



LUND
UNIVERSITY

Lund University Master of Science in
International Development and Management

May 2026

Youth in Agri-Entrepreneurship in Nepal

Agency in Times of Change

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Master's Thesis

Abstract

In light of global patterns of youth disengagement from farming, agri-entrepreneurship emerges as an opportunity for youth to reconnect with agriculture. This research investigates the experiences of young agri-entrepreneurs in Nepal. Embedded in a context of youth unemployment, migration, and the recent Gen Z movement, this study focuses on Nepali youth who exert agency through developing agri-businesses. It aims to understand youths' underlying motivations and how they navigate challenges and constraints in agri-entrepreneurship. Thereby, it explores the neglected aspect of agency in youth agri-entrepreneurship research. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 14 youth agri-entrepreneurs in Nepal, drawing on a diverse sample from rural and urban areas. The findings highlighted youths' desire to drive change in multiple spheres through agri-entrepreneurship, including generating income and employment, and countering migration pressures. Youth faced resource, market, governance and societal constraints in Nepal's agri-business context. They navigated challenges through peer support, problem-solving, accepting multiple roles, active learning, perseverance, patience, passion and persistence. These capacities to act and youth intentions reveal how youth agency unfolds in a context of change and constraints to agri-entrepreneurship. It indicates that youth agency is central to maneuvering in agri-entrepreneurship, while policy needs to address constraints to scaling up youth agri-entrepreneurship opportunities.

Acknowledgement

This research builds on my six-month experience in Nepal, where I arrived in a time of change, shortly before the Gen Z movement. My gratitude goes to the young participants of this study. Thank you for your openness, trust and time in sharing your stories with me. It made this research possible and let me understand agri-entrepreneurship and Nepal's contemporary context from a youth perspective. I would also like to thank the two young translators who enabled me to conduct the research beyond the language barrier. My thanks extend to my peers in the supervision group and my supervisor Izzy, who continuously helped me refine the work with valuable feedback and suggestions. Special thanks go to my friends Lara, Klára and Ulrich, who always accompanied me throughout the months of the process. I am also grateful that this work was supported by a scholarship from the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD).

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1 Introduction

On the 8th of September 2025, a historic protest mobilized Nepali youth onto the streets. The Gen Z movement reached a countrywide magnitude and spread around the world. Protesting against corruption, misgovernance, unemployment and a recently enforced social media ban, violence erupted as the police shot and killed youth protesters to suppress the movement, leaving Nepal in shock and fury. The day after the shooting, on 9th September 2025, the country witnessed an exceptionally fast and violent overthrow of the government (Human Rights Watch, 2025).

Since the Gen Z revolution, youth voices and demands are at the center of attention in contemporary Nepal. This includes not only Gen Z, born between 1995 and 2010, but all youth in the country, defined as 18- to 35-year-olds. In the past decade, Nepal's youth unemployment rate reached the highest in South Asia (World Bank, 2026), fueling the political youth crisis. Frustrations with misgovernance led youth to exert their collective agency to demand change through the Gen Z movement (Gnawali, 2026). Youth agency refers to the desire and ability of young people to act, with an intention of driving change in their own lives, communities, and larger spheres of influence. For the newly elected government in the aftermath of the revolution under a 36-year-old prime minister, a major task now is to meet the demands of the young people.

An overarching problem for youth is the perception of a lack of opportunities in Nepal, especially in terms of employment (Gnawali, 2026; Sapkota, 2026; Poudel, 2021). A youth unemployment rate of 20.6% against a total unemployment rate of 10.5% highlights that Nepal's job crisis affects youth the most (World Bank, 2026). This has pushed youth into transnational labor migration. The number of Nepalis who migrated abroad increased to almost eight percent of the total population over the last three years until 2025 (Bhusal, 2025, p. 1).

Next to overseas migration, rural outmigration constitutes another youth dynamic in Nepal. In rural areas, traditional societal structures have been changing rapidly, connected to youth disengagement from agriculture. Today, youth aspirations center around non-farming sectors, waiting for better educational and migration opportunities and moving to urban areas (Korzenevica, 2016; Sunam et al., 2025). These patterns in Nepal are not isolated, but reflect larger, globally observable development dynamics (Sunam et al., 2025). The disengagement of youth from agriculture and rural areas causes youth migration to urban areas globally. It leads to an increasing number of youth congregating in cities and struggling to find work. Thus, youth

disengagement from agriculture is a critical challenge since it exacerbates youth unemployment, livelihood issues and agricultural decline across many countries (Khanal et al., 2021; Sunam et al., 2025; White, 2012).

The underlying reasons for this disengagement are multiple and context-dependent. They often include attributing low social status and financial returns to farming, while youth aspirations change culturally with modernization and globalization (Ainomugisha et al., 2026; Sunam et al., 2025). Agriculture is often seen as a static sector and occupation, the last choice for youth (Adhikari et al., 2017). Studies also show that youth refrain from agriculture due to a lack of awareness about opportunities in the sector (Magagula & Tsvakirai, 2020). In Asia and Nepal, this perception is reinforced by parents, who often prefer their children to exit farming and find jobs in urban areas (Sunam et al., 2025; Thephavanh et al., 2022). A study with 320 youths in Southern Nepal reveals that one main social constraint youths perceive to their engagement in agriculture is societal perception of farmers (Khanal et al., 2021, p. 368). Although Nepali youth believe agriculture plays a positive role in societal development, they see it as a burdensome profession with low financial returns (Khanal et al., 2021, p. 367).

Thus, if engagement in agriculture were to become more profitable and socially recognized, youth might be more inclined toward the sector. In this regard, agri-entrepreneurship has been identified as an opportunity to address the above-mentioned issues. Agri-entrepreneurship refers to the development of business ventures within the agricultural sector (Chapter 2). In many countries in the Global South, research has shown that youth are increasingly drawn to agri-entrepreneurship due to its profit-making potential (Khanal et al., 2021, p. 366).

Research Purpose and Questions

Amidst the pressing issues for youth in Nepal in terms of unemployment, migration and agricultural disengagement, one group of youth is countering these dynamics beyond the Gen Z protest: Youth agri-entrepreneurs. These youth are developing their own businesses in the field of agriculture despite a challenging context. Who are these youth agri-entrepreneurs? Why do they choose this trajectory in agriculture? And how do they navigate their agri-businesses?

To better understand the extraordinary realities faced by youth agri-entrepreneurs, this thesis investigates their subjective perspectives and experiences in Nepal. Youth agri-entrepreneurship is an underexplored research field in the academic literature (Salam et al., 2025), a gap this thesis can assist in filling. It is relevant to understand because of its potential to respond to the youth crises of unemployment, lack of opportunities and migration pressures.

Through the Gen Z movement, Nepali youth have recently highlighted the structural constraints they perceive in the country and proven how youth agency can lead to change at the political level. Considering the global spread of the Gen Z movements, this study recognizes the contemporary importance of youth-related development research, and the relevance of youth agency as an analytical concept. The phenomenon of youth agri-entrepreneurship indicates that youth agency in Nepal might not only express itself in the recent Gen Z movement, but even in agriculture, which many youth deem unattractive. To investigate youth agri-entrepreneurship from an agency lens, the following main research question and two sub-questions were developed:

How do youth agri-entrepreneurs experience their agribusiness trajectories in Nepal? What do their experiences reveal about youth agency?

- 1. What motivations led youth agri-entrepreneurs to engage in agri-entrepreneurship?*
- 2. How do youth agri-entrepreneurs navigate the challenges and constraints to establishing and managing agri-businesses in Nepal?*

Based on agency theory, which conceptualizes agency as comprising intentionality and the capacity to act, the two sub-questions were developed to support answering the main question. First related to intentions, this research aims to understand what motivates Nepali youth to pursue agri-entrepreneurship, particularly in light of youth disengagement from agriculture. Second, the present academic literature focuses on challenges and constraints of agri-entrepreneurship globally and in the Global South, but has rarely examined how youth deal with these issues. Therefore, this study aims to investigate how youth agri-entrepreneurs in Nepal navigate the challenges and constraints they face in agri-entrepreneurship, which relates to agency in the capacity to act.

