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# **‘Moving up’ or ‘moving out’? Livelihood trajectories and farmers’ decision-making about growing cassava in Northern Laos**

(Kenthao District, Xayabouly Province)

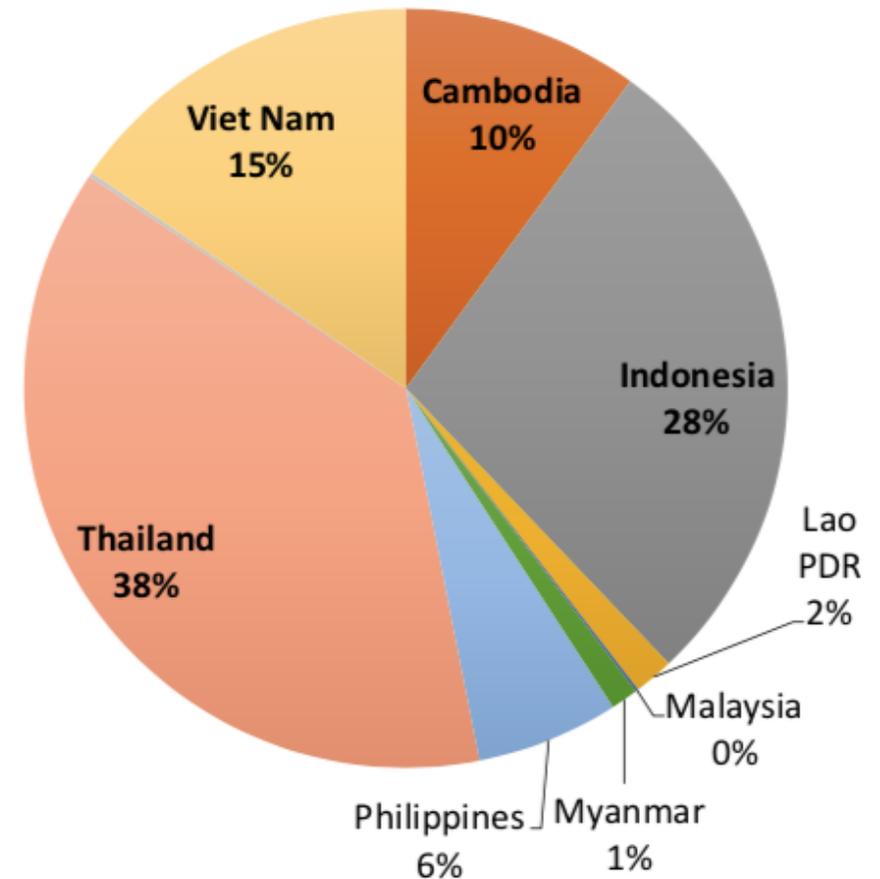
**Soytavanh Mienmany**  
PhD candidate

**Fenner School of Environment and Society**  
**Australian National University**

**4<sup>th</sup> July 2019**

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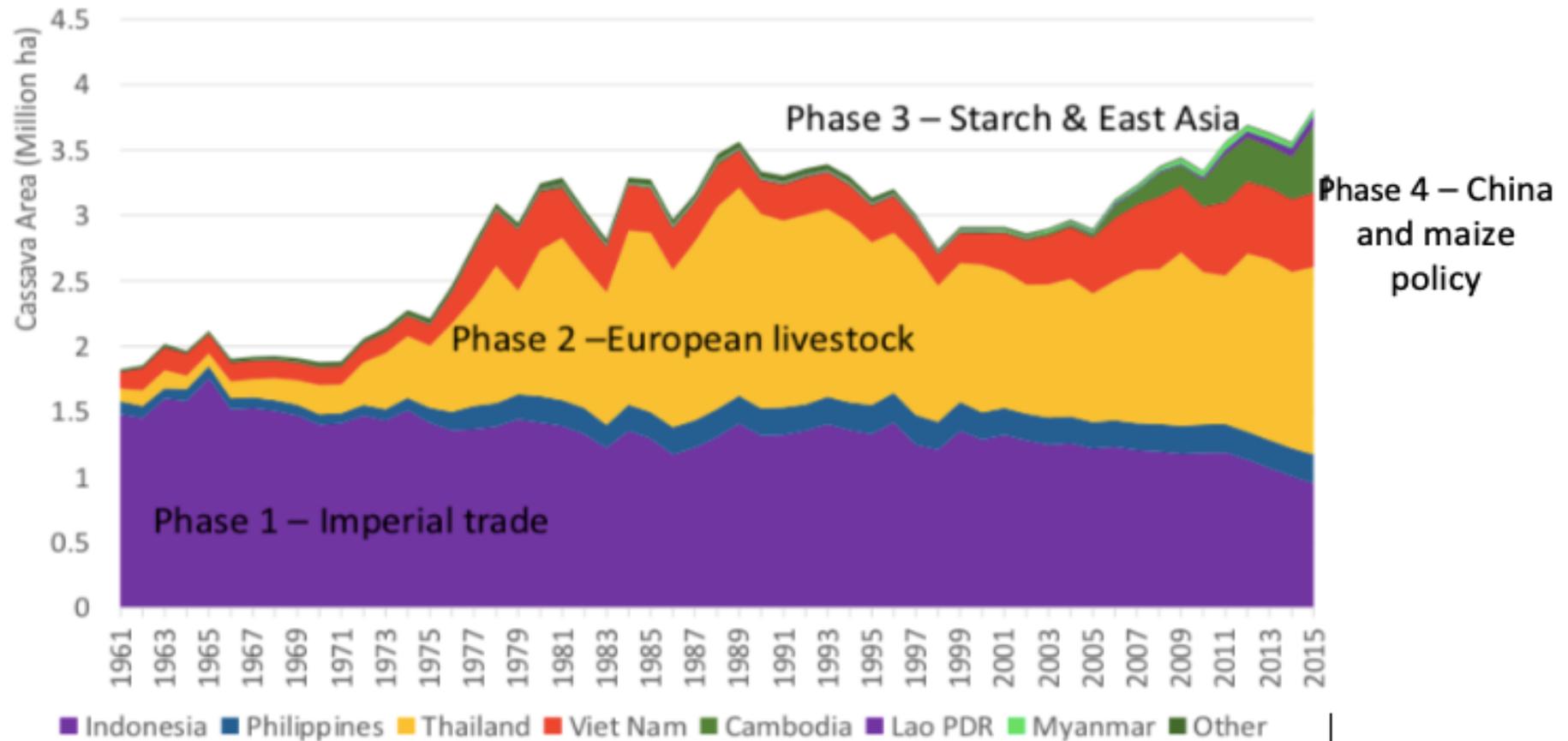
- Cassava is often grown by resource-poor farmers on marginal land and in biodiverse habitats (Delaquis et al., 2018)
- 26 million ha cultivated throughout the global tropics (FAOSTAT, 2017).
- 3.6 million ha in Asia - Thailand, Indonesia and Vietnam are the leading producers.
- Recent cassava 'boom' in the Mekong countries - Cambodia, Myanmar and Laos.
- Cassava is part of China's 'going out' strategy (Rutherford et al., 2008)



(Cassava in Asia: Newby et., 2017)



# Factors favouring cassava boom



# My PhD Research Questions

## How do processes of rural change manifest in the case of boom crops in Laos?

- What **external factors** lead farmers to adopt, continue and withdraw from boom crops?
- What **internal factors** lead to farmers to adopt, continue and withdraw from boom crops?
- What are the **consequences of adoption/non-adoption** on case study households and communities?

## Why and how do certain crops become boom crops in the context of Laos?

- What are **the past, current policies and future strategies** of the Lao government for boom crops?
- What **factors influence the Lao state agencies' decisions** about boom crops?
- What **value chain factors are most important** in a crop 'booming'?

