target rural youth, with emphasis on education and/or training in agriculture and related areas:

The United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has developed community learning centres (CLCs), with an emphasis on community development through education in basic literacy, vocational training and income-generating activities in remote areas. The Non-Formal Education Department (NFED) is the implementing agency and has set up, in cooperation with various INGOs and UN agencies, CLCs in 16 provinces to increase literacy and vocational training in rural areas, targeting poor ethnic groups and women. Establishing CLCs is one of the Government's priorities in rural development policies (Hakeem, 2005; UN-Lao, 2005).

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and **Save the Children Alliance** are working to provide improved education to all children and youth as part of their effort to implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), in which education is one of the

¹¹ Child trafficking (Supported by Save the Children Fund U.K.); child labour prevention (Save the Children Fund Norway); UXO awareness (UNICEF); preschool construction (Sweden); magazine (Norway); reproductive health (UNFPA); HIV/AIDS/STD (BURNET Australia); community sanitation (UNICEF); and HIV/AIDS (UNICEF).

¹² The LYU collaborated with FAO in conducting a national rural youth workshop on agriculture and food security in 2005, which indicates their awareness of the need to get more involved.

key components. The cornerstone of this work includes formal and non-formal basic education and skills training for children and youth.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and **Health Unlimited** are each promoting youth reproductive health projects in collaboration with the LYU. The projects aim at promoting sexual and reproductive health awareness among rural youth in selected villages in selected provinces. UNFPA works with the MOE on institutionalizing sexual health education through the formal and non-formal education system in ten provinces (UNDP, 2005; Health Unlimited, 2005).

Church World Service (CWS) engages in non-formal education projects in the provinces of Oudomxay, Phongsaly, Luang Nam Taa and Luang Prabang. Through four boarding training centres, the CWS works with the MOE to offer ethnic minority teenagers nine months of skills training in mathematics, carpentry, weaving and various agricultural activities, such as animal raising, fish farming, fruit tree cultivation, vegetable gardens and others, to use when they return to their home villages (CWS, 2005).

Oxfam Australia and **Oxfam Hong Kong** jointly implement a Youth Employment and Training project in Vientiane, Saravan and Sekong provinces. Rural youth from Lao Theung and Lao Sung communities are learning new skills, and through these, they are improving their employment opportunities and ability to generate income. Activities include carpentry, mechanics, hairdressing, tailoring and how to process products such as pineapple, bamboo shoots, ginger and banana leaf meat to improve their food security. The training aims for rural youth to sell the processed products to other villages (Oxfam, 2005).

The **Burnet Institute** collaborates with the LYU in a Lao Youth HIV/AIDS/STI Response project, which currently is carried out in 11 provinces. The LYU members are trained in participatory methods to gather information about sexual and drug use behaviours and to raise awareness about safe sexual practices among youth (Burnet Institute, 2005).

Situation of rural youth

Some 80 percent of the population in Lao PDR engages in agriculture, which includes many young people. Agricultural techniques are traditionally passed on from generation to generation, while modern techniques are difficult to implement or adopt because of poor communication channels and limited education levels of the farmers. This situation suggests that rural young people will, or are very likely to, have the same livelihoods and living standards as their parents – unless they are targeted in rural development and education projects.

Rural youth and education

In general, the education level in Lao PDR is low. Of the total population aged 15 and older, the literacy rate is 66.4 percent. While 77.4 percent of the male population can read and write, only 55.5 percent of the female population are literate. For the youth population, the total literacy rate is 79 percent (CIA, 2005; GOL and UN, 2004). However, there is a noticeable difference between the national level and ethnic minority groups. For instance, the small northern ethnic group of Lahu has a total literacy rate of 1.6 percent; broken down by sex, Lahu men have a literacy rate of 2.9 percent, whereas female Lahu have a literacy rate of only 0.4 percent (UNDP, 2001).

From 1991 to 2002, the primary school enrolment nationwide improved by 25 percent, from 58 to 83 percent. The proportion of students starting grade 1 and who completed grade 5

was 62 percent in 2001. However, there is a big difference between the numbers of boys and girls enrolled and between geographical locations, with a high percentage of youth in school in Vientiane municipality and Vientiane province (95 percent) compared with Phongsaly and Attapeu, where the school enrolment rate was only 56 percent in each province in 2004 (GOL and UN).

The low rates among rural children are attributed to several factors. Rural youth have to contribute to agricultural production from an early age, especially girls who often must take care of siblings when their mothers go to work in the fields. Boys assist their fathers in ploughing fields and in other farm tasks. These family obligations contribute to a high drop-out rate and result in low literacy and general low educational levels in rural areas, especially among girls. Other reasons for children not attending school is the economic situation of the family, in which parents cannot afford to educate their children because they do not have money for clothing and school supplies. Additional reasons for rural youth not attending school are lack of parental support and understanding regarding education and the opportunities it may lead to, and the great distance or no road access to school facilities. Also, not all villages have a primary or secondary school (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2: Access to primary and secondary schools

Region/Province	Primary school in village (%)	Lower secondary school in village (%)
Lao PDR	79	8
Urban areas	80	19
Rural areas with road access	81	11
Rural areas without road access	76	0
Phongsaly province	95	0
Vientiane province	73	14

Source: NSC, 2003

Not all primary schools have instruction covering grades 1 to 5. According to the NGPES, 90 percent of poor villages do not have a fully functional primary school (GOL, 2003).

For rural youth who complete primary school, the likelihood that they continue to secondary education is very low.

Table 3.3: Youth schooling

Age	Rural (%)			Urban (%)		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
14–16 (lower secondary school)	67.7	51.2	59.5	87.0	81.4	84.3
17–24 (upper secondary school)	25.0	9.9	16.9	39.6	27.4	33.2

Source: UNESCO, 2001

Table 3.3 shows that the proportion of rural youth enrolled in lower and upper secondary schools are quite low compared to the proportion of urban youth. It also shows a general low enrolment rate of both urban and rural youth in upper secondary school. This is particularly true among rural girls where only one out of ten attended upper secondary school in 2001.

This is attributed to the many rural girls who marry and have children at an early age without continuing their education.

Additionally, lack of access to primary and secondary schools can result in a low literacy rate for rural youth. In 2001, rural youth aged 15–24 had a literacy rate of 51 percent, with 45 percent of the females literate (ADB, 2004).

In nine of the country's 18 provinces, youth have the possibility to attend vocational training schools, which offer courses in handicraft making, languages and tourism. Only a few centres currently provide education and training in agriculture and forestry topics (JICA, 2001).

Agriculture and forestry education and training possibilities

There are institutions available for skills training in agriculture and forestry, but they tend to lack teachers in both quantity and quality. In fact, many teachers are unqualified. As well, the facilities are outdated and the academic programmes need improving (JICA, 2001).

There are currently three regional Agriculture and Forestry Technical Schools (AFTS), located in Luang Prabang, Bolikhamxay and Champassak provinces. However, these schools offer a three-year training programme only for young people who have an upper secondary school degree. A fourth technical school with irrigation technical education was established in 2000 in Vientiane municipality. The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry administers these four technical schools while the Ministry of Education has charge of two technical schools that focus on agricultural education and are located in Vientiane municipality and Vientiane province. There are also three agricultural colleges: the Dongdok Faculty of Forestry in Vientiane municipality, the Nabong Faculty of Agriculture in Vientiane province and the Department of Irrigation Engineering in Champassak province. These training institutions provide formal technical agricultural training for rural youth. These other programmes also require an upper secondary school degree for enrolment.

For farmers, the possibility of receiving training in agricultural practices is limited. The MOAF has some 29 training centres across the country with training programmes for its staff and local farmers. However, most of the training is done ad hoc in places other than centres, typically in villages, and in which the training of district extension staff and farmers is mainly done in relation to a district development project (JICA, 2001; personal communication, MOAF, 2005).

Farmers can receive training from extension workers based at the DAFEO; but due to lack of capacity, the DAFEO staff capability to provide extension services to remote areas is limited. Also, there are limited possibilities for DAFEO staff to receive training due to a lack of resources.

Rural youth and employment

Information on agricultural child labour is difficult to obtain as children helping parents in the family business or production is not considered as child labour. However, the International Labour Organization's (ILO) definition of child labour states: "*Child labour includes all work that harms children and keeps them out of school. They have no time to learn or play.*" (Fieldsofhope, 2005)

Approximately 50 percent of rural youth work in the agriculture sector, primarily engaged in subsistence agriculture, where they either are helping the family in the fields or are working their own fields. Other work tasks include collecting water, collecting NTFPs, looking after and feeding animals, cooking and looking after siblings.

As mentioned, Lao people's livelihoods are based on seasonal subsistence agriculture. During the off season, some youth look for jobs elsewhere to support themselves and their families. However, migration is not just reduced to the off season but is taking place all year round due to the general lack of employment opportunities, boredom and influences from the media about the seemingly prosperous or glamorous life in the city. Many youths migrate to urban areas in search of work; boys typically find employment in construction, and girls mostly become employed at garment factories and restaurants. If they do not succeed in the urban area, they might seek work in neighbouring countries. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), some 181 600 legal Lao migrants and an estimated 80 000 irregular Lao migrants currently work in Thailand. Many are young people mainly from the provinces located closest to the Thai border (especially the provinces of Khammuane, Savannakhet, and Champassak). In order to regularize Lao illegal immigrants working in Thailand, The Government has signed a memorandum of understanding with Thailand to adjust the status of Lao migrants working illegally to that of a regular migrant. Youth migration has hit such proportions that some villages in rural upland areas are inhabited only by the older population (Howell, 2005; ADB, 2004; MOAF, 2005; personal communication).