Overall, with these questions, the thesis aims to contribute to a better understanding of agency in youth agri-entrepreneurship and the constraints of Nepal's agri-entrepreneurship context from a youth perspective. Multiple studies have already quantitatively evaluated how youth participation in agri-entrepreneurship is influenced by demographic, socio-economic, institutional, perceptual or family-related factors (e.g., Devkota et al., 2023; Khanal et al., 2021; Magagula & Tsvakirai, 2020; Mkandawire et al., 2023). Rather than attempting to measure the influence of such determinants on youth participation and agency in agri-entrepreneurship, this thesis concentrates on youths' subjective understandings. Drawing on qualitative interviews with 14 young agri-entrepreneurs in Nepal, the research focuses on personal accounts of youth

experiences, which can demonstrate how youth, in different contexts and with different backgrounds, might be able to exert agency in agri-entrepreneurship.

The study is structured as follows: First, existing literature on youth agri-entrepreneurship globally and in Nepal will be reviewed (Chapter 2). Subsequently, the theoretical grounding of youth agency (Chapter 3) will be provided, followed by the methodology (Chapter 4). Next, the findings will be presented (Chapter 5) and discussed (Chapter 6). Lastly, a final conclusion will be drawn (Chapter 7).

2 Literature Review

This chapter reviews existing literature from (youth) agri-entrepreneurship research. After defining agri-entrepreneurship and linking it to the development field, the review will focus on youth motivations related to the first research question. Subsequently, research on challenges and constraints to (youth) agri-entrepreneurship in the Global South and Nepal is examined, a foundation for the second research question. Further, existing research on capacities to navigate challenges and agency within youth agri-entrepreneurship will be assessed.

Entrepreneurship and agriculture have long been regarded as incompatible, related to the dominant narrative of non-innovative, family-run farms (Salam et al., 2025). As such, agri-entrepreneurship has received comparably little attention in entrepreneurship research in the past (Adhikari et al., 2017; Fitz-Koch et al., 2018; Magagula & Tsvakirai, 2020). Adhikari et al. (2017) explain this gap with the narrow understanding of entrepreneurship as “creation of a new venture” (p. 120). Though starting a business from scratch is not always the case in the agricultural sector, as agri-businesses are often characterized by inheritance and continuity across generations (Adhikari et al., 2017). Since commercial farmers still exhibit the typical characteristics of entrepreneurs, Adhikari et al. (2017) suggest a more suitable definition of an entrepreneur as “a change-oriented and value creating entity willing to embrace innovation to capitalize opportunities” (Adhikari et al., 2017, p. 125), which can encompass entrepreneurs within agriculture.

Thus, agri-entrepreneurship need not mean founding a new business; it can include innovations within existing farms and diversification of livelihoods (Salam et al., 2025). Agribusinesses operate related to biomass in agriculture, including ground and tree crops, horticulture, aquaculture, floriculture, and animal husbandry (Mishra, 2024; Srivastava, 1989). Agri-entrepreneurship is not limited to commercial farming but encompasses the whole agricultural

value chain, involving agricultural input production, service provision, farm-level production, agro-processing, marketing and retail of farm products (Khanal et al., 2021; Mishra, 2024; Salam et al., 2025). Thus, agri-entrepreneurship in this thesis will be defined as:

the capacity and willingness of individuals to identify a promising opportunity along the agricultural value chain, obtain resources and develop an agribusiness either by diversifying an existing agricultural operation or pursuing a new business venture. (adapted from Raza et al., 2025, pp. 3-4 and Salam et al., 2025, p. 1662).

Growing Relevance of Agri-Entrepreneurship

Agri-entrepreneurship is increasingly recognized by academia and policymakers for its potential to foster economic growth, sustainability innovations, productivity increase and poverty reduction in agriculture, especially in developing economies (Adeyanju et al., 2024; Raza et al., 2026; Salam et al., 2025). One hope is that agri-entrepreneurship can re-attract youth to agriculture, thereby addressing youth unemployment and migration (Magagula & Tsvakirai, 2020). In Nepal, multiple authors emphasize its potential to create jobs, increase incomes, reduce poverty, promote local economic development in rural areas and diversify the overall economy (Chaudhary, 2025; Devkota et al., 2023; Khanal et al., 2021; Mishra, 2024).

Evidence, particularly from Africa, suggests that youth interest in agri-entrepreneurship has been increasing in last years (Adeyanju et al., 2024; Salam et al., 2025). Governments both in Asia and Africa are increasingly launching youth agri-entrepreneurship training programs (Adeyanju et al., 2024; Magagula & Tsvakirai, 2020). In Nepal, this trend has been picked up by national and international development agencies¹. Youth agri-entrepreneurship is thus an emerging field that gains increasing significance in development research and practice.

However, policymakers' focus on agri-entrepreneurship has also generated criticism. White (2012) criticizes that neoliberal governments, the World Bank, and the International Labor Organization have identified youth agri-entrepreneurship as “a new kind of ‘do-it-yourself’ employment strategy for the young” (White, 2012, p. 11), which allows them to avoid addressing structural problems and investing in actual employment generation.

¹ To name a few youth agri-entrepreneurship programs in Nepal, the Youth Food Lab, the Youth Agri Innovation Challenge, the Climate Smart Entrepreneurship program, the Nature-based Solutions Innovation Challenge, women fellowship programs, and multiple more.

Agri-Entrepreneurship Research

While agri-entrepreneurship has long been neglected in entrepreneurship research, an increasing number of publications across countries indicate this has changed in recent years (Dias et al., 2019b). Globally, multiple systematic literature reviews on agricultural entrepreneurship have already been conducted (Dias et al., 2019a; Fitz-Koch et al., 2018; Salam et al., 2025), with some focusing specifically on the Global South (Raza et al., 2026). Focus points in existing literature are, among others, youth agri-entrepreneurship, urban agri-entrepreneurship and rural development (Dias et al., 2019a; Fitz-Koch et al., 2018; Salam et al., 2025). Notably, the concept of agency is hardly considered in agri-entrepreneurship research. In all four literature reviews, the term ‘agency’ appears zero times. Regarding youth engagement in agri-entrepreneurship, Salam et al. (2025) identify it as an increasingly inquired topic. They deem it a priority direction for future research, since the topic remains insufficiently explored and evidence is required for policymaking. Thus, this thesis can add to a contemporary field.

Youth Motivations to Engage in Agri-Entrepreneurship

Youth-related studies have focused on youth intentions to engage in agri-entrepreneurship and how these are shaped by cultural and social factors (Salam et al., 2025). In Laos, Thephavanh et al. (2022) identified paradigms that motivated youth to become agri-entrepreneurs, including income, self-sufficiency, and the desire to maintain cultural heritage or to grow personally. Additional motivations were protecting the environment, supporting farmers or family, and creating jobs, which Thephavanh et al. (2022) frame as altruistic motivations. These motivations indicate youths' desire to drive change, relating to the definition of youth agency, although the authors do not connect to this concept. Despite the global disengagement of youth from agriculture, such work shows that some youth still have aspirations for rural areas. In Nepal, one study qualitatively investigates agri-entrepreneurial motivations and challenges of two female agri-entrepreneurs (Nepal & Poudel, 2024). It found financial freedom, self-fulfillment, and creating jobs as most important motivations (p. 95). Although this study shows that agri-entrepreneurship offers opportunities for youth and women's empowerment in rural Nepal, it neither explicitly refers to agency.