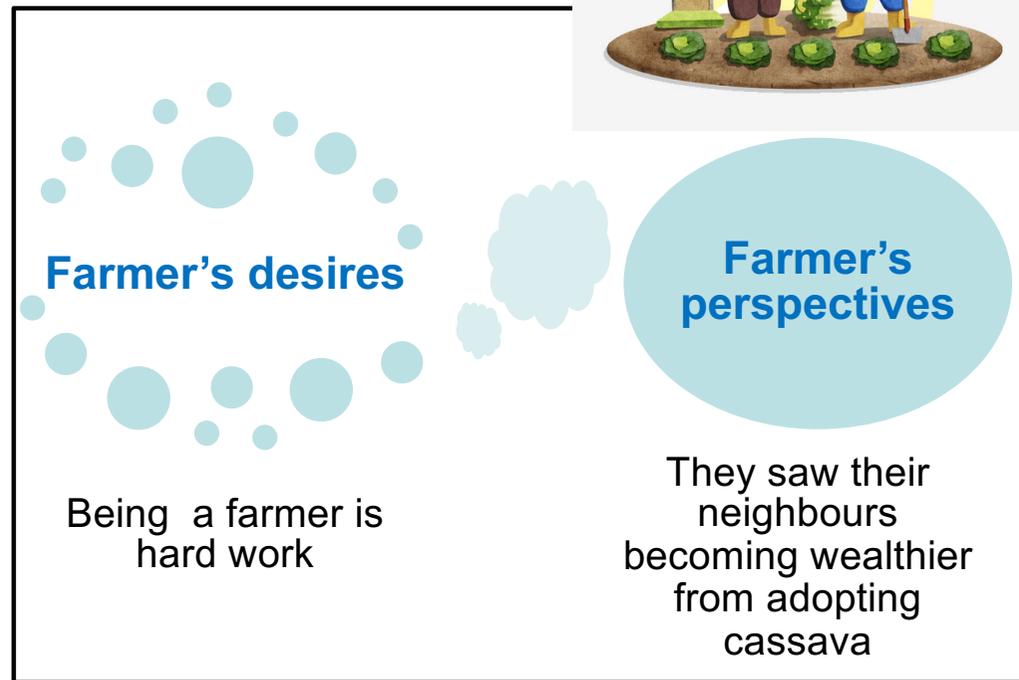
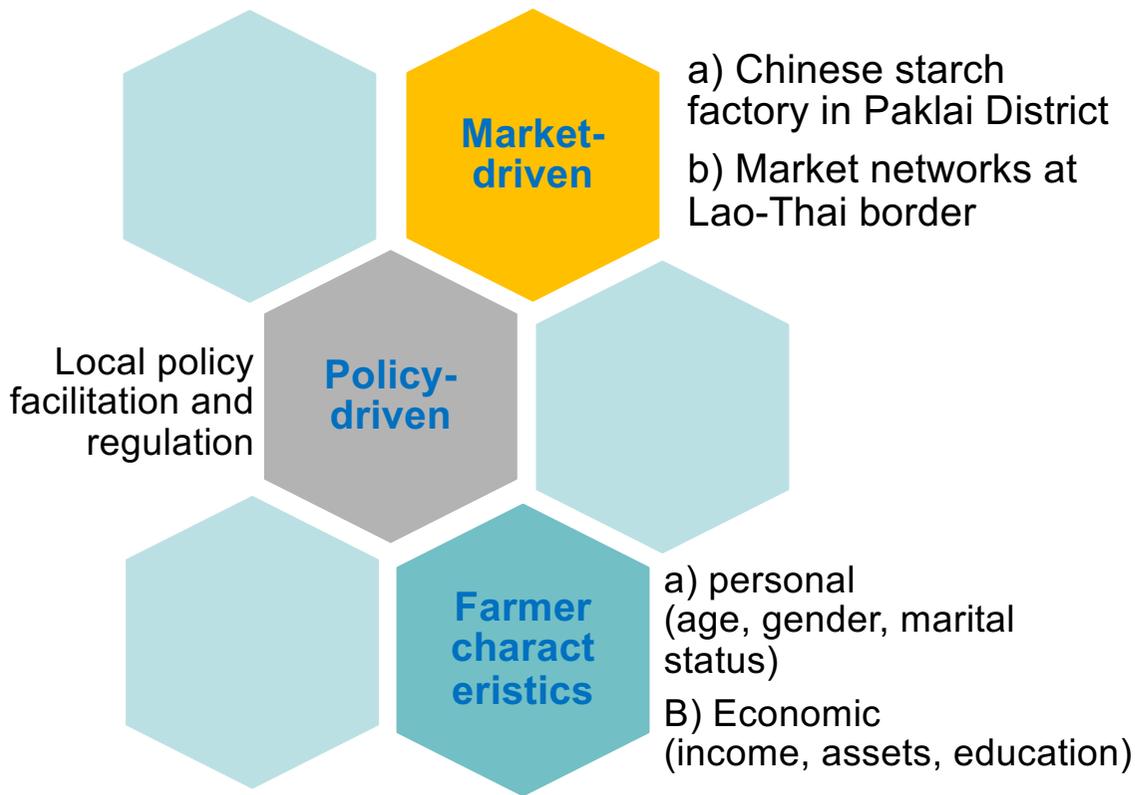
## What do the results of questions 1 - 2 suggest as better policies for improving the sustainable livelihoods of farmers?

- Village selection: visit 5 villages in Feb 2019; technical support and advice from CIAT and DAFO.
- Fieldwork: February – April 2019
  - Focus group discussions (male and female groups)
  - In-depth interviews - 62 households
  - Interview with village chief
  - Informal discussions with villagers
  - Observation