Migration and human trafficking

Approximately one third of global trafficking of women and children occurs in or from Southeast Asia and the Mekong subregion; it is only now that the extent of the problem in Lao PDR is being recognized. A study in 17 provinces by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MLSW) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) identified three main areas of trafficking: 1) work at factories in urban locations within Lao PDR, 2) domestic service, with a large percentage in Thailand and 3) commercial sexual exploitation. The study also found that 60 percent of the surveyed trafficking victims were girls aged between 12 and 18 years, and that 35 percent of them ended up in forced prostitution.¹³ All the trafficking victims in the study came from ethnic minorities and from a family or village that recently had been relocated (MLSW and UNICEF, 2004).

An alarming aspect cited by social anthropologist David Feingold is that due to reduced cash income from opium production and decreased rice production in rural upland communities, there is an apparent risk that families will send young girls to work in district towns or in Thailand in order for them to purchase consumer goods to meet households requirements. Improved infrastructure, development projects, modernization and access to knowledge and new ideas also encourages youth migration, which heightens their vulnerability to traffickers (ADB, 2004; Feingold, 2000; Molland, 2005).

Rural youth and health

Health issues of special concern include HIV infection and drug addiction. The country currently has a low prevalence for HIV infection, with reported cases making up only 0.1 percent of the population. However, of the 1 094 people known to be infected, 18 percent are in the 15–24 age group and 37 percent are 10–29 years old, which is a clear indication that young people are particularly vulnerable to HIV infection. Also, 1 000 young people returning from seasonal work in Thailand were tested, with a result of a 6 percent HIV infection rate (ADB, 2004). Of particular concern are the young people in rural areas who have a low awareness of issues and facts regarding contraception methods, HIV/AIDS and STDs, compared to with their urban equivalents (Table 3.4).

¹³ The study is based on interviews with 253 victims of human trafficking and their families in 2004.

Table 3.4: Awareness about contraceptive methods, HIV/AIDS and STDs

	% of youth who have heard about contraception	% of youth who have heard about STDs	% of youth who have heard about HIV/AIDS
Rural	45	40	67.4
Urban	78.8	68.5	92.9

Source: MOH 2000

Due to socio-economic behaviour, such as rural youth migrating to towns and across the border to Thailand, the risk of an increasing HIV infection rate is apparent. The NGPES specifies awareness raising through sex education regarding prevention of HIV infection among youth, migrant workers, pregnant mothers, newborns, drug users and ethnic minorities (GOL, 2003).

Because of the reality of human trafficking and sexual exploitation of girls, addressing HIV and AIDS is becoming a very important concern in Lao PDR.

Even though many international organizations, such as the UNFPA, UNICEF and CARE International, have programmes that focus on providing youth with information about reproductive and sexual health issues, the numbers in Table 3.4 clearly indicate that youth lack sufficient knowledge. This highlights the continuing need for greater dissemination of information on reproductive and sexual issues and to provide youth with health services. This deficiency of knowledge and information is prevalent in rural areas and especially areas that are targeted in rural development and major infrastructure projects. These projects facilitate a tighter connection with surrounding communities and thereby a risk of exposure to new illnesses and health risks, such as STDs.

That ethnic minority youth are particularly vulnerable to human traffickers begs for even more attention towards, and awareness about, protection against HIV infection in the rural areas.

Drug addiction has become an increasing problem among school-aged children and young people in general during the past five years. The main drug of consumption among youth is amphetamine-type substances (ATS), also more commonly known as *ya baa*. Abuse of ATS is no longer an urban problem as it is slowly spreading to the rural areas. Where it is a problem, there are varied reasons for its popularity: Curiosity, desire for “fun” or peer pressure has a lot to do with the expanding use. Family problems also have been mentioned as a major reason for trying the drug. There is no evidence indicating opium addicts have switched to the amphetamines; considering that opium use is largely found among older people and that ATS is a drug mainly used by young people, this seems logical. The Government’s strategy regarding illicit drug use dwells on opium production while efforts against ATS abuse are limited to counselling and rehabilitation.

Conclusions

In theory, rural youth have many opportunities to improve their livelihoods. In practice, many obstacles pose barriers or dire challenges to rural youth:

1a. Obstacles regarding rural youth and education

Access is a primary obstacle for young people. There are not enough primary schools in Lao PDR to accommodate all school-aged children, and only 35 percent of all primary schools

can provide teaching for grades 1 to 5. In many villages, the schools are located far away and children cannot attend unless they stay with relatives or in a dormitory. As well, primary schools are under-facilitated, which means they lack teachers in general, especially qualified teachers, and they cannot provide textbooks.

The situation is much worse regarding secondary education where there are fewer schools compared with primary schools. These schools also are located some distance from most villages, and there is a lack of teachers, especially in rural upland areas. There is also a significantly higher percentage of boys than girls who continue their education to secondary levels.

Another issue is the lack of parents' support towards educating their children. They do not recognize education as necessary and thus do not give it any priority. Many poor families cannot support their children's education financially given that they have to pay for school fees, uniforms and stationery supplies.

For ethnic communities, language poses another critical barrier. In most cases, teaching takes place in the Lao language; having limited or no Lao language skills, the children's ability to learn is hampered. Lack of teachers is especially profound in the rural ethnic areas as it is difficult to find qualified teachers willing to live remotely. Here also parents' support for sending their children to school is low, but even lower compared to other areas. This relates to traditions in which ethnic communities do not send their children to school or in which boys go to school and girls generally are kept at home.

When rural young people do complete secondary school, they have limited options to continue their education. There is a lack of technical and vocational training schools; and few vocational training centres or schools offer training in agricultural subjects targeting rural youth.

There is potential for the MOAF's local departments at the provincial and district extension offices, including their training stations, to provide training and development of agricultural practices in upland areas. Unfortunately, they struggle with the same difficulties as other educational facilities in terms of insufficient resources, both financial and human, to train youth, especially ethnic minorities, regarding technological advances and knowledge and skills relevant to local needs. The limited capacity of the DAFEO staff is a major obstacle, and they need help in building up their capabilities to develop appropriate agricultural practices for rural areas (MOAF, personal communication, 2005).

1b. Opportunities regarding rural youth in education

As a large workforce, rural youth have the potential to contribute tremendously to the country's development. However, due to their limited education, there is a need for them to pursue training in practical as well as entrepreneurial skills through vocational training schools. But that requires them to at least complete their primary education.

Certainly a higher formal educational level improves the possibility for higher-paying employment and a better life. But through improved access to vocational training schools, especially with a focus on agricultural knowledge and techniques included in the curriculum, youth can learn methods to intensify the agricultural production and improve their living conditions. Training in other practical skills, such as weaving techniques or silk production, also offers opportunities for rural youth. In the absence of formal education, alternative instruction is possible. In particular, on-the-job training through farmer-to-student or farmer-to-farmer training, allows rural youth to experience and learn from other farmers' agricultural practices beyond that learned from working with their family.

2a. Obstacles regarding rural youth and employment

Employment opportunities for those who have graduated formal or vocational school as well as those with limited or no education is a concern for rural youth. They worry about ending up unemployed, even though almost everyone is working, such as in the family rice field. But they do not consider subsistence agriculture as gainful employment because it does not provide a salary or regular income.

One obstacle for rural youth to enhance their agricultural or forestry production or start a business is the lack of access to financial support or credit. When asked, youth always mention lack of capital as a bottleneck in their attempt to start a business or an innovation process. In some cases, it forces or encourages them to migrate to urban areas where there are more chances of finding counterparts to assist them with their businesses aspirations and interests.

Another threat is the limited infrastructure and limited market access in rural areas, as well as the lack of employment opportunities for youth who have finished formal or non-formal education. Additionally, if a graduate decides to stay in the local community, he or she risks ending up in a job where the skills gained from the education are not used due to lack of job opportunities.

Employment for qualified candidates is possible via the MOAF. For instance, the Government aims to provide financial support to DAFEO to recruit more staff. Thus, graduates can be employed by DAFEO. The numbers of recruits would, however, be small.

Another issue of concern is that graduates from technical schools located in urban areas often do not want to return to their village because of the poor living conditions and because they prefer life in an urban area (MOAF, personal communication, 2005).

Limited agricultural production and limited business skills among rural youth are other obstacles. Even though their family can pass on traditional production skills, they still end up with a lack of contemporary skills. Without knowledge and skills in modern agricultural technology, rural youth are at a disadvantage. And their development is affected.

There also exists a language barrier that needs to be addressed. Staff from the MOAF and the national and provincial extension offices are mainly Lao Loum who only speak the Lao Loum language. They are thus not able to communicate effectively with farmers from other ethnic groups. This means that farmers from other ethnic groups will lag behind or miss out in training, knowledge and skills of new techniques. Also, there is often not an equal inclusion of women and men in training and skills-development activities, leaving women lagging behind or missing out.

2b. Opportunities regarding rural youth and employment

Youth involvement in agriculture can be improved through greater attention to job training possibilities. Youth are open-minded, interested in new techniques and quicker in adapting to new methods. One recommended approach is to have youth work as volunteers in villages in cooperation with DAFEO. In doing so, they receive practical training through demonstration plots, pilot projects, etc. They then can transfer the knowledge and skills to the rest of their village. This concept responds to the reality that people's willingness and commitment to be trained and then transfer the new knowledge and skills is greater if the instruction comes from someone they know from the community instead of being taught or passed to them from strangers. Having youth work as volunteers also can ease the language barrier with older

farmers, as youth in general are better at reading, writing and understanding Lao language compared to the older generation. It is thus recommended to include male and female upland ethnic group members in the NAFES staff to reduce the language and cultural barriers.