More frequently than subjective motivations, the literature has repeatedly investigated the influence of social, demographic, economic, and perceptual factors on youth agri-entrepreneurship awareness and decisions, using quantitative methods (e.g., Bouichou et al., 2021; Devkota et al., 2023; Mkandawire et al., 2023). In Nepal, identified factors include

opportunities available, depending on place, parental income, and access to inputs; as well as perceptions of feasibility influenced by education and government support (Devkota et al., 2023; Khanal et al., 2021; Mishra, 2024). While these structural factors impact statistical probabilities of youth participation in agri-entrepreneurship, they do not shed light on youths' personal motivations and understandings. Furthermore, these studies cannot explain how youth from less favorable backgrounds came to engage in agri-entrepreneurship. Therefore, this study aims to understand the motivations of youth from their own perspectives, rather than reducing their engagement in agri-entrepreneurship to these characteristics.

Youth Agri-Entrepreneurship Challenges, Constraints and Navigations

Regarding challenges in agri-entrepreneurship, a relevant emerging research field focuses on agri-entrepreneurial *constraints* in developing countries (Raza et al., 2025, 2026; Refai et al., 2025). As Raza et al. (2025) highlight, “[e]ntrepreneurship does not occur in isolation; it is deeply embedded in various institutional, social and spatial contexts or ecosystems” (p. 2).

Identified constraints for (youth) agri-entrepreneurship across the Global South include high prices of agricultural inputs, critical market practices, and government inefficiency in service delivery, especially in rural areas (Boye et al., 2024; Mkandawire et al., 2023; Raza et al., 2025, 2026). Some literature points to young people's lack of skills and credit access, and discouraging social pressures from relatives that hinder youth involvement in agri-entrepreneurship (Boye et al., 2024; Geza et al., 2023; Mkandawire et al., 2023). In Nepal, this concerns parents' aspirations for children to engage in non-farming sectors (Sunam et al., 2025).

In Nepal particularly, studies have identified the multiple constraints. Khanal et al. (2021, p. 369) distinguish between social, economic and technological constraints to youth transformation of agriculture. Others caution infrastructure, financial service, market linkage and skilled labor deficits, which pose structural challenges and hinder the exploitation of agri-entrepreneurial opportunities (Chaudhary, 2025; Mishra, 2024). Identical constraints are discussed in literature from other Global South countries, indicating development challenges to agri-entrepreneurship beyond Nepal (Boye et al., 2024; Mkandawire et al.; Raza et al., 2025, 2026). Nepali literature equally reflects globally described socio-cultural constraints on female youth entrepreneurship, where a patriarchal society and institutions question women's ability to manage enterprises and limit their access to capital and land (Chaudhary, 2025; Nepal & Poudel, 2024; Raza et al., 2026, p. 338). Overall, it has been assessed that “Nepal's youth possess the drive for entrepreneurship but are held back by systemic constraints” (Chaudhary,

2025, p. 38). This quote exemplifies the tendency in English-language literature to frame challenges and constraints to hinder youth agri-entrepreneurship (e.g., Boye et al., 2024; Chaudhary, 2025; Mkandawire et al., 2023).

Research on constraints highlights its important contribution to policy and programming, which should address challenges to youth agri-entrepreneurship. However, by focusing on constraints and presenting solutions as dependent on policies and programs, existing studies tend to overlook the room for maneuver that youth currently have in agri-entrepreneurship. Rather, it sometimes implies seemingly insurmountable barriers to independent youth engagement. Thereby, existing literature does not capture the full picture. It falls short of investigating how youth already engaged in agri-entrepreneurship navigate these constraints. It thereby fails to learn from potential role models in agri-entrepreneurship. This research gap identified in youth-specific literature seems to be similar in general agri-entrepreneurship research, as Salam et al. (2025) assessed: “There is a clear shortage of organized strategies or resources that agripreneurs can use to navigate the disruptive, volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous nature of their industry while ensuring sustainable success” (Salam et al., 2025, pp. 1684, 1687).

Addressing this research gap, the thesis investigates how young agri-entrepreneurs in Nepal navigate challenges and how youth agency manifests, potentially showing how youth carve out spaces to act despite constraints. Therefore, finally, the literature review will assess whether the concept of agency has yet been applied to youth agri-entrepreneurship research.

Youth Agri-Entrepreneurship and Agency

Connecting the concept of youth agency to agri-entrepreneurship appears to be an equally rare approach. Hardly any literature could be found that integrates all concepts. Ainomugisha et al. (2026) consider youth agency as important factor in agriculture, rather than focusing on agri-entrepreneurship. They argue that structural conditions influence both youth perceptions of agriculture and their agency (p. 16). Unsupportive agricultural structures would drive youth to exert agency through migration or exit from farming, whereas in a more favorable environment, youth agency is expressed by founding agri-businesses (ibid.). Further, Refai et al. (2025) provide an overview of entrepreneurial agency in constrained contexts. This can be linked to the examined constraints in youth agri-entrepreneurship and will therefore serve as theoretical foundation for this thesis (see Chapter 3). However, their work falls short of connecting to agriculture and youth specifically. Additional studies are hard to identify. Self-efficacy, a psychologically related concept to agency, sometimes appears in (rural) youth entrepreneurship

and agri-entrepreneurship literature (McElwee & Bosworth, 2010; Salam et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2016).

To conclude, research globally and in Nepal has focused on motivations, influencing factors and constraints that shape youth engagement in agri-entrepreneurship. Studies often quantitatively assess influence factors like gender, finance or family on youth agri-entrepreneurship decisions. It further highlights constraints that hinder youth from getting involved in agri-entrepreneurship. However, this kind of research overlooks young people's personal agency in developing agribusinesses. Youth agency in agri-entrepreneurship thus constitutes a research gap. By combining all these aspects with a qualitative methodology, this thesis designed a new way of understanding youth agri-entrepreneurship. For a theoretical grounding of this investigation, agency will be explained in detail in the following chapter.

3 Theoretical Grounding

In the following, first, a general overview of agency and youth agency will be provided. Then, a guiding frame for youth agency will be introduced, distinguishing between intention and action elements. Lastly, a relevant theory of entrepreneurial agency in constrained contexts will be added.

Agency – An overview

Understandings of agency differ and multiple theoretical debates are ongoing. Agency appears in different fields, including youth, child, women, poverty and conflict studies (Cavazzoni et al., 2021; Spencer & Doull, 2015). It is also used in development studies, attributable to Amartya Sen's capability approach (Sen, 1999). Additionally, human agency is central to psychology and sociology, and sometimes acknowledged in entrepreneurship theory (Bandura, 1997; Hitlin & Elder, 2007; Townsend, 2012). Thus, the concept of agency has become pivotal in social sciences, despite the absence of a single agreed-upon definition and a standard measurement methodology (Cavazzoni et al., 2021). Different ontologies are used. A common description of agency is "the capacity or ability to act" (Spencer & Doull, 2015, p. 904). Another relevant definition of agency is "the intentions and actions of individuals and groups in pursuing their goals" (Hearn, 2012, p. 9).

Scholarly debates about agency center around 'structure versus agency' (Cavazzoni et al., 2021; Hearn, 2012). Structure is understood as "relatively stable patterns of social relations" (Hearn, 2012, p. 9). Social arrangements such as economic opportunities, political freedom, societal constraints, and other enabling conditions constrain individual agency (Sen, 1999). The debate about agency stems from disagreement over how much influence external structural opportunities and constraints have on actors' capacity to act and achieve goals, or to what extent rather internal processes are guiding (Cavazzoni et al., 2021; Starnawska, 2018). These discussions have created an unproductive dichotomy between agency and structure in scholarship (Coffey & Farrugia, 2014; Starnawska, 2018).

Youth Agency

Since this thesis specifically investigates young people, understanding youth agency is important. The concept has become pivotal in social science studies of young people (Jeffrey, 2012). However, youth agency is rarely defined in studies and is equally debated (Coffey & Farrugia, 2014; Spencer & Doull, 2015).