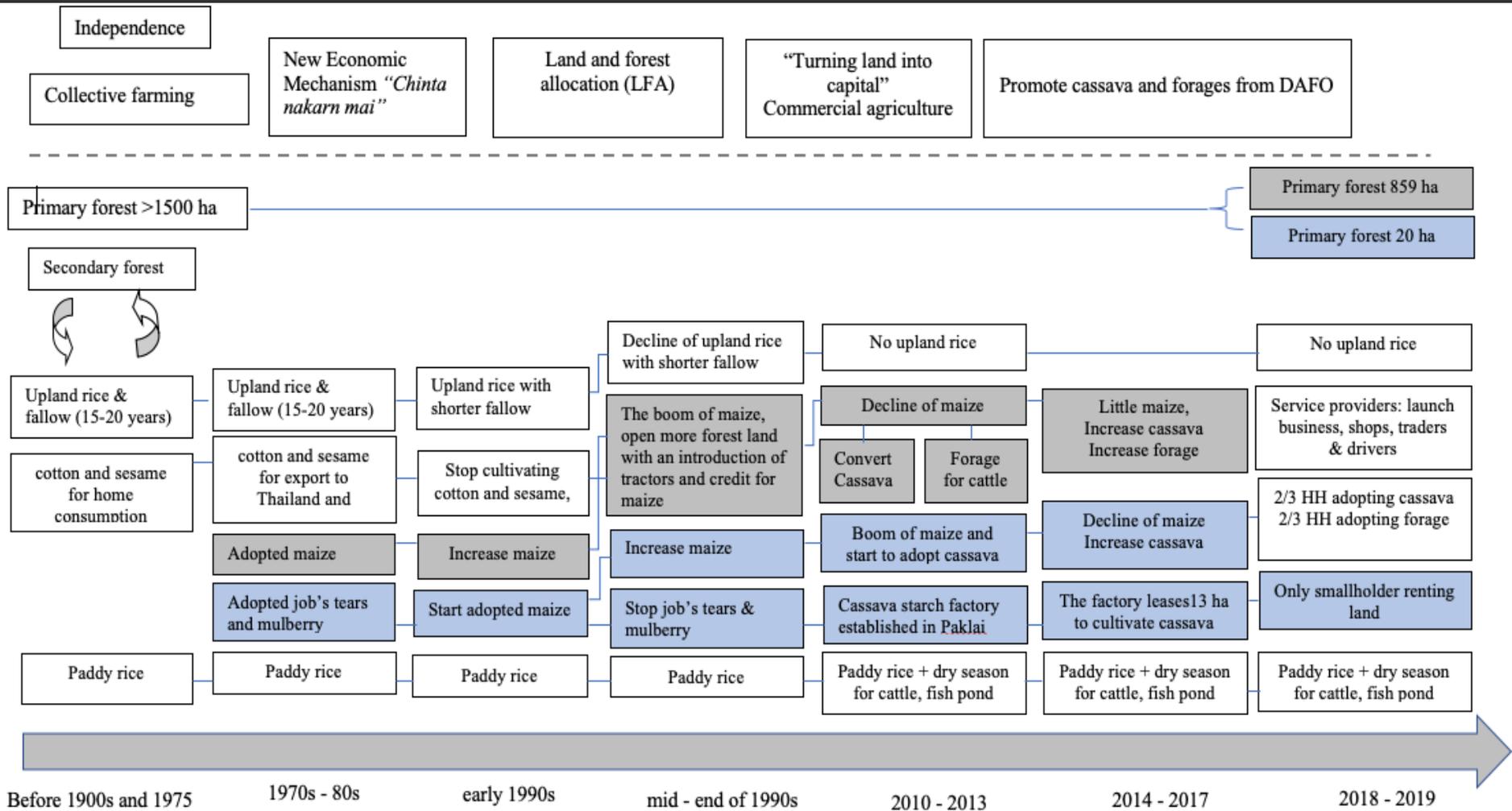
# Initial findings about adoption

## External & internal factors impact farmers' decision-making