Facilitating and extending youth's access to credit could be the best starting point to encouraging rural youth to invest in agricultural endeavours such as vegetable production, livestock rearing, chicken raising or other agricultural activities that produce outputs they can sell in their village, at local markets or when buyers visit their village for trading. This extended access to credit also can improve youth's possibilities to engage in alternative income-generating activities.

Currently, all crops and NTFPs are sold without any or very limited processing at the local level. Processing could be a way to raise income from these products, but it requires skills training. And it has to be incorporated into development projects, which, of course, should be undertaken in a sustainable way without overexploitation of NTFPs. This necessitates improved management of NTFPs in villages to avoid overexploitation. Another possibility is to have gardens or fields with certain NTFPs, such as *mak neng* (cardamom), that can be cultivated outside the forest areas. Processing NTFPs offers considerable potential, as processed items add value to the products before being sold to middlemen (MOAF, personal communication, 2005).

There also exists the TeleFood project opportunity, which FAO manages and which supports small-scale community food-security projects. It offers a possibility for rural youth and rural youth organizations to access funding up to US\$10 000 per project to start crop production, animal raising and other enterprises. However, according to the Deputy Chief of Cabinet for the LYU, Lao youth do not know how to fill out the application form or submit project proposals (LYU, personal communication, 2005). There is, thus, a need for FAO to offer training on how to submit applications for the TeleFood project.

Another sector where youth labour can be used is in development and infrastructure projects. Establishing new schools, road construction, water-supply schemes and other projects offer future employment opportunities for youth, as does the maintenance needs once they are built. Also, providing improved access to primary health care will require more health care workers, and if young people are provided appropriate training, that could present employment possibilities.

3a. Obstacles regarding rural youth health

As mentioned previously, rural youth have more limited awareness and less access to information and health care facilities than urban youth. They thus face greater risk of disease infections, which under more urban conditions would be less of a problem because there would be health care facilities providing preventative care. Unfortunately, many rural areas do not even have access to basic sanitary facilities or clean water.

Due to traditions of getting married and giving birth at a young age, rural females are likely to experience more health problems, considering that rural women on average give birth to twice as many children as their urban counterparts. Also, there is a lack of midwife services available in the rural upland areas.

Limited knowledge about health and sexually transmitted diseases heightens rural youth vulnerability to becoming infected with HIV or other STDs. Although the number of HIV infected persons is still low, there is a need for awareness-raising campaigns to prevent the spreading of it.

3b. Opportunities regarding rural youth health

The increasing focus on reproductive health through awareness raising will help safeguard and improve the lives of rural women through a reduction in child births. The improved awareness and knowledge about sexually transmitted diseases will also reduce the risks of young mothers becoming infected. Also, enhancing basic sanitary facilities will improve the health of rural youth and help reduce diseases caused by poor sanitation standards.

Shifting traditional cultivation patterns also can have positive impact. By changing the agricultural production from primarily rice production into a more varied range of crops would provide the rural population with a more varied diet, which will benefit the general state of health in the rural areas. The positive effect of this could be even more enhanced if agricultural development projects promote the cultivation of especially nutritious fruits and vegetables.

4. Village context in two provinces

This section highlights the situation in Phongsaly and Vientiane provinces and provides an overview of the national policies and the institutional context in relation to rural communities and the circumstances under which rural youth live.

Phongsaly province is located in the remote northern mountainous region. Many villages there are located in areas without access to roads or health care services and education facilities. Phongsaly province is also one of the poorest in Lao PDR, with three out of seven districts classified as poor. It endures rice-supply deficiencies for some six to eight months annually. It has a population of approximately 179 600, with a population density of 11 persons/km². The main ethnic groups found there are Khmou, Akha and Phunoy (Directory of NGOs, 2005; USG, 2005; ADB, 2001).

Vientiane province, on the other hand, is located northwest of Vientiane municipality and has a population of approximately 336 800 people and a population density of 21 persons/km². The three main ethnic groups located there are Lao Loum, Neua-Phouan and Khmou. None of the districts are classified as poor; however, people are indeed poor and suffer from a rice deficiency up to six months annually (ADB, 2001; Directory of NGOs, 2005). See Annexes 1 and 2 for detailed maps of the villages studied.

The situation of rural youth in selected villages

The seven villages studied for this research are all rural villages with main livelihood activities in rice cultivation, crop production, raising animals and collecting NTFPs. The majority of the households are categorized as food sufficient, which is based on the months of rice sufficiency supply during a year, the number of heads of livestock and/or income from other livelihood activities. One village, Ban Phonetong in Vientiane province, is categorized as poor, with 35 families being rice deficient for five to six months per year, while two villages in Phongsaly province are categorized as rich (see Annex 3 for details).

Rural youth in the studied areas are concerned about the lack of employment opportunities and unemployment after graduation, parents' lack of support for education, lack of funds to start activities and having limited market access (see Annexes 4–9 for detailed findings from the villages studied).

More specifically, the situation of rural youth is that they currently face high unemployment. In Phonhon district, Vientiane province, youth unemployment has reached 50 percent (this partly reflects youth perceptions that their working in the rice fields along with their parents and families is not "employment"). Youth have limited education (most have only completed grades 1 or 2) and work only in rice fields, which they consider a factor limiting their chances and opportunities for higher education. Those who have completed secondary school cannot further their education because their parents cannot afford to support their studies and there are a limited number of vocational training centres and technical schools. Graduates of skills-training courses also expressed concern that they cannot make use of the skills learned.

Table 4.1 shows a low number of youth attending secondary school or a higher educational institution in four of the villages studied.¹⁴

¹⁴ Due to missing data and weak data, it is only possible to show figures from four of the seven villages studied. Also, there are no data on attendance and completion of primary education by youth in the studied villages.

Table 4.1: Village school attendance in secondary and university education

Villages	Total pop.	Village youth		In school				Out of school	
		Total	F	SC		NUOL		Total	F
				Total	F	Total	F		
Ban Phone Sa Vanh (Vientiane province)	200	40	60%	18%	21%	0%	0%	83%	71%
Ban Phonetong (Vientiane province)	279	50	40%	20%	30%	0%	0%	80%	50% ¹⁵
Ban Houy Kha (Phongsaly province)	450	80	38%	59%	57%	0%	0%	41%	43%
Ban Houy Dong (Phongsaly province)	299	57	47%	60%	37%	0%	0%	40%	22%

F = females; SC = secondary school; NUOL = National University of Lao PDR

The reason for the low attendance in secondary school is partly explained by the distant location of the schools. Lower secondary schools are located 5–10 km away from the villages. If parents cannot afford dormitory and other required expenditures, youth have few options but to leave school and work in the rice fields or find employment elsewhere. In Ban Phonetong, 80 percent is not attending school because of limited financial support from their parents, which is corroborated by the fact that 31 out of 47 households in the village are categorized as poor, as shown in Annex 3. In discussions with the study’s researchers, the young people also mentioned the lack of support and encouragement from their parents as an issue. Parents, according to the youth, do not see the need or importance of education. They depend upon their children’s labour in the family farming operations. Table 4.1 also shows a difference between youth attending school in the two provinces. Some 59 percent of youth in Ban Houy Kha, Phongsaly province, and 60 percent of youth in Ban Houy Dong, Phongsaly province, attended secondary school at the time of the research, whereas 18 percent and 20 percent in Ban Phone Sa Vanh and Ban Phonetong, respectively, attended school.

Rural youth see their possibilities for improving the current situation difficult to overcome for various reasons: Lack of funds and poverty are major obstacles hampering development and improvement of livelihoods for rural communities. People cannot invest in new, improved seeds, and they cannot buy fertilizers and pest-control chemicals needed for improved crop production. Also, the possibility of starting a small-scale business is limited because youth do not have the capital and skills to start income-generating activities. Thus, the limited access to training and vocational schools, extension services from DAFEO and the need for human resource development are crucial challenges that require urgent attention.

Another constraint for intensifying production is the marketing of products due to poor infrastructure, markets being located far from their villages and often the quality of crops produced is low due to the lack of water and fertilizers, which then results in a low income.

The different geographical location of the villages participating in this study is reflected in the concerns about youth expressed by headmen and LYU representatives. Youth and village headmen from Vientiane province mentioned unemployment, having no possibility to pursue formal studies after high school graduation, drug addiction (especially to ATS), employment as sex workers and migration to Vientiane municipality as major issues. Youth are migrating

¹⁵ The last four young women were working outside the village and are not included in the table.

to the Vientiane capital and will typically be working at garment factories (for young women) and construction sites (for young men). In one village in Vientiane province, as many as 20 percent of the village youth had migrated to Vientiane municipality. The concerns expressed by youth and village headmen from Phongsaly province are unemployment, no possibility to continue studying after secondary school graduation, no vocational training due to limited numbers of schools and lack of parental support for schooling.

Youth see their future needs as related to a number of areas, including food security, support and opportunities to enable them to continue their studies or train in agriculture and animal husbandry, weaving, handicrafts and tailoring. They also seek job opportunities at local levels and seek help with financial support via a village fund. They are also interested in having improved infrastructure, especially road access and support services to their villages.