The following definition of youth agency will be used in this research, adapted from the International Youth Foundation (IYF) (n.d.):

Youth agency is the desire and ability of young people to act, with an intention of driving change in their own lives, in their communities, and in their larger spheres of influence.

The definition connects youth agentic change to multiple spheres - own lives, communities and larger spheres of influence. This opens the possibility of examining various ways in which young agri-entrepreneurs could aim to contribute to change in Nepal.

The concept of youth agency is often used in the context of young people's resistance against social patterns, injustices, or power structures (Coffey & Farrugia, 2014; Jeffrey, 2012). In Nepal, youth agency has therefore been linked to the recent Gen Z movement, in which youth resisted the government, thereby driving political change (Gnawali, 2026; Sapkota, 2026). In terms of the youth agency definition, this mirrors a change young people drove in their larger spheres of influence. However, youth studies recognize that beyond resistance, youth agency expresses itself in different forms in everyday life and in complex socio-cultural, political and geographical settings (Jeffrey, 2012; Spencer & Doull, 2015). In this light, this thesis investigates youth agency in agri-entrepreneurship.

Since accounts of youth agency were often overly focused on individual acts, an important aspect increasingly recognized in youth agency theory is its social nature (Jeffrey, 2012). Jeffrey (2012) suggests that “[y]oung people in many contexts equate agency with the cultivation of interdependencies rather than individual action and autonomy” (p. 250). This interpersonal dimension of agency reflects the ability to attain goals through interaction with others (Cavazzoni et al., 2021, p. 1142).

To clarify the ontology of agency, several scholars have broken it down into two elements (e.g., Spencer & Doull, 2015; Victor et al., 2013). These are framed as subjective-and-effective, affective-and-effective, or, in this thesis, intention-and-action elements of agency. Both Hearn’s (2012) definition of agency in general and the youth agency definition reflect intentions and actions. Therefore, these two elements will be theorized more in depth in the following.

Intention Element of Agency

First, intentions are central for human agency (Krueger & Carsrud, 1993). Across fields like psychology, philosophy and youth studies, agency has been understood as “acts done intentionally” (Bandura, 1997, p. 270; see also Pink, 2022; Spencer & Doull, 2015). Since

ancient Greek philosophy, purposiveness has been viewed as crucial to agency, a distinctive factor compared to non-agency (Pink, 2022). Therefore, agency research has revealed intentions, desires or motives that underlie action (Small, 2022). The youth agency definition in this study reflects the intention element of agency in young people's *desire and intention to drive change*. This justifies the relevance of investigating youths' motivations to engage in agri-entrepreneurship in Nepal with the first research question, since it reveals an important element of agency, intentions.

Theory implies that intentions could also be relevant for navigating challenges in agri-entrepreneurship. An agent's goal-directedness leads them not to give up but to persist in the face of a disturbance, instead seeking a way around the obstacle (Ferrero, 2022). The centrality of intentions is a commonality between agency and entrepreneurship theories, making intentionality particularly relevant in the context of this thesis. In entrepreneurship theory, for example Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour, intentions are recognized as the central trigger for the decision to become and act as an entrepreneur (Ajzen, 1991; Nielsen et al., 2025). Intentionality leads to an entrepreneur's proactive commitment to purposeful, goal-oriented action (Townsend, 2012). Therefore, the study of youth motivations for agri-entrepreneurship can reveal important aspects of youth agency in an entrepreneurial setting.

Action Element of Agency

Second, the action element of agency must be understood. Agency is often referred to in literature as "the capacity or ability to act" (Spencer & Doull, 2015, p. 904, see also Cavazzoni et al., 2021, p. 1126). People with a high degree of agency can act in a way they value, while those who cannot exert agency may be passive or coerced into situations (Alkire, 2008, pp. 3-4). Thus, the underlying capacity to act is important for understanding agency (Ferrero, 2022). Powers like capacities, abilities and skills are important factors shaping agentic behavior and action (Small, 2022). In this line, the youth agency definition highlights young people's *ability to act*.

Action is also a key element of entrepreneurship theory. Entrepreneurs must be willing to take action even in the face of grand external challenges (Townsend, 2012). By exerting agency, entrepreneurs are "attempting to 'make things right' through intentional strategic action" (Townsend, 2012, p. 127), creating a context that is conducive to the business.

It must be cautioned that agency theorists do not agree on whether the observation of 'outcomes' or 'effects' of agentic actions, i.e., *change*, should be drawn upon to evaluate agency

(see e.g., different opinions of Alkire, 2008 and Bandura, 1997). This study recognizes that the outcomes are not decisive for evaluating agency but only its consequence, because outcomes are mediated by structure as well (Bandura, 1997; Spencer & Doull, 2015). To better understand how agency and action are connected to structure in the context of entrepreneurship in developing countries or rural areas, it is helpful to theorize this relationship drawing on Refai et al. (2025).

Entrepreneurial Agency in Constrained Contexts

Refai et al. (2025) provide a more nuanced and productive conceptualization of agency and structure that relates to entrepreneurship and constrained contexts, thereby relevant to the second research question of this thesis. To a certain extent, constraints persist in all forms of entrepreneurship, because no context provides entrepreneurs with all favored resources and structures (ibid, p. 459). However, when comparing, for example, Silicon Valley with Nepal's remote areas, it becomes clear that constraints on entrepreneurship are relative (Refai et al., 2025, p. 459).

As Refai et al. (2025) define, constrained entrepreneurship happens

in contexts which present diverse and challenging structures – relative to other contexts or other positions in contexts – that constrain the ability of entrepreneurs to act, where such structures can be both external and/or internal [...] [thus] the ability of entrepreneurs to act and employ their agency becomes more challenging. (Refai et al., 2025, p. 460)

External structures refer to conditions which lie beyond an entrepreneur's control, for example, economic policies, or beyond their willingness to influence (p. 460). Meanwhile, internal structures concern entrepreneurs' personal dispositions and knowledge (ibid.). While agency is more difficult to employ within constraining structures, at the same time Refai et al. (2025) highlight the importance of agency to navigate these constraints. They define entrepreneurial agency as

a transformation of structures through entrepreneurial actions that preserve, modify or challenge those structures to achieve some valued outcome, including profit gaining, upward social mobility and social, environmental, cultural or community value. (Refai et al., 2025, p. 460)

This reflects both the action element of agency as well as the connection between structure and agency, specifically regarding constraints in entrepreneurship. Theorizing these constraints more concretely, Refai et al. (2025) distinguish between three types:

First, a constrained context can be one in which an entrepreneur is embedded within an external structure of relative scarcity, for example in rural areas. Here, entrepreneurs experience structural market, infrastructure or resource deficiencies, which need to be overcome through entrepreneurial agency (Refai et al., 2025). This can be connected to Nepal, where related constraints to agri-entrepreneurship have already been suggested (Chapter 2). Thus, the thesis's research question on how youth navigate these challenges could reveal more about entrepreneurial agency in a context of constraints. Theory suggests that the mobilization and repurposing of resources to overcome limitations are important for entrepreneurial agency (Refai et al., 2025). This can happen through creativity, resourcefulness, proactivity and resilience (*ibid.*). It can also be achieved through drawing on networks and communities, thereby expanding individual entrepreneurial agency to collectives (Refai et al., 2025).

A second type of constrained entrepreneurial agency refers to an entrepreneur's position in context (Refai et al., 2025). Societal structures can influence opportunities and entrepreneurs' experiences, for example when marginalized individuals cannot access opportunities that majority groups obtain (*ibid.*). In Nepal, this could relate to gender. Literature has indicated constraints on women's access to capital and land, as well as cultural and family expectations that oppose female entrepreneurship (Chaudhary, 2025, p. 30; Nepal & Poudel, 2024). It is therefore interesting to see from this research how young female participants are embedded in constrained positions within societal context and how they can still exert agency. Entrepreneurial agency in such contexts can manifest in the emancipation from constraints (Refai et al., 2025, p. 462).