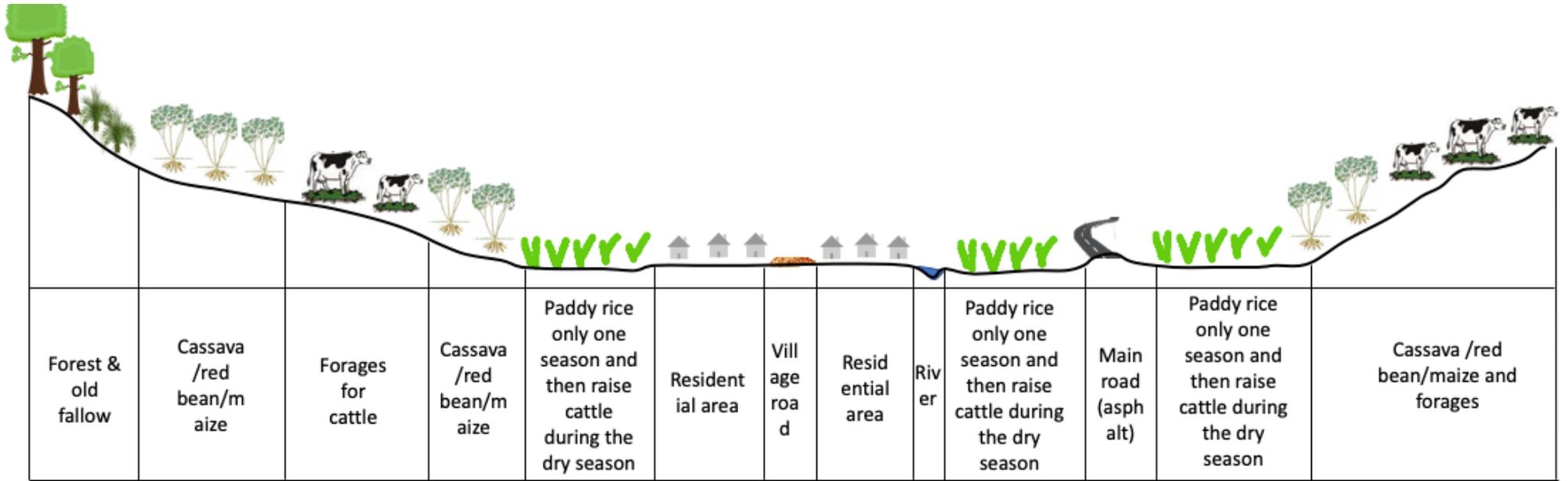




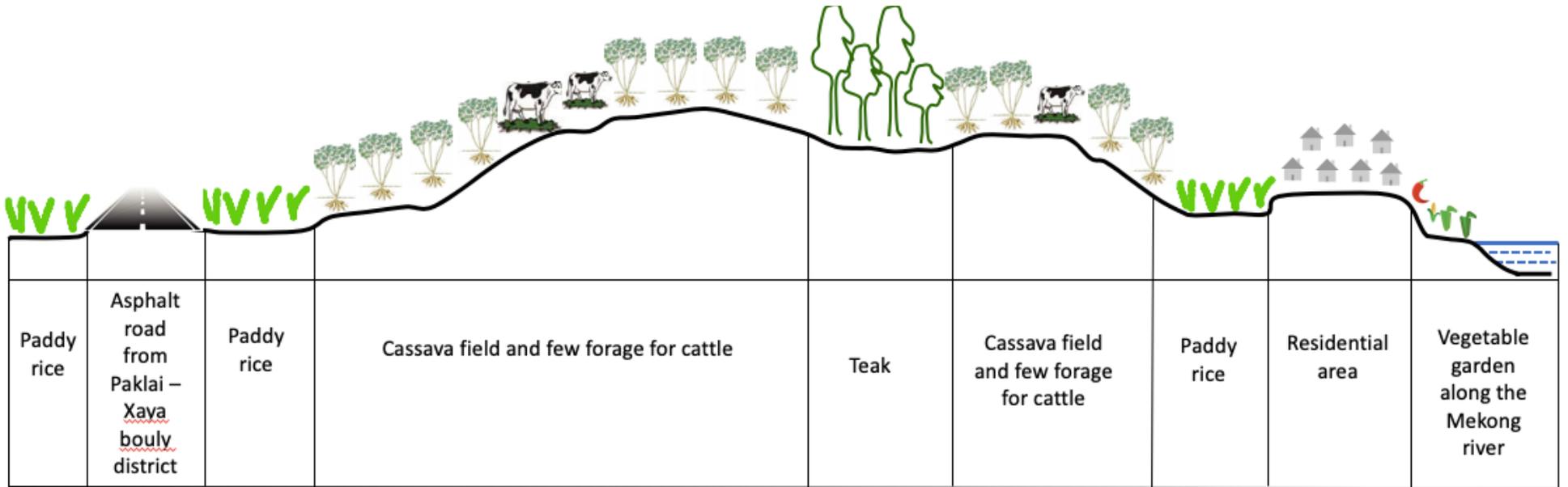
# Evolution of cropping systems in case study villages