Agencies and INGOs active in the two provinces of the study

Organizations/INGOs active in Phongsaly province:

The **Lao Red Cross** and **United Nations Drug Control Programme** fund and support an ethnic minority boarding school in Boun Neua district, Phongsaly province, which the NGO Church World Service implements. The school offers vocational training for 230 youth annually (ten from each district). The selection criteria for scholarships includes: having no family, coming from the poorest families, having completed primary or secondary school but cannot continue school and having no employment and/or belonging to an ethnic minority living in mountainous areas. The boarding school provides training in vocational skills, such as weaving, sewing, carpentry, cooking and handicraft production, and also general education but not agriculture subjects (CWS, 2005). Also, the students participating in the research for this study mentioned the lack of agriculture skills training. Drug addiction and drug control are also issues addressed in the curriculum.

Students expect that after graduation they will continue studying at a college or university or will start a small business. However, they expressed concern that they will not have the funds to start such businesses, which will mean unemployment, thus forcing their return to their villages without the possibility of using the skills they gained from training.

UNICEF, among others, collaborates with the Phongsaly province LYU in a nationwide HIV/AIDS Prevention and Care Programme with the aim of raising awareness among youth regarding the issues and use of contraception.

The **European Commission (EC)** funds the Phongsaly Forest Conservation and Rural Development Project in the districts of Boun Neua and Bountai. Activities include improved living conditions for villagers in buffer zones through village development activities and natural resource management (Directory of NGOs, 2005; EC, 2002).

The North Phongsaly Alternative Development Project in Boun Neua district, supported by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, is a drug-control project with emphasis on opium eradication, opium addiction and poverty reduction through socio-economic development in 33 villages. Activities include animal raising, water supply, road construction and irrigation schemes. There also has been establishment of rice and animal banks in target villages.

The Lao-American Integrated Rural Development Projects (LAP), which is active in Boun Tay and Samphan districts of Phongsaly province, is working towards eradicating opium cultivation and addiction and providing livelihood alternatives, and targeting some of the poorest areas. The United States of America Government supports the project.

Save the Children is also involved in Boun Neua district with a project to raise awareness of the UN Convention on the Rights of Children.

Other international organizations are working in other districts of Phongsaly province with a primary focus on food security and community development. For example, the **Committee for Cooperation with Laos** (CCL) and the Government are currently implementing a rural development project in Phongsaly district. The project's focus relates to food security, economic development and stabilizing shifting cultivation.

The German Agro Action (GAA) is implementing the Integrated Poverty Project, supporting activities to increase food security through agricultural practices and livestock production and non-farming income-generating activities.

Quakers Service in Laos from the United States of America has two projects also being implemented in Phongsaly province: i) the Small-Scale Irrigation Programme, with the goal of increased food security, use of irrigation schemes and stabilizing shifting cultivation, and 2) the Community Development Programme, which also focuses on food security, community development through women's activities and alternative income-generating activities.

Organizations/NGOs active in Vientiane province

UNICEF is also active in Vientiane province with the nationwide HIV/AIDS Prevention and Care Programme, which is carried out in Phongsaly province, as mentioned previously.

In Viengkham district, Vientiane province, **ERIKSHJÄLPEN** and **Japan International Volunteer Centre** (JVC) currently support a vocational training centre targeting ethnic minorities. The centre opened in 2002 and has eight classes with about 150 trainees per course. All trainees are from the capital town of Vientiane province. In the future it will include students from other districts. The centre offers training in English and Chinese, computers and sewing but no agriculture- or rural development-related subjects. Also in the future the centre will include courses on mobile phone and electronics repair. The school's mission is to help youth develop skills that they can use to improve their chances of finding employment.

Table 4.2 summarizes activities of the INGOs currently operating in Phonhon district, including their target areas. This summary shows how only some aspects concerning youth are explicitly addressed in only some of the projects being implemented by different organizations and INGOs in Vientiane province. Some others are more focused on community development but have no explicit attention on rural youth. There are thus many opportunities that might be explored.

Table 4.2: INGOs operating in Phonhon district, Vientiane province

INGO	Name of project	Target areas
Australian Red Cross	Lao Red Cross – capacity building for HIV/AIDS prevention and care	Health care
Handicap International Belgium	Community-based rehabilitation programme	Agriculture, forestry & fisheries; community development; data collection & analysis; education; health care; human resources development; income generation & economic development; social development
Handicap International/Action Nord Sud	Decentralized Irrigation Development and Management Project (DIDMP) – Social water management unit	Community development; human resources development
Save the Children	Awareness raising of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child	Social development
Wildlife Conservation Society	Biodiversity cooperation project	Education; natural resources & ecology
Macfarlane Burnet Institute for Medical Research and Public Health (Burnet Institute)	Lao youth HIV/AIDS/STI response project	Data collection & analysis; health care; human resources development; social development
	Working women’s HIV/AIDS/STI response project	Data collection & analysis; health care; human resources development; social development
	Lao youth military and police HIV/AIDS response project	Data collection & analysis; health care; human resources development; social development

Source: Directory of NGOs, 2005

5. Conclusions and recommendations

The following suggested actions and activities for developing rural youth in Lao PDR include recommendations made by youth during group discussions for this study:

Policies

As the researchers for this study realized, there are no specific strategies for national development policies and programmes for either rural or urban youth, even though there is a significant difference in their conditions and their opportunities.

The same situation appears when looking at programmes and development projects implemented by government institutions and international organizations. There is an obvious lack of attention on youth, especially rural youth, and their needs. Projects target children and mothers or the rural population in general, but there are no programmes or projects emphasizing rural youth development.

However, there are several barriers for development in some rural areas: remoteness of villages without road access and very limited or no access to education, health care and services.

It is recommended that government institutions and international organizations focus on rural youth, target their needs and develop their potential. Policies that encourage youth to remain in their villages and help develop the rural communities are needed. Most beneficial would be addressing rural youth's needs and potential while they are still in the local community instead of targeting them after they migrate to Vientiane or elsewhere. The policies also need to be gender-responsive to reflect the big differences in opportunities for men and women.

Involving youth in the early phases of an international organization's project, when they can express their needs, allows them to develop ownership for the ensuing activities. This could be achieved by establishing youth interest and management groups on, say, animal rearing, crop production, fishponds, handicrafts, etc.

Encouraging rural youth to stay at home requires rural youth development projects that specify agriculture and income-generating activities. Allowing the LYU to play a primary role in the implementing of such projects would be most beneficial, considering the union has an organizational framework throughout the country that can serve as an initial foundation for projects.

Education

Current development policies refer to academic education across the country without taking into consideration that it might not be the best way to help rural youth improve their situation. The ability to read and write is, of course, a very important skill, but the findings from this study indicate that there is need to focus educational policy on developing all forms of education. This includes strengthening vocational education options.

Many rural youth in the study's discussion sessions expressed a desire to continue their academic studies at secondary and university levels while others requested acquiring vocational skills. Future development projects should take both these interests into account. Both need equal importance and support.

Educational curricula should meet the needs of youth, both urban and rural. They also should focus on gender aspects and how to improve young women's situations and especially encourage them to participate in income-generating activities. It is also important to consider the lack of employment opportunities that vocational training graduates encounter, which can be addressed through improved access to credit and funds. A special village fund for youth to start entrepreneurial enterprises and activities is one approach.

Another issue needing attention is parents' lack of support to their children's education. This is especially the case in ethnic minority communities and especially for girls where traditional practices of keeping children out of school and girls marrying at a very early age are common. Supportive parents as well as a complete education can help improve youth's chances for better job options later in life. But changing traditions, especially among parents who are not educated and who see no need to prioritize school, is a long process. When developing youth's opportunities, it is important to incorporate information campaigns that target parents in order to win their support.

Employment opportunities

Even though they do not consider subsistence agricultural activities as employment, youth are interested in agriculture if earning a cash income is possible. Agriculture should be a cornerstone of development activities targeting rural youth so that they can learn the potential in farming, particularly with modern and improved technologies and techniques relating to crop and livestock production, including agribusiness. Further, it is important that villagers have access to markets to sell their products and commodities or that buyers can get to them. Cash crop production and related crop processing are areas that would benefit both young men and women.

Lack of employment opportunities prompts rural youth to migrate. They head to urban areas of Lao PDR or to neighbouring countries, especially Thailand, because they see better possibilities for finding work. In doing so they run the high risk of ending up victimized by human traffickers, more so than their urban counterparts. Development projects addressing rural youth need to include information about the difficulties that migrants to urban areas experience, especially young women, as they are more vulnerable to being trafficked.

Employment possibilities for rural youth could include the following areas:

- ***Small livestock production***

There is considerable potential for small livestock activities, such as poultry, pigs and goat production. Poultry are fairly easy to breed, and the sale of poultry meat and eggs is convenient, as it primarily takes place in the village. However, improved skills and knowledge in poultry production are required. This includes establishing chicken runs or hen houses, nutrition and use of improved feeds, breeding, health and various other management aspects. These points hold true for pig and goat production as well.

- ***Fishpond or aquaculture***

As fish is an important part of the Lao diet, a ready market exists. But youth require improved skills and knowledge in the construction and maintenance of fishponds, nutrition, health, breeding and fingerling management.

- *Field and horticultural crop production*

Apart from rice production, a range of crops including fruits, vegetables and ornamental plants, have the potential for both food security and for selling. Suitable training will be required.