Lastly, a third type of constraining structure concerns not objective, but subjective interpretation of contexts and opportunities (Refai et al., 2025). Here, entrepreneurial agency is about imaginative envisioning beyond limitations and "believe in overcoming constraints and the creation of a possible world through entrepreneurship" (Refai et al., 2025, p. 464).

Overall, Refai et al. (2025) assume that entrepreneurial agency in a constrained context has the greatest potential to generate transformational change (Refai et al., 2025). They call for studying the operationalization of agency in such contexts, which this thesis addresses through its second research question.

To conclude, the intention and action elements of youth agency combined with an understanding of entrepreneurial agency in constrained contexts provide a strong theoretical foundation for understanding youth agency in agri-entrepreneurship in Nepal - both in terms of youth motivations and how they navigate challenges.

4 Methodology

Next, the methodology, ethical and positionality considerations and limitations of this research will be discussed.

This study investigates youth agri-entrepreneurial trajectories and agency in Nepal. For this purpose, it employs a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis, as this provides the opportunity to gain a deep contextual understanding of young agri-entrepreneurs' experiences and subjective perspectives (Chambliss & Schutt, 2019; Hammet et al., 2015). These are overlooked by most studies that apply a quantitative approach in the fields of agri-entrepreneurship constraints in the Global South, as well as studies on youth entrepreneurial intentions and agency. First, the methodology will be discussed.

Preparation

To initially identify the research focus, a broad literature review on youth in agriculture and agri-entrepreneurship in Nepal and globally was conducted, revealing the underuse of the agency concept in research. This was followed by a scoping interview with a young agri-entrepreneur in Kathmandu, who provided an initial understanding of dynamics in this sector. This informal information was not integrated into data collection, but became a valuable source for developing the research questions and the interview guide.

In this study, individual young agri-entrepreneurs constitute the unit of analysis. The research chose semi-structured interviews as a data collection method, because this allows capturing youths' personal stories and subjective opinions.

Sampling

The research drew on nonprobability sampling methods. The first sampling criterion was Nepali nationality. The second criterion, age, was based on Nepal's definition of youth, understood as ages 18 to 35 in the recently revised National Youth Policy (Nepal News, 2025). However, until the amendment to the National Youth Council Act 2015, youth legally remain defined as those between 16 and 40 years in Nepal. Thus, sampling prioritized youth agri-entrepreneurs aged 18 to 35 (12 out of 14 interviewees), but still included two more youth under 40 years, as their

perspectives were deemed equally relevant. Third, participants should have founded (12 out of 14) or built on an existing family agri-business (2 out of 14), in line with the definition of agri-entrepreneurship (Chapter 2).

Since representativeness of the sample was not the major objective, availability sampling was used as a justifiable sampling strategy (Chambliss & Schutt, 2019). Potential participants were identified through networks of colleagues and friends, social media research, snowball sampling, or by approaching them at various farmers' markets in Kathmandu. In one district where data was collected, a local resource person provided contact to three youth agri-entrepreneurs.

Entrepreneurs from a variety of agribusiness types were interviewed (see Table 1 below), including youth in commercial farming, agro-tourism, agricultural training and trading. Agro-processors constituted the largest group. Agro-processing refers to ventures that transform agricultural and forest-based raw materials through value addition (Alam, 2021). The diversity of agri-business types in the sample allows capturing a wide range of youth experiences concerning agri-entrepreneurship. The sample further encompasses a diverse group of young agri-entrepreneurs in terms of gender, age and years spent in agri-entrepreneurship (see Table 1).

To safeguard the anonymity of participants, it was chosen not to publish a list regarding the place of business and caste of participants, but to only provide an overview of this additional diversity of the sample. Participants lived in rural, urban and peri-urban areas. For urban participants, their business was often still centered in a rural or peri-urban area, often the place of production or business registration. However, these participants stayed in a city, the point of sale, or regularly moved between areas. In total, participants belonged to six different castes, whereby the group of Brahmin was the largest (42,9%), and the other five were almost equally distributed. The sample included marginalized caste and indigenous community members. Due to the limited sample size, intersectionality and diversity, the findings cannot be generalized to other young agri-entrepreneurs in Nepal.

Table 1: Sample Characteristics

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	9	64,3%
	Female	5	35,7%
Age Group, in Years	23-25	4	28,6%
	26-30	4	28,6%
	31-35	4	28,6%
	36-39	2	14,3%
Business Type	Agro-Processing	7	50.0%
	Commercial Farming	4	28,6%
	Agro-Tourism	1	7,1%
	Agro-Training	1	7,1%
	Agro-Trading	1	7,1%
Years in Agri-Entrepreneurship	1-2	4	28,6%
	3-4	4	28,6%
	5-6	2	14,3%
	7-8	2	14,3%
	14	1	7,1%
	18	1	7,1%

Data Collection

The interview guide encompassed open-ended questions relating to the research questions and to understanding the overall context of youth in Nepal. The questionnaire was developed inductively instead of drawing on an existing theoretical framework. In total, 14 semi-structured interviews with young agri-entrepreneurs were conducted between December 2025 and February 2026, ranging between 25 and 60 minutes.

Data was personally collected in three regions: Western Nepal's Bardiya district, the capital Kathmandu, and in Kavrepalanchok district east of Kathmandu. However, the places of businesses go beyond these three regions, as some entrepreneurs from different places could be met in the capital and one interview was held online. Because of me not speaking Nepali, interviews were conducted in English when young participants were confident (11 out of 14). The remaining three interviews in Bardiya were realized with the help of an interpreter, who translated the questions and responses from English to Nepali and vice versa. Interviews with participants living in rural areas were conducted at their properties when visiting. The

interviews with urban-based agri-entrepreneurs were conducted in calm public cafés or at their business offices.

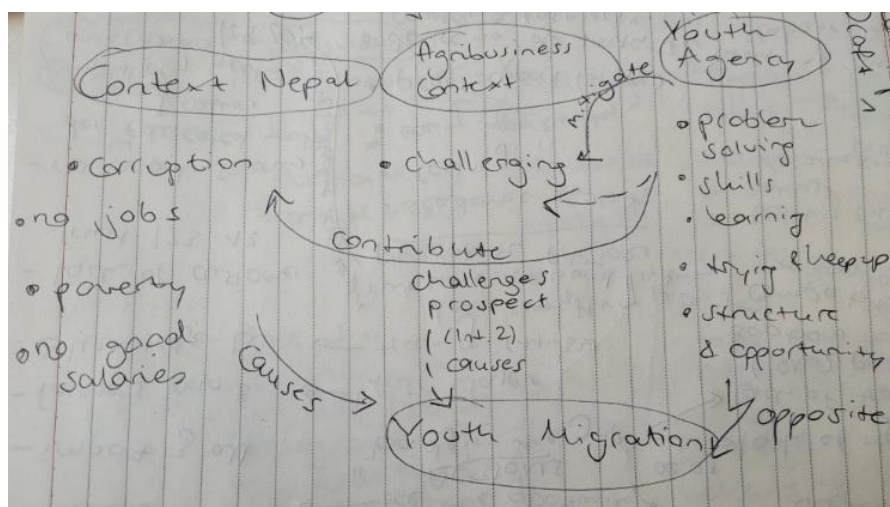
In line with the ethical guidelines of the Swedish Research Council, prior to the interview, participants were informed about the purpose of the research and the modalities of the interview. This included their voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity, the right to withdraw from the interview, and the possibility to skip questions. They were further informed about data processing, online transcription of the interview, and safe data storage on my personal computer. The participants provided written consent in accordance with the LUMID template. The interview was then recorded with my private phone. The data will be deleted after thesis submission. The interview guide served as orientation, but sometimes the order of questions was changed or additional questions were asked, emerging from the conversation. Most interviews lasted between 30 to 45 minutes. After the first three interviews, the questionnaire was slightly revised (Chambliss & Schutt, 2019).