Village 1

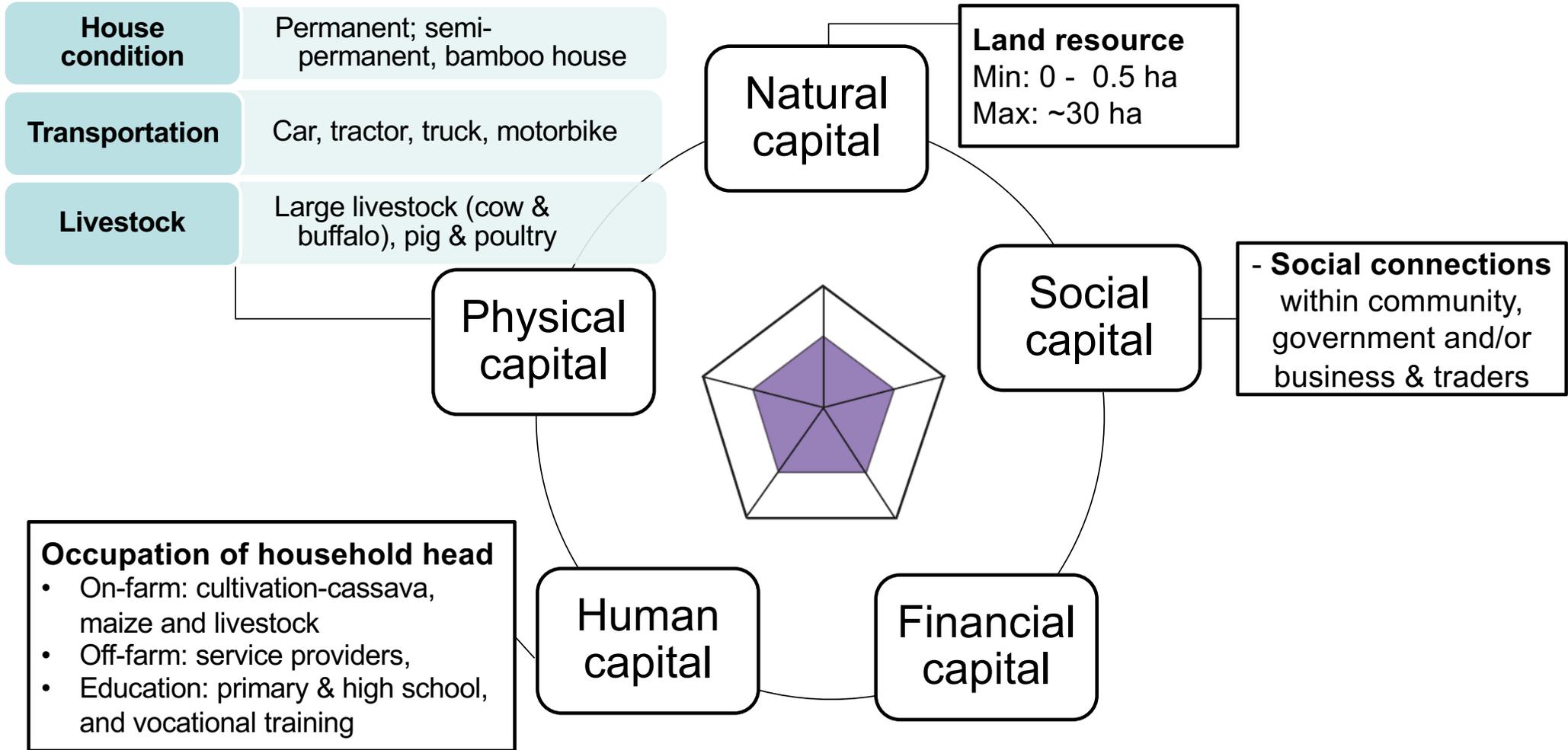


Village 2



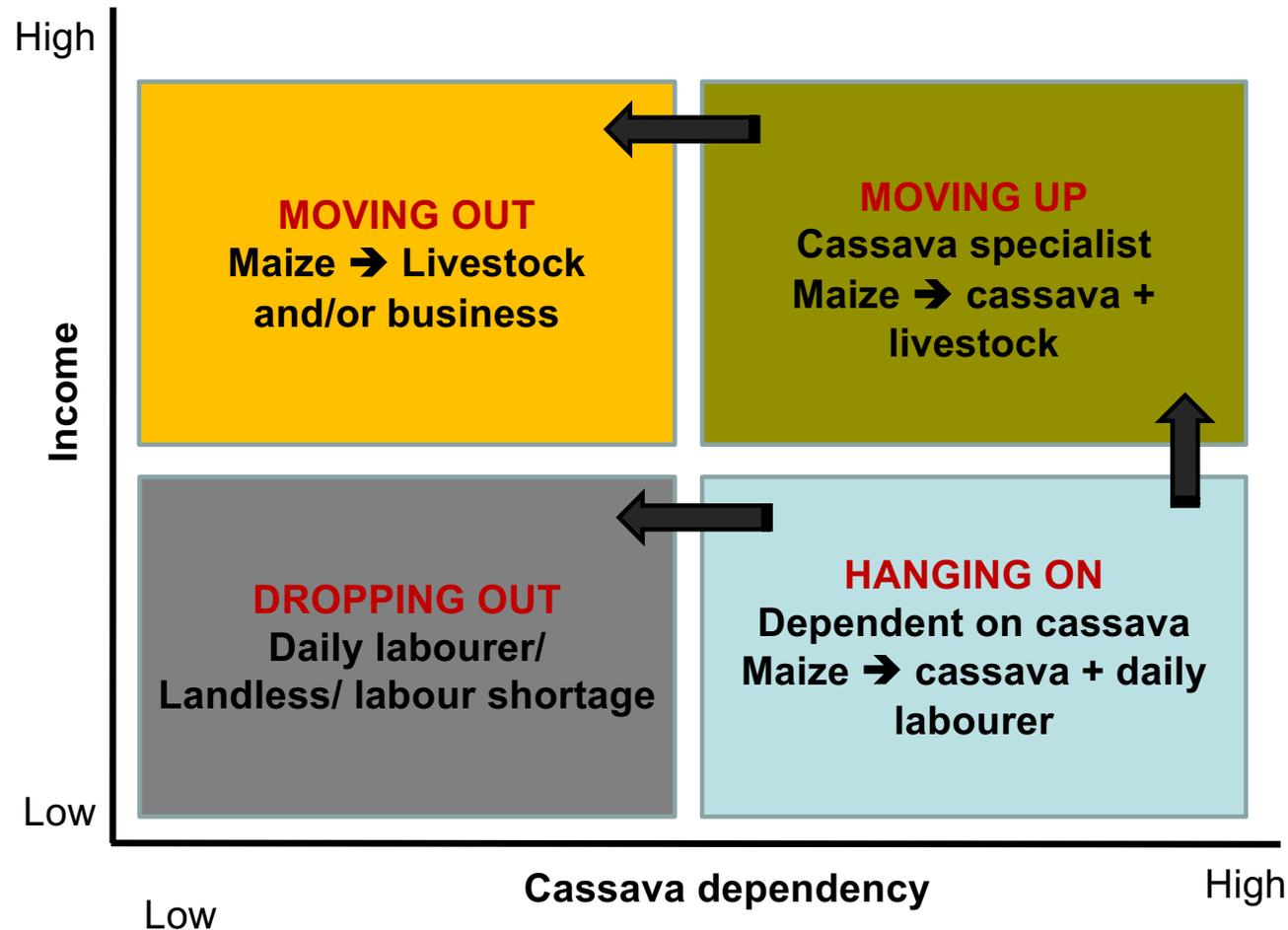


# Livelihood assets



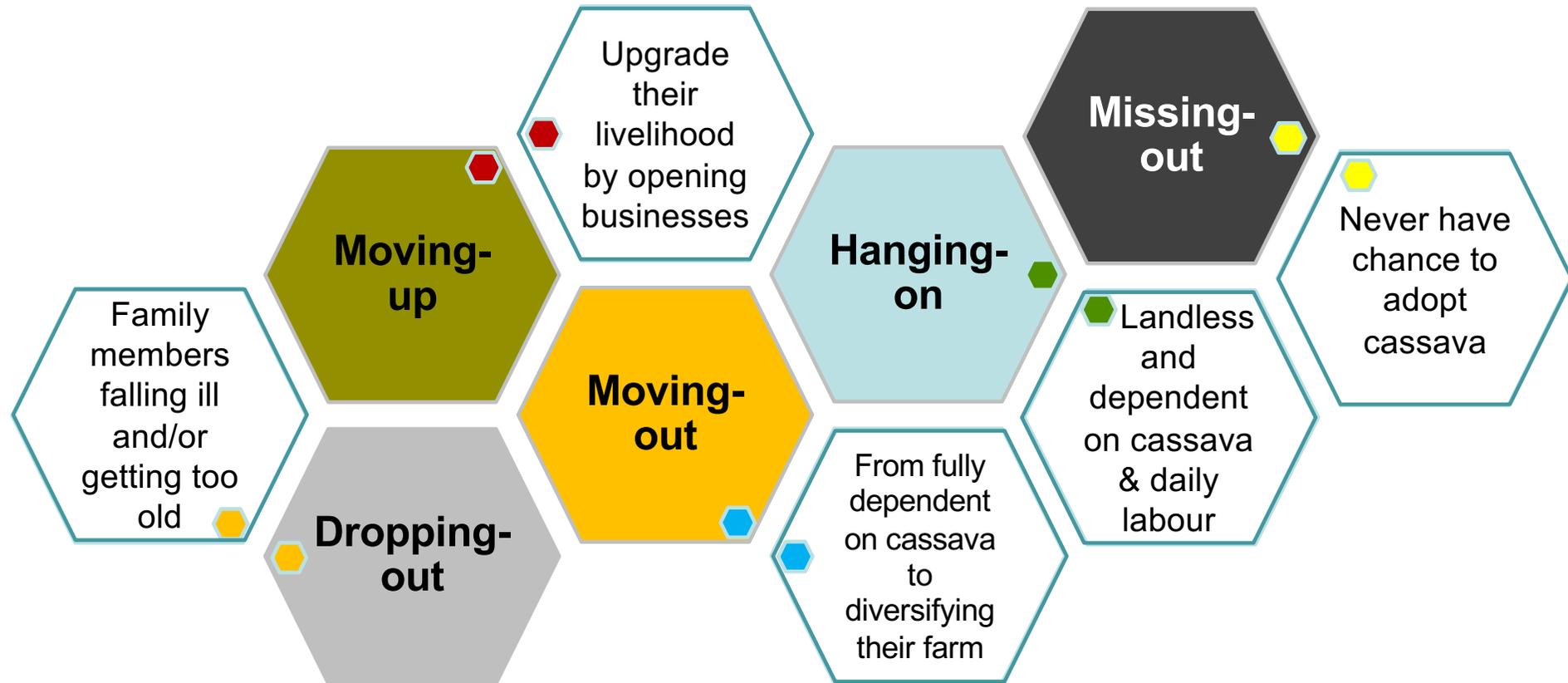


# Moving up or moving out?





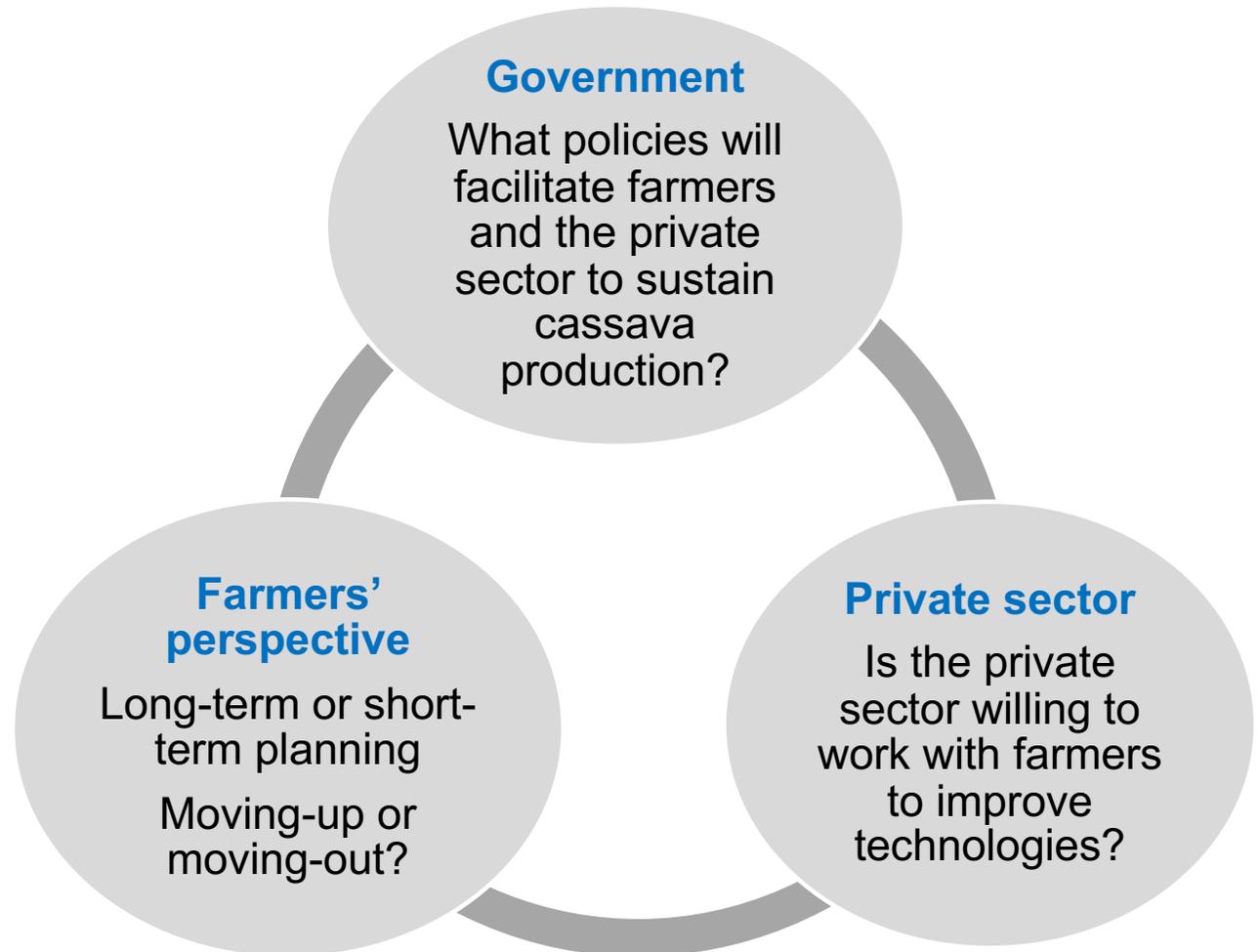
# Livelihood typologies



- **Farmers in Northern Laos, as elsewhere in Southeast Asia, are riding the boom of cash crops**
  - The better-off and medium-wealth households → benefit from the boom
  - Some medium and the poorer households are still ‘hanging-on’ in the cycle of boom and bust, and some are ‘dropping out’.
- **Adoption remains a dynamic process**
  - Village 1 focuses on cattle rearing (agricultural policy of promoting livestock)
  - Village 2 continues growing and expanding their cassava
  - Cassava has a short-term planning horizon
    - farmers make a decision based on the cassava price of current year
  - Long-term planning: only the better-off and medium households plan to invest in fruit tree (durian, mango and lychee)

- New “Clean agriculture policy” from Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, defined as low cost production, free of chemicals, stable and sustainable.
- Land competition for boom crops
  - Cassava boom in Village 2 encouraged migration to the village
  - New boom crop?  
Arrival of banana plantation under ‘clean agriculture’ policy
- Cassava yield decrease → farmers are willing to apply fertilizer; but they have limited knowledge and access to the appropriate fertilizers
  - ACIAR + Govt. + private sector → fertilizer experiments and supply chains







# Thank you



A farmer waits for her husband to transport cassava stems up to the hill  
@Kenthao district, Xayabouly Province, Laos