- Processing of NTFPs

There is a wide range of items and commodities that could form very lucrative income-generating businesses and activities for rural youth. Adding value via processing or other marketing techniques (packaging, labelling, etc.) will expand the marketability of NTFPs.

Access to credit and funding

The lack of finance hampers the rural population's development opportunities, especially among the youth. Promoting and improving access to funds and microfinance for investment in agricultural production, either through bank loans or revolving funds in the villages, are recommended. Improving female farmers' access to credit and other financial services are crucial to develop rural communities.

Improving rural youth's opportunity to receive funding through the FAO-sponsored TeleFood Programme to enable small-scale projects is another viable approach. However, there is a need to either simplify the application procedures and requirements or to provide relevant training for youth and/or training DAFEO and LYU staff and members to be facilitators for the application process and requirements.

Give rural youth a chance

Rural youth are open-minded and curious to learn new things and are crucial to the development of the country. But as one informant noted during a discussion session, "Rural youth have new fresh brain, why do people forget that? We have to invest in the youth." (MOAF, 2005, personal communication)

References

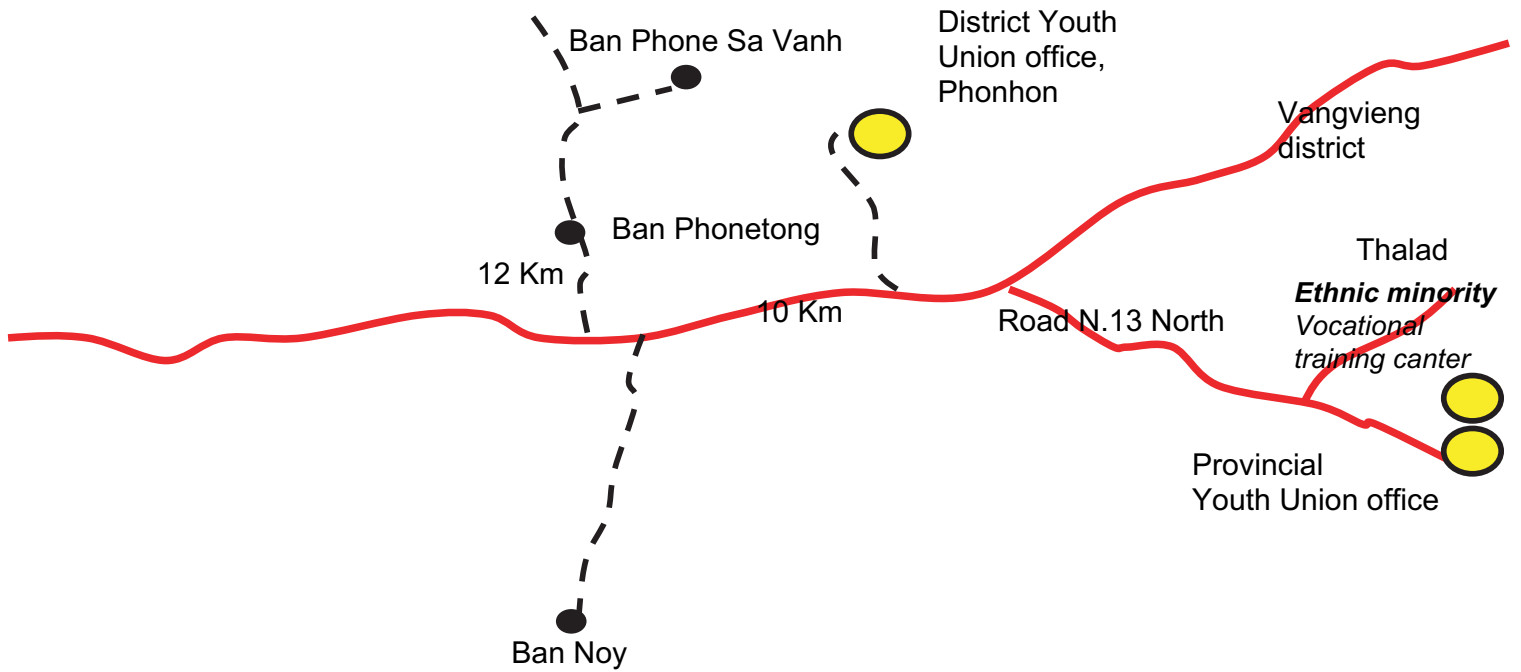
- Asian Development Bank.** 2001. *Participatory poverty assessment: Lao People's Democratic Republic.* Manila, Philippines.
- Asian Development Bank.** 2004. *Lao PDR gender, poverty and the MDGs.* Manila, Philippines.
- Committee for Planning and Co-operation.** 2002. *Progress Report on the Preparation of the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NPEP).* Vientiane, Lao PDR.
- Danida.** 1999. *Project document: Integrated watershed management in Xieng Khouang and Huaphan provinces.* Danida & Government of Lao PDR.
- EC,** 2002. *The EC-Lao country strategy paper 2002–2006.*
- Feingold, D.** 2000. "The hell of good intentions: Some preliminary thoughts on opium in the political ecology of the trade in girls and women." In: Grant Evans et al., *Where China meets Southeast Asia: Social & cultural change in the border regions.* Singapore: ISEAS/Bangkok: White Lotus/New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Government of Lao PDR.** 2003. *National growth poverty eradication strategy.* Vientiane, Lao PDR.
- Government of Lao PDR & United Nations,** 2004. *Millennium Development Goals progress report Lao PDR.* UNDP, Vientiane, Lao PDR.
- Hakeem, A.H.A.** 2005. *Presentation from rural youth workshop 26–27 January.*
- Howell, F.** 2005. *Employment challenges and opportunities for rural youth in LAO PDR.* Paper presented at the Rural Youth Workshop, 26 January 2005, Vientiane, Lao PDR.
- JICA.** 2001. *Master plan study on integrated agricultural development in Lao People's Democratic Republic.* Japan International Cooperation Agency & Ministry of agriculture and Forestry, Vientiane, Lao PDR.
- LYU.** no date. *Lao People's Revolutionary Youth Union.* Vientiane, Lao PDR.
- Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry.** 2002. *Strategic vision: Integrated watershed management for sustainable mountain development and poverty alleviation in Lao PDR.* Vientiane, Lao PDR.
- Ministry of Health.** 2000. *A strategic assessment of reproductive health in the Lao People's Democratic Republic 2000.* Vientiane, Lao PDR.
- Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare & UNICEF.** 2004. *Broken promises, shattered dreams.* Vientiane, Lao PDR.
- Molland, S.** 2005. *Human trafficking and poverty reduction: Two sides of the same coin?* In: Juth Pakai 4 July 2005, UNDP, Vientiane, Lao PDR.
- National Statistical Centre.** 2004. *The households of Lao PDR – Social and economic indicators, Lao expenditure and consumption survey 2002/2003.* State Planning Committee, Vientiane, Lao PDR.

- Oxfam.** 2002. *Annual report 2002 Oxfam community aid abroad.* Australia.
- UNDP.** 2001. *National human development report Lao PDR 2001.* Vientiane, Lao PDR.
- UNDP.** 2005. *Human development report 2005.* New York, USA.
- UNESCO.** 2001. *Lao national literacy survey 2001.* Bangkok, Thailand.
- UNESCO.** 2005. *Education for all global monitoring report 2006.* Paris, France.
- United Nations.** 2000. *Common country assessment (CCA) The Lao People's Democratic Republic.* Vientiane, Lao PDR.
- WHO.** 2005. *Lao People's Democratic Republic environmental health country profile.* Vientiane, Lao PDR.