Data was collected until saturation regarding the purpose of the research questions was reached. Finally, the English interviews were transcribed using the online tool Clipto, which participants were informed about and agreed to by signing the consent form. The data was permanently removed from the website after transcription. Regarding the three Nepalese interviews, it is relevant for translation that the young local interpreter was embedded in the local context himself. Therefore, to ensure the accuracy of translation to include only interviewees' perspectives in the data, it was decided to hire a second, neutral assistant to translate and transcribe the Nepalese recordings verbatim. Still, meaning can be lost in translating Nepali words and concepts into English.

Data Analysis

The thesis drew on the Qualitative Analysis Guide of Leuven (QUAGOL) framework by Dierckx de Casterlé et al. (2012) for data analysis. They argue that directly coding data in analysis software risks losing the contextual richness and the uniqueness of each interview, as well as missing the researcher's interpretation. Therefore, they propose a qualitative data analysis method that provides an iterative tool preceding the coding process. Applying QUAGOL, first the interview transcripts and respective fieldnotes were reviewed one by one, underlining appealing passages and commenting in the margins (Dierckx de Casterlé et al., 2012). From there, a conceptual scheme highlighting all ideas of the respective interview was developed, thereby creating a visual mind map of the interviewee's account (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Excerpt of Conceptual Interview Schemes, Based on QUAGOL Methodology



Subsequently, I wrote a narrative report that captured the overall story of the interview in relation to the research questions, and then developed a list of concepts (Dierckx de Casterlé et al., 2012). After completing this process for all interviews, the lists of concepts were combined and sorted. From this, different codes emerged that encompassed multiple inductively derived concepts from all the data (see Table 2) (Dierckx de Casterlé et al., 2012).

Table 2: Excerpt of Combination of Concepts into Codes, Based on QUAGOL Methodology

Overarching Code	Multiple Roles	Learning	Perseverance
Concepts from all Interviews	Multiple roles Effort Doing by oneself Initiative Involvement Active Proactive	Continuous learning Learning by doing Newcomer, learn everything Reading	Not give up Keep going Pull through Witnessing time Hard work Patience

These codes were then inserted into the NVivo software to code the interviews. A few additional codes became apparent during this process and were added to the list. For the analysis, codes were reviewed for their references to infer the findings and relate them to the theory. Also, the narrative reports helped reidentify important passages and interpret throughout the development of findings.

Positionality and Ethical Considerations

Development research processes occur within a sphere of power dimensions between informants and researchers, where the latter is often “in a position of power and privilege” (Hammet et al., 2015, p. 147). Therefore, it is important to reflect on positionality and ensure ethical fieldwork and data management.

My six-month internship at the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in Nepal brought me to the country shortly before the Gen Z movement happened in September 2025. My personal witnessing of the youth movement and revolution in Kathmandu shaped my personal understanding and interpretation of youth in Nepal, their voices, power, issues, constraints and the injustice they denounced. I, being a youth myself, was influenced by this experience in choosing the topic of youth and agency. Further, after the Gen Z revolution, youth agency became a common discourse at FAO Nepal, which additionally sparked my interest in the concept.

My positionality as an intern at FAO Nepal was also a relevant aspect to consider during the data-collection phase. For transparency reasons, I disclosed to participants that I worked at FAO Nepal, since my affiliation with the organization might have influenced their openness to participate. I conveyed, both written and orally, that the purpose of the research is solely academic, independent of FAO Nepal, and that their participation in the study was voluntary. Working at FAO Nepal allowed me to collect data in Bardiya, a place I visited during a work field mission. However, I collected the data outside of beneficiary communities and independently, without FAO colleagues, to ensure a more neutral environment. My positionality as a student from Germany also impacts data analysis and interpretation, because I have only lived in Nepal for six months and bring different assumptions and lenses of interpretation.

During the interviews, I did not initiate talking about the Gen Z movement myself, since this topic may have been sensitive, both emotionally and politically, for some young research participants. However, multiple participants themselves began discussing the Gen Z movement when connecting to the current youth context in Nepal. This flowed into data analysis, providing authentic contemporary understandings of youth while ensuring anonymity.

Youth agency as a theoretical lens can bring ethical risks when it becomes a normative concept of interpretation. Agentic behavior in youth studies is often understood as going against power structures or social patterns, for example behavior contrary to the majority of other youth (Coffey & Farrugia, 2014). Depicting youth agency as power resistance could entail portraying

non-resisting youth as lacking agency (Coffey & Farrugia, 2014). This would neglect other youths' efforts to shape their lives within existing conditions and impose normative expectations on young people, even when those expectations do not relate to them (ibid.). Thus, it should be explicitly clarified that from this thesis, no conclusions can be inferred about other youths' agency.

Limitations

Due to the limited time available for data collection during the then-ongoing internship, the sample is biased toward youth agri-entrepreneurs who were more readily accessible from Kathmandu in terms of location. Therefore, and due to limited sample size, the findings cannot be generalized to other youth agri-entrepreneurs in Nepal, but reflect selected voices. This is also due to the qualitative research design, which reflects context-dependent insights and does not intend generalizability.

Some, but not all, female participants indicated gender-based constraints to agri-entrepreneurship. More women entrepreneurs would have needed to be interviewed to gain a more in-depth picture about gender constraints and young women's agency specifically. This can be addressed by further research.

Moreover, the findings showed the diverse and personal motivations of youth to found agri-businesses. One could argue that in an interview with a foreign researcher, participants might emphasize 'altruistic' motivations for entrepreneurship more strongly than intentions to gain personal wealth. Here, the circumstantiality of data must be considered to assess credibility (Tracy, 2010).

A theoretical limitation of choosing agency as a lens is the lack of theoretical agreement in academia on the concept of agency and its ontological meaning. With regard to youth studies, Coffey and Farrugia (2014) consider agency a 'black box' due to heuristic meanings across different conceptual frameworks. This research does not intend to and cannot resolve these theoretical issues. Instead, it draws on selected theoretical aspects of agency which could be inductively inferred from the data.

5 Findings

In the following, the findings on young agri-entrepreneurs' trajectories and youth agency will be presented. The chapter will first discuss youths' motivations to engage in agri-entrepreneurship, relating to the first research question. It will then continue with the action element regarding the second research question on navigating challenges.

5.1 Youth Motivations to Engage in Agri-Entrepreneurship

An important aspect of agency is intention, which constitutes the beginning of purposive pathways for youth in agri-entrepreneurship. Motivations are the triggers that prompt youth to exert agency in developing an agri-business. The findings revealed that youth motivations are diverse. The following results do not apply to all participants, but rather highlight various patterns observed among different groups of young agri-entrepreneurs. These patterns are *embeddedness and belonging, income and migration, preservation of heritage, women's empowerment, change in larger spheres of influence, responsibility and opportunity*. These will be examined in the following.

Place, Embeddedness and Belonging

For many youths, motivation to pursue agri-entrepreneurship was driven by personal embeddedness in a rural community and an emotional connection to the place, even when they had lived elsewhere for a long time. Belonging translated into motivations on three different scales, regarding own lives, family and community.

First, connection to place shaped youths' desire to lead their lives in a way they valued through agri-entrepreneurship. For example, after a participant lost his overseas job in Qatar during the Covid-19 pandemic and returned to his village in Nepal, he had a crucial realization of belonging: "When I was staying some time here, so I thought that [...] I was born in a nature place like this. And I was not born to stand there, but to do something here". This drove his motivation to develop a farm stay, as a way to create a livelihood for himself to reconnect with the place of origin. This reflects the youth agency definition, youths' desire to drive change in their own lives. Second, some participants grew up within family agribusinesses. This embeddedness shaped their desire to preserve the family legacy and stay connected to the land they would inherit one day, driving their motivation to get involved in existing agri-businesses. Third, multiple participants entered agri-entrepreneurship motivated to contribute to their community. Growing up in a rural context, many youths understood the issues of their

communities. For example, one participant explained, “First, me myself being the son of the farmers, I know the hardship and pain of farming. So, you know, I just wanted to create something for my society”. This indicates youths’ desire to drive change in their communities, an intention behind exerting agency through agri-entrepreneurship. The multiple ways in which participants were motivated to contribute to communities and families through agri-entrepreneurship will be discussed in more detail subsequently.

Income and Migration Dynamics

Several participants discussed how they envisioned agri-entrepreneurship as an opportunity to generate additional income for their farming communities and families. A main problem in agriculture described by participants is the “huge margins” of retailers, while respective farmers receive little return for their products. Especially female farmers would get “financially abused by the aggregators”, as drastically assessed by one participant. This aligns with the constraints to smallholder farming identified in Himalayan Pakistan and other developing countries, considering farmers’ limited bargaining capacity due to market exclusion or insufficient market information (Raza et al., 2025, p. 16). Multiple young agri-entrepreneurs tried to challenge these power dynamics. Motivated to become independent of middlemen and to contribute to fair incomes for farming communities, several participants strove to establish direct market links. This reflects entrepreneurial agency (Refai et al., 2025), because youth aim to transform structures in agriculture, striving to achieve some positive effect for their communities. For instance as detailed by a youth from a tea farming community, by creating a tea brand to enable selling the community’s tea directly to customers, this young agri-entrepreneur envisioned the farmers becoming “more sustainable, they get more influence, and they can become more financially independent. So that they don't have to leave the village”.

Likewise, to counter the dynamics of rural outmigration was a motivation for various other youths as well. Rural participants across Nepal reported “there is no youth in the village, everyone is living in the city and abroad” or “Overall the men in our household are away“. In this context, agri-entrepreneurship motivated youth because of its potential to contribute to communities and families as a way to continue life in rural areas. Explicitly, a commercial banana farmer explained: “I wanted to be able to provide employment because I wanted my relatives and friends to work with me locally rather than going abroad for employment”. Similarly, a livestock farmer expressed her motivation to generate additional income for her family, hoping that the profit from her agri-business could allow her husband to return from overseas work in Malaysia. Here again, youth trying to counter *structures* of rural migration,

which they experience in their context, signals entrepreneurial agency as theorized by Refai et al. (2025, p. 460).

Together, these findings suggest that youth were frequently motivated to engage in agri-entrepreneurship because of their desire to contribute to their families or rural communities by generating additional income. Thereby, rural participants often aimed to support the possibility of continuing life in rural areas. Youth agency is reflected here in youths' desire to drive change through agri-entrepreneurship.

Preservation of Local Heritage

The interview data further revealed the desire to preserve Nepali heritage as another motivation for youths to engage in agri-entrepreneurship. Some participants discussed how society “lost interest and lost the connection” to traditional rural practices and nowadays often devalued them as a “poor people’s job”. Meanwhile, youths understood that society celebrates imported food products but lacks awareness of local products. Young participants often observed this development with mixed feelings. This motivated some youths to promote the recognition of local agricultural heritage through entrepreneurship. For example, one participant’s motivation was to create societal awareness of indigenous spices through agri-entrepreneurship. Another was motivated by a strong desire to preserve their rural community’s traditional crafts by helping artisans earn income through the business, thereby gaining social recognition. This shows that the desire for heritage preservation can motivate youths to exert agency in agri-entrepreneurship.

Women’s Empowerment in Communities

Another recurring motivation was contributing to rural women. Some participants reported the issues of gender-based violence in rural areas and gender norms that constrained women from earning any or a fair income. These accounts echo earlier evidence on gender issues in Nepal (Chaudhary, 2025; Nepal & Poudel, 2024). Observing such gender inequalities, some participants were driven by the idea to contribute to women’s empowerment through agri-entrepreneurship. One participant, for example, began with an intention to become an entrepreneurship role model for rural women. Another youth was encouraged to provide for her mother: “I have to do something specifically for my mother so she can earn for herself”. The present findings suggest that youth entrepreneurial agency can intend to empower other women in their agency, rather than just detaching themselves from constrained positions in context (Refai et al., 2025) based on gender.

Change in Larger Spheres of Influence

The definition of youth agency further includes youths' desire to drive change in their larger spheres of influence. Findings showed that youths' motivations sometimes indeed went beyond their communities, families or own lives. Some expressed their motivation to drive change in the Nepalese society and economy. Two participants, for example, mentioned the need to generate tax revenues, enhance the national economy and create employment by engaging in agri-entrepreneurship. A youth entrepreneur with a large-scale meat business expressed: "Actually, I have to do business. [...] Because actually I have to contribute to my society through employment". These findings show that the definition of youth agency is suitable to make sense of agri-entrepreneurial motivations. Additional motivations relatable to larger scales of influence were often based on participants' personal interests and consciousness of specific problems in Nepal. This included individuals' intentions to address environmental issues in agriculture through a business solution and to promote population health through their innovative agri-processed products.

Feelings of Responsibility

A recurring pattern throughout different motivations was the feeling of personal responsibility, which has shaped youths' agri-entrepreneurial agency. Often, participants were driven by the feeling that nobody would take a specific role if not them. For instance, next to valuing the family's agri-business, one youth also thought, "if not me, who would take over this?" For a female livestock farmer, who lived in a rural context where all men have migrated away, entrepreneurship seems to be a responsibility and necessity: "As women, we are managing the household through income earned from entrepreneurship. If we do this, this helps us to run the household from that money and save the money earned from abroad".

These feelings of responsibility could also be connected to participants' perception of urgency to act. The youth motivated to preserve their community heritage was driven by the thought "if we don't do it now, I think it's gonna go away, and no one's gonna continue". These findings suggest that youths' perceived personal responsibility for their family or community also drives them into agri-entrepreneurship. When asked about their motivation, some participants even referred to responsibilities in their larger spheres of influence, such as the need to minimize the institutional void or to contribute to societal employment. Regarding the connection of responsibility and agency, Hieronymi (2022) proposes a form of agency where ethical reasoning of what is important or worth doing drives consideration. The ability to answer to these reasons can become agentic behavior.

Grasping Opportunities

Agri-entrepreneurship can also be driven by the desire to capture available opportunities. Strong agreement among participants across business types and locations was their perception that Nepal provides lots of opportunities, which was explicitly mentioned by two-thirds of participants. This is an interesting finding in light of the often-described youth perspective of lack of opportunities in the country (Gnawali, 2026; Sapkota, 2026). Participants specifically referred to abundant natural resources as well as opportunities in agriculture and through innovation. One agro-processor highlighted the scarcity that persists in Nepal, but instead of seeing it as a push factor toward outmigration, his mindset is different: In the “context of Nepal, there are lots of scarcities. What I believe is, you as an entrepreneur always need to see opportunity in those scarcities. So that's what I have been seeing”.

The findings suggest that entrepreneurial intentions can be shaped by a motivation to grasp opportunities. Another participant for example was motivated by a realization of a way in which Nepal's natural resources are underutilized: “So we see the gap, and we thought we can do something in it [...]. Nobody was doing it and that means there is an opportunity. You can be a first mover for that”. This and similar data show that the realization of business opportunities in Nepal's agriculture sector can shape motivations to get involved in agri-entrepreneurship, aligning with entrepreneurship theories (Murphy & Marvel, 2007).