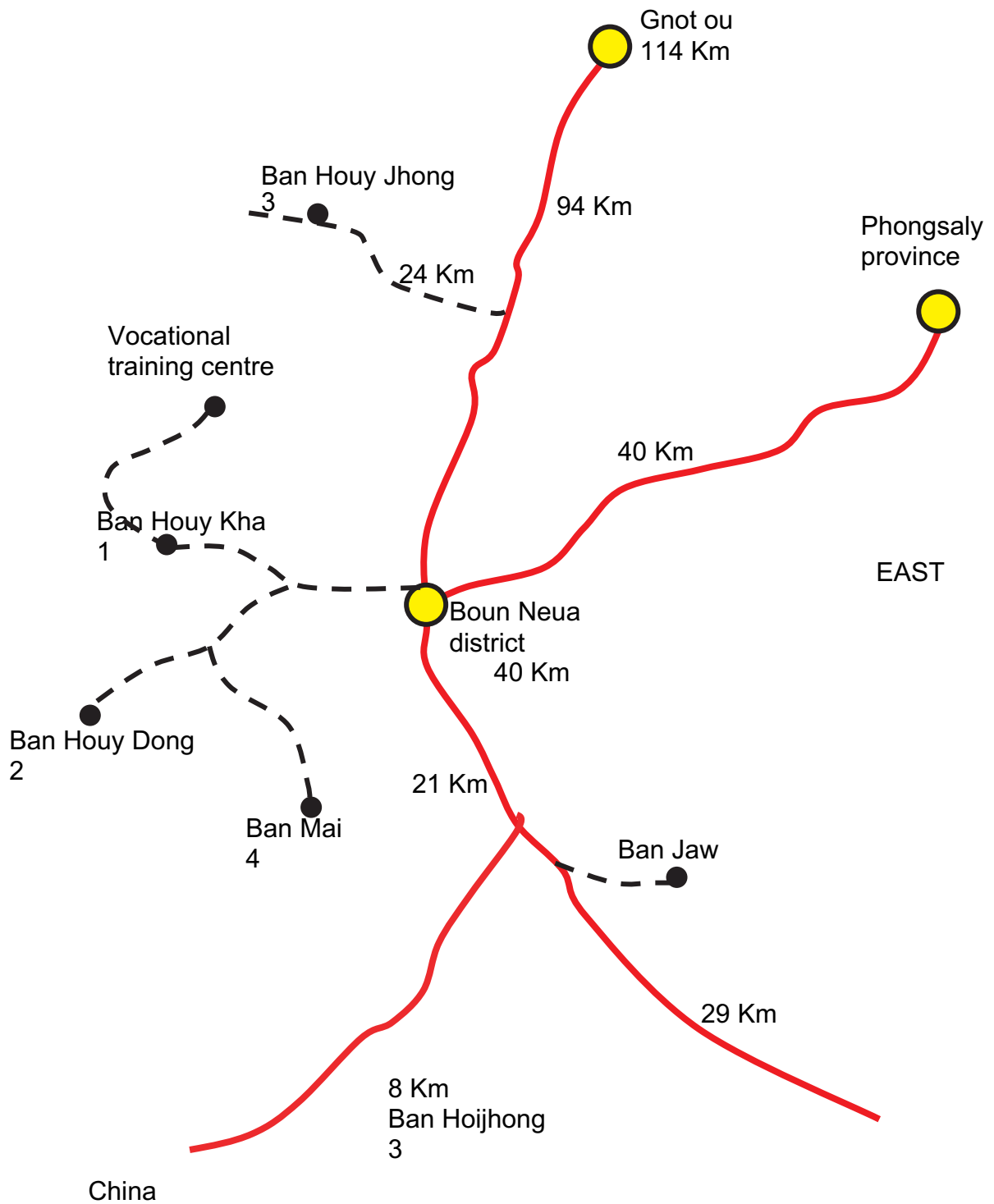
Internet sources

- Aseanyouth.** 2005. <http://www.aseanyouth.org/country/Laos/Laosfocus.htm>
- Burnet Institute.** 2005. <http://www.burnet.internationalhealth.edu.au/projects/asiapacific/lao/youth>
- CIA.** 2005. <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/la.html>
- CWS.** 2005. <http://www.cwslaos.org/non-form/index.htm>
- Directory of Ngos.** 2005. <http://www.directoryofngos.org>
- Fieldsofhope.** 2005. <http://www.fieldsofhope.org/homeroom/>
- Health Unlimited.** 2005. <http://www.healthunlimited.org/laos/>
- Laos-travel.** 2005. <http://www.laos-travel.itgo.com/map/>
- Oxfam.** 2005. http://www.oxfam.org.au/oxfamnews/june_2005/makepovertyhistory.html
- The Asia Foundation.** 2005. [http://www. Asiafoundation.org](http://www.Asiafoundation.org)
- UN.** 2005. <http://www.esa.un.org/socdev/unyin/countrya.asp?countrycode=la>
- UNDP.** 2005. http://www.undplao.org/projectdb/report/factsheet.asp?p_id=174
- UNFPA.** 2005. <http://www.unfpa.org/news/news.cfm?ID=609>
- UNICEF.** 2005. http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/laopdr_statistics.html
- UN-Lao.** 2005. <http://www.unlao.org/team/UNESCO/page.htm>
- USG.** 2005. <http://www.vientiane.usembassy.gov/www/wnas.html>

Field map of villages studied in Vientiane province



Field map of villages studied in Phongsaly province



Information summaries on Phongsaly and Vientiane provinces

Table Annex 3.1: Household data

Village	HH	Population		Ethnicity			Economic status		
		Total	Female	Lao Loum	Lao Theung	Lao Sung	Rich	Sufficient	Poor
Ban Phone Sa Vanh (VP)	42	200	76	37	5	0	0	38	4
Ban Noy (VP)	93	485	255	485	0	0	18	72	3
Ban Phonetong (VP)	47	279	126	4	274	1	4	12	31
Ban Houy Kha (PP)	101	450	219	450	0	0	82	10	9
Ban Houy Jhong (PP)	41	288	#	0	288	0	5	31	5
Ban Mai (PP)	53	239	104	239	0	0	0	46	7
Ban Houy Dong (PP)	68	299	159	0	299	0	64	3	1

Table Annex 3.2: Summary of information Phongsaly province

A.1 Information from Provincial Youth Union

- 14 450 Provincial Youth Union members (total number of youth not possible to estimate)
- 449 people (96 women) treated for drug addiction (2003–2004) and of those, 69 were aged 15 to 35 (17 were women).

Youth concerns:

- Unemployment
- Insecure livelihoods
- Lack of parental support for education
- Lack of funds for youth to start activities
- Markets for products are not easily accessed

Future needs:

- To support youth to continue their studies at secondary level and university
- Agriculture training need assessment and provide training accordingly
- Establish a revolving fund

Projects supported by international donors

- There are many development projects in Phongsaly province with focus on food security and community development. Projects include: Phongsaly District Rural Development Project (CCL), Phongsaly Forest Conservation and Rural Development Boun Neua and Boun Tay districts (EU), North Phongsaly Alternative Development Project (UN), Integrated Poverty Project (GAA), Lao-America Development Project in Boun Neua District (US). Irrigation Project and Community Development Project (Quaker's Service), HIV/AIDS prevention programme in Phongsaly (UNICEF).

Table Annex 3.2: Summary of information Phongsaly province (*continued*)

A.2 Information from Boun Neua district, Phongsaly province

- Total youth population 1 553 (643 women)
- 569 District Youth Union members (103 women)

Because they cannot read and write and live in remote mountainous areas, only about one-third of youth become members of LPRYU. The District LYU thinks that to secure food, people should focus on animal and crop production, but they lack technical guidance in agricultural production and funding to support project activities.

Ethnic minority vocational training centre

- 230 youth attend the vocational training centre each year (10 from each provincial district). The selection criteria for scholarships are: orphaned youth, the poorest, those who have completed primary or secondary school but have no job and ethnic minorities living in mountainous areas.
- Training subjects: The centre focuses on vocational skills like weaving, sewing, carpentry, cooking, handicraft; and general education; but no agriculture, so the curriculum is similar to primary school.
- Students in the centre are concerned they will not have funds to start a business if they complete the training.
- Proposal:
 - Vocational curriculum should include training on crop and livestock skills
- Youth expectations:
 - Study at college or university
 - Start a small business after graduation from their training
- Organizations supporting the training centre:
 - CWS, NPADP and Lao Red Cross

A.3 Information from four villages, Boun Neua district

In Ban Houy Kha, 82 households out of 101 are classified as rich. In Ban Houy Dong, 64 households out of 68 are classified as rich. In Ban Houy Jhong and Ban Mai, most of the households are classified as sufficient. The classification is based on rice sufficiency and other income. Three villages are near the town and people have arable land and access to irrigation. Ban Houy Kha, Ban Mai, and Houy Dong are located near Boun Neua district town and have more youth attending secondary school, then Ban Houy Jhong. In Ban Mai, youth population is 66, but the number attending secondary school is 90. The explanation is that all of the youth in the village are at the secondary school level, but those who are married are not counted as youth.

Concerns of youth at village level:

- Youth unemployment
- Youth help parents work the fields, limiting their chances/opportunities for higher education
- Limited education (as most youth complete only 1 or 2 years of primary school)
- Some completed secondary school but cannot attend vocational training centres or university as parents have no funds to support further study
- Limited number of vocational training centres.

What youth want to have:

- Revolving fund for youth development
- Sufficient income to survive
- Ensure their future by having more educational opportunities
- Scholarships for rural youth
- Vocational training in fields like animal husbandry
- Strengthened village sporting activities

Table Annex 3.3: Summary of information on Vientiane province

B.1 General information of the province

- 58 276 youth aged 15 to 30, of which 29 646 (50.9%) are women (2003). 18 652 (32%) are Youth Union members. 39 624 (68%) are non-members. 10 112 (17.4%) youth attend school, of which 4 423 (43.7%) are women. 3 146 (5.4%) are school drop-outs.
- Concerns of youth:
 - Drug addiction
 - Employment opportunities after completing secondary school
- Proposal/recommendation from youth:
 - Increase vocational training
 - Create job opportunities at local level
- Project that supported by international donors:
 - Swedish project in cooperation with Lao government (training centre), HIV/AIDS prevention programme (UNICEF)

B.2 Information from Phonhon district

- 6 805 youth, of which 2 549 are women
- 2 087 are Youth Union members, of which 1 037 are women (69%) (4 718) are non-members
- Concerns of youth:
 - Jobs: 50% of youth are unemployed
 - Drug addiction
 - Social problems, e.g. drug abuse, unemployment, leading some to enter the sex industry
- Solutions proposed by youth:
 - District Youth Union to cooperate with village authorities to establish livelihood development activities
 - Establish a development fund
 - Agriculture training needed

Ethic minority vocational training centre

- Opening in 2002, the Vocational Training Centre includes eight classes with about 150 students per course. All students were from the capital township of Vientiane province; however, in future, it will include students from other district as well.
- Training subjects:
 - English, computers, sewing, but not agriculture or rural development-related subjects
- In the future, the training centre will add mobile phone repair and electronics
- Youth expectations:
 - Would like to study at university (for those now attending school)
 - Would like to secure a livelihood (for those not now attending school): agricultural training was suggested
- Fund supported by: ERIKSHJÄLPEN from Sweden and JVC from Japan.

B.3 Information from three villages, Phonhon district

The three villages are accessible by road in all seasons. The majority of households are classified as sufficient. Youth education level low, many out of school youth in the three visited villages.

Concerns:

- Families lack money to support further education
- No or limited job opportunities after graduation
- Youth have social problems such as school drop-outs, unemployment, drugs, stealing, and sex workers
- Youth illiterate

Possible solutions:

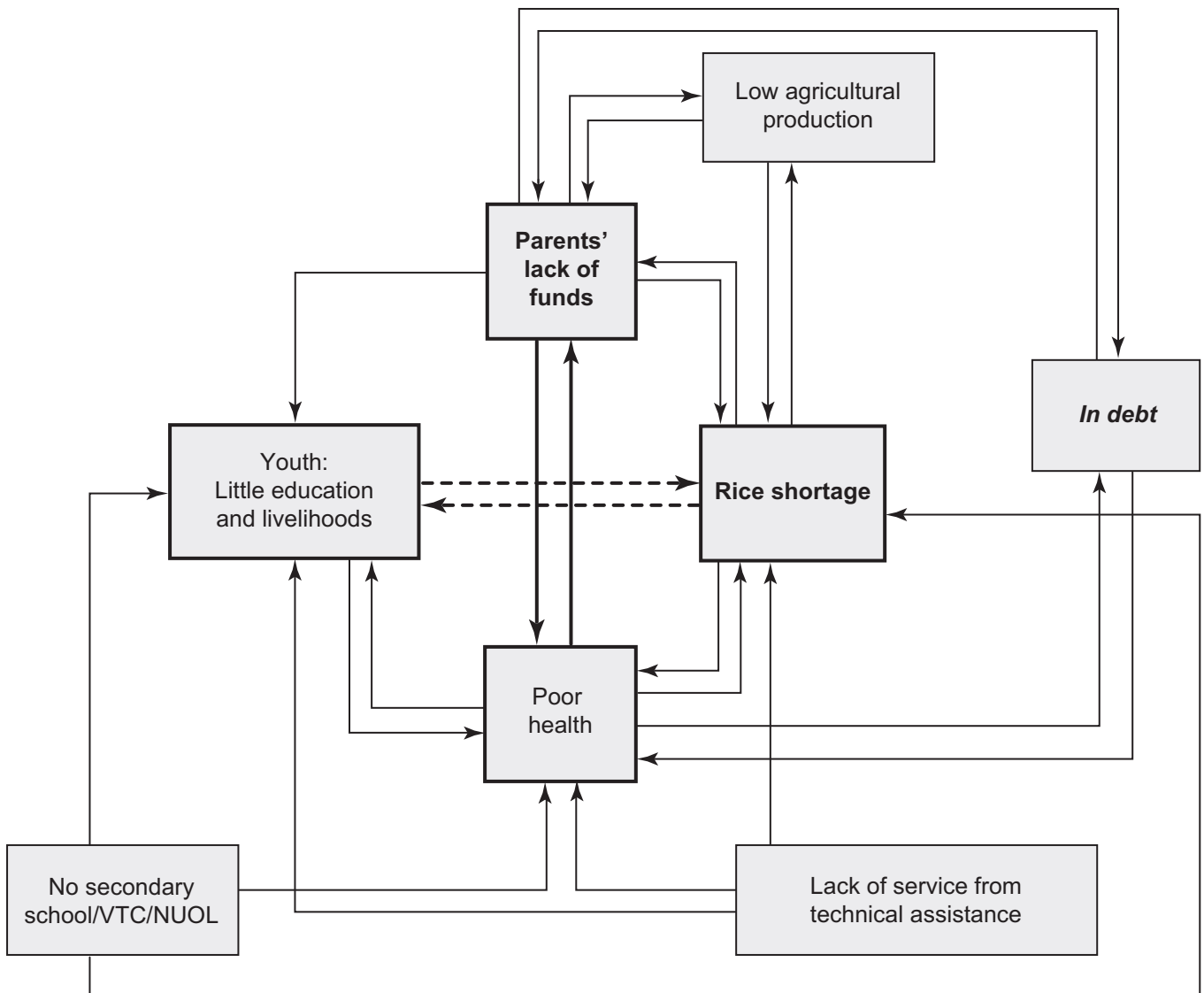
- Need support for youth education
- Youth want to have sport activities in the village
- Create job opportunities for youth as soon as possible
- Projects to improve youth livelihood, e.g. animal husbandry and agricultural projects
- Vocational training e.g. weaving and handicraft, dressmaking, construction work and agriculture
- Youth want: more agricultural land, animal husbandry, clean water, latrines, schools, health centres and improved road conditions

Rural youth-suggested activity plans

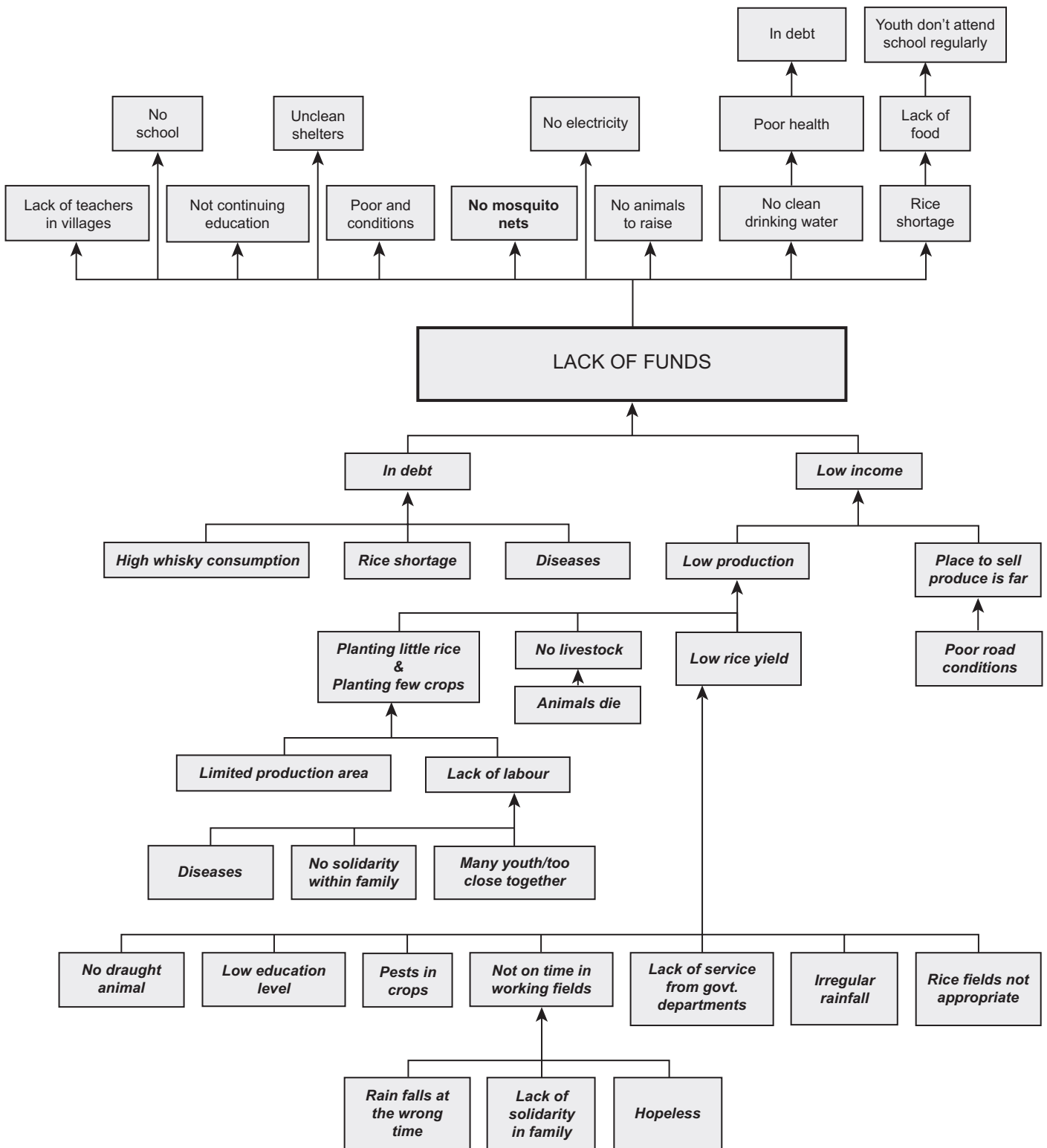
MAIN PROBLEM	MAIN OBJECTIVE	SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES	SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES
RICE SHORTAGE	FOOD SECURITY	Increase rice yield	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ start a rice bank, use improved varieties ■ small-scale irrigation ■ expand paddy fields ■ use more compost and manure ■ better use of fertilizers
		Improve management of forest and production areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ forest and land allocation ■ land-use planning ■ establish land-use policy ■ establish community forest
		Increase production and income from crops other than rice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ plant vegetables, groundnuts, soybeans, cotton and fruit trees ■ improve marketing of produce ■ more processing of products ■ road improvement and new bridges
		Increase production and income from animal raising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ start a buffalo and cattle bank ■ vaccinate animals against disease ■ establish animal feed gardens ■ pig raising with improved techniques ■ use processed animal feed ■ build fish ponds
		Improve use of non-timber forest products (NTFPs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ cardamom cultivation ■ bee raising ■ charcoal production ■ plant rattan and pitpii ■ better marketing of NTFPs ■ more processing of NTFPs ■ establish policy for NTFPs use
POOR HEALTH	IMPROVE VILLAGE LEVEL HEALTH CARE	Improve disease prevention and hygiene	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ vaccination against diseases ■ integrate health lessons and define targets for behaviour change in JDGs (Joint Development Groups), (hygiene, MCH family planning, alcoholism) ■ impregnate mosquito nets ■ promote PHC lessons at primary school ■ improve management and care of water pump
		Improve village level curative health care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ village drug revolving fund ■ train VHW and TBA
		Have youth attend school regularly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ JDGs establish attendance targets ■ parents' association encourages families to send youth to school regularly