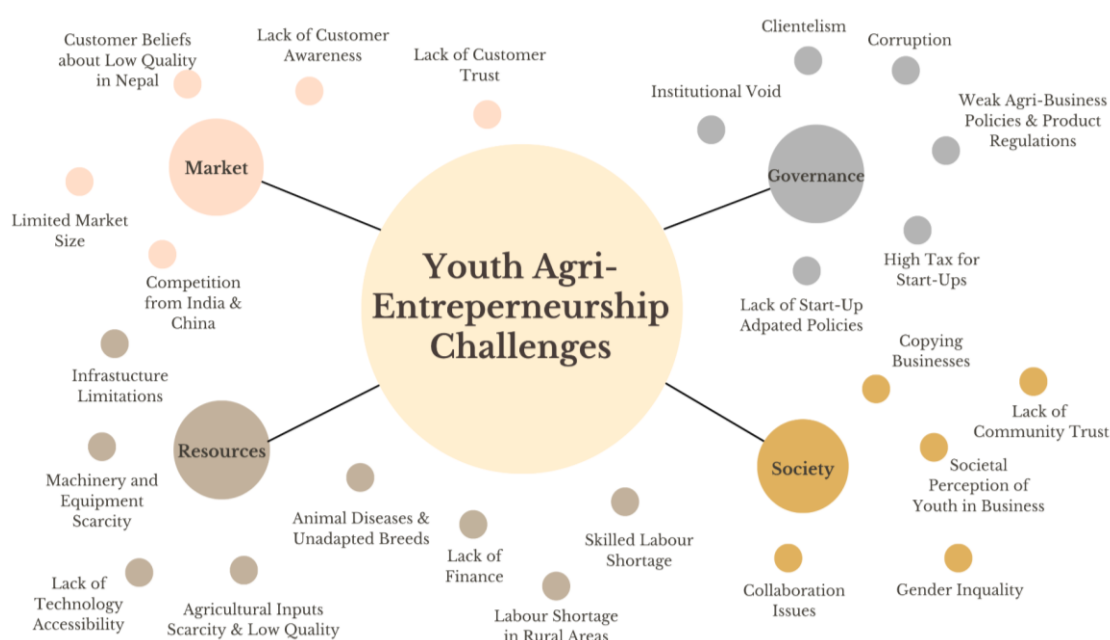
To conclude, the findings reveal that youths' agri-entrepreneurial trajectories often started from a desire to drive change in their rural community, family, own life or larger sphere of influence in Nepal. Youths' motivations often relate to development concerns, although not framed by participants that way. Common motives included the generation of additional income, the creation of employment and countering migration dynamics in rural communities. Youths' embeddedness in local context and observation of structures in agriculture and migration all influence their motivations to engage in agri-entrepreneurship. The findings also showed how a triggering realization, feeling of personal responsibility or seeing an opportunity shaped youths' motivations. These intentions constitute the first element of youth agency, providing the foundational rationale for youth to act in agri-entrepreneurship, striving to drive change and transform structures by developing an agri-business.

5.2 Navigating Challenges and Constraints – Youth Action and Capacities

After examining motivations relating to the intention element of youth agency, in the following, how youth navigated challenges and constraints throughout agri-business trajectories will be analyzed.

Participants discussed a wide range of challenges they experience with their agri-business, which have been repeated multiple times. The challenges were found to be attributable to four areas: Market, Resources, Governance and Society. The graphic depicts the most common reported challenges young participants faced in agri-entrepreneurship, distributed to these four areas, distinguished by color (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Common Challenges Reported by Young Agri-Entrepreneurs in Nepal



Youths' extensive report of challenges suggests that Nepal's agri-business context is facing constraints. Challenges in Nepal echo those constraints identified in other countries of the Global South, including, but not limited to, inadequate road infrastructure, challenges in obtaining sufficient and qualitative agricultural inputs, corruption, and lack of agri-business specific policies. A constrained context in which agribusinesses are embedded requires entrepreneurial agency to overcome challenges and structures (Refai et al., 2025). Six patterns of how youth navigated these challenges were identified: *Peer support, problem-solving, multiple roles & doing themselves, active learning, perseverance, patience, passion, and persistence*. These will be discussed separately in the following chapters (5.2.1-5.2.6) to answer the second research question. Thereby, the analysis will expand on some specific constraints, using them as examples to analyse how youth navigated.

5.2.1 Peer Support

The first relevant finding on youth navigation of challenges in agri-entrepreneurship is the role of peer support. Around two-thirds of participants have not started or managed their agri-business alone, but enjoyed the support of a family member (mothers, sisters, wives, or the whole family), a partner, or business partners. This strengthened their agency to unfold.

At the beginning of agri-entrepreneurship trajectories, the translation of ideas into action was often crucially supported by peers. For example, one participant relied on the sister's support to initiate the agri-business: "The idea was mine, but I just had the idea. I had no idea how to execute it. She knew how to make things happen. So we work together". Similarly, another agro-processor felt the desire to act for a long time, but had no concrete idea how. Thus, the trigger for execution depended on his partner, who came up with an idea and the courage to say, "let's just try it". These findings demonstrate that peer support can be an essential factor in navigating the challenge of establishing an agri-business. This is articulated in the reflection: "If I didn't have support from her, like mentally, emotionally, like anything, I don't think this would have ever happened. That would be just a dream all the time". This highlights the social nature of youth agency (Jeffrey, 2012).

Further, working in a team when establishing an agri-business helped some participants to bear the risk together. Additionally, they highlighted the benefits of bringing diverse skills and knowledge to develop the business, which are useful for navigating the challenges throughout agri-business trajectories. Together, these findings indicate that peer support can increase youths' abilities and capacities to act.

While managing agri-businesses, findings suggest that navigating constraints can unfold through leveraging networks, again highlighting the interpersonal dimension of youth agency. For example, one banana farmer, who could not find qualified technicians to hire, was still able to progress by drawing on a personal network to agricultural institutes: "In case of any difficulties, I go there without any thought and share with my friend. They have been supporting me with the solutions". Other commercial farmers equally highlighted the role of strong networks, for example to ensure a stable connection to the market. This confirms that entrepreneurial embeddedness in local networks can allow youths to mobilize resources, thereby exerting agency (Refai et al., 2025). Overall, this evidence confirms that many youths understand agency as cultivating interdependencies (Jeffrey, 2012).

To conclude, these findings underscore the importance of recognizing the interpersonal dimension of youth agency (Jeffrey, 2012), as it was a vital aspect of some youths' experiences of agri-entrepreneurial trajectories. Peer support enabled youths to act on their intentions for agri-entrepreneurship, exert agency together, and navigate the challenges of establishing and managing their agri-business in Nepal.

5.2.2 Problem-Solving

The second identified characteristic of navigating challenges was problem-solving. Some participants highlighted that businesses must solve the most pressing problems of Nepalese society, thereby indicating agri-entrepreneurship as a means for youth to drive change.

Participants highlighted the centrality of continuous problem-solving throughout their agri-business trajectories amidst ongoing challenges. One agro-processor reflected on how seeing the business's challenges like a video game, where they have to repeatedly overcome barriers to reach the next level. Another youth explained, “we just picked up the problem and try to solve it”. This indicates youths' entrepreneurial agency in their efforts and action to ‘make things right’ (Townsend, 2012). Concrete evidence for this can be found in examples of how youths navigated specific challenges through problem-solving, such as human resource and market constraints.

This and the following chapters are organized in a way to show how identified patterns of capacities (e.g., problem-solving) appear across different constraints (e.g., resource and market constraints in this chapter). The structure is intended to highlight the capacities youth draw on, by presenting examples of using them across constraints. Thus, it must not be misunderstood that one capacity presents the only way in which youth navigated a specific constraint, since constraints were navigated through a variety and combination of capacities and strategies.

Resource Constraints – Skilled Labor Shortage

First, multiple participants across business types faced major problems in finding skilled labor to advance their agri-enterprises. This echoes a common constraint to agri-entrepreneurship in developing countries (Raza et al., 2026). Informants explained the skilled labor shortage in Nepal with youth outmigration from rural areas (see Chapter 5.1) and additional reasons. For one, since educated youth