MAIN PROBLEM	MAIN OBJECTIVE	SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES	SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES
LIMITED EDUCATION	IMPROVE VILLAGER LEVEL EDUCATION	Improve management of school and lesson supplies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ establish parents' association ■ establish fund for lesson supplies ■ repair school
		Improve teaching methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ offer agricultural lessons in primary school ■ teach PHC lessons in primary schools ■ improve lesson materials ■ train teachers
		Increase literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ literacy course ■ village library
		Improve knowledge and skills of villagers in various fields	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ training in a number of technical fields
LACK OF FUNDS	MORE FUNDS TO VILLAGERS	Increase income	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ loans for small enterprises ■ loans for crop production and livestock
		JDGs borrow from village loan fund	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ establish JDGs that analyse problems ■ define plans and implement activities ■ technicians teach technical lessons to JDGs (see above)
		Decrease expenditures for health care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ (see improved health care)

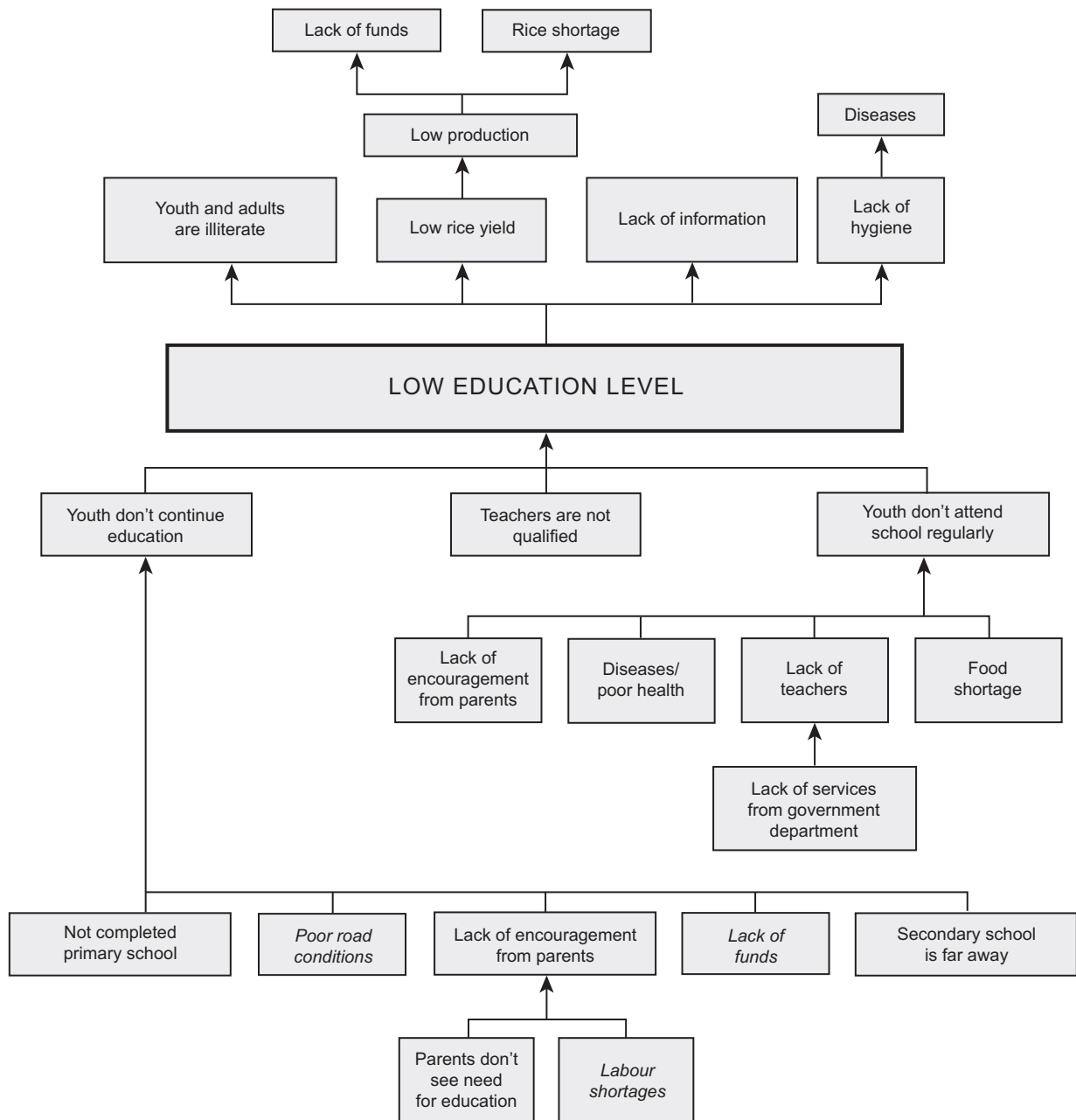
Conceptual schema on youth and family support



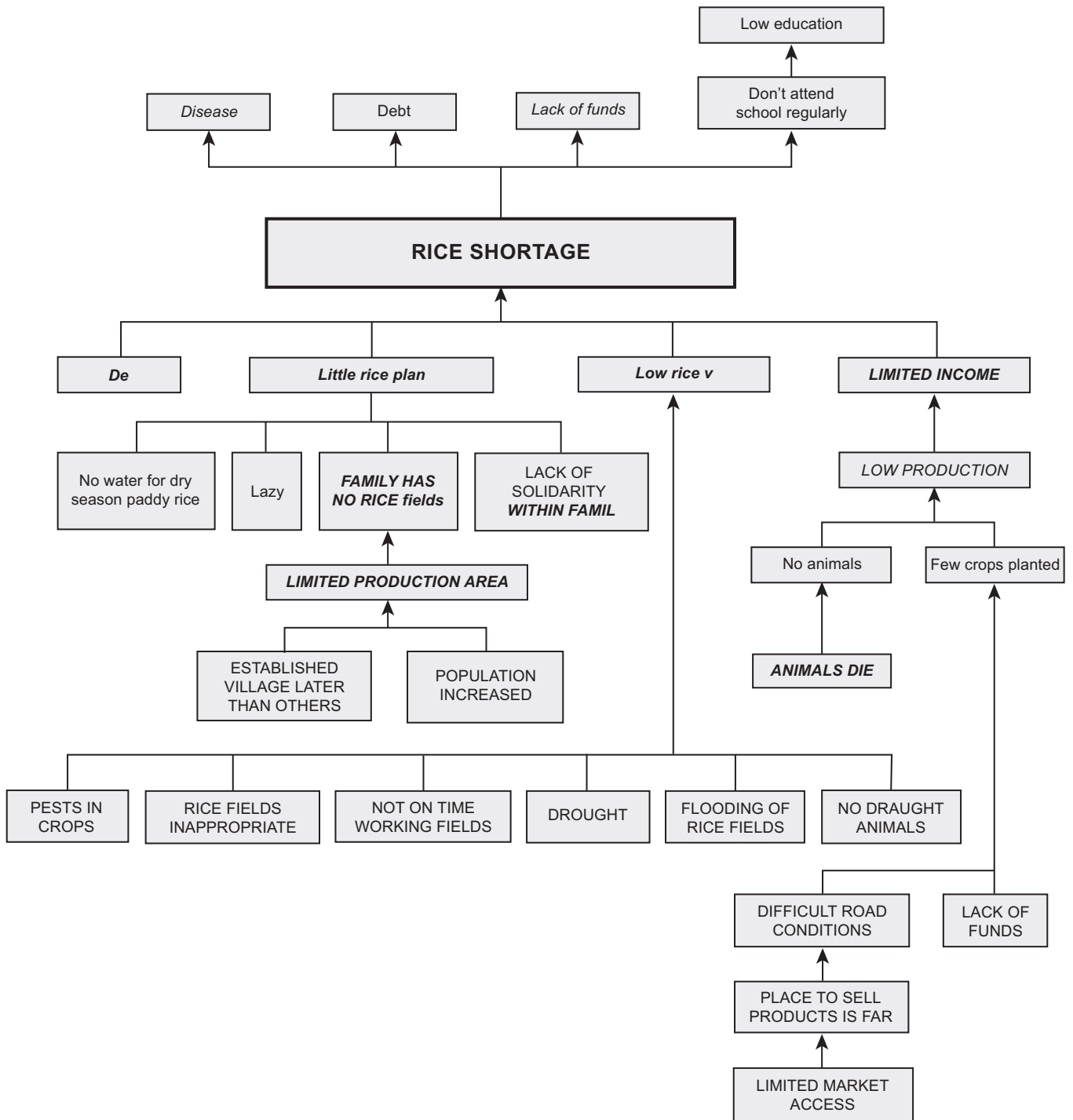
Problem tree for lack of funds



Problem tree for low education level



Problem tree for rice shortage



Problem tree for poor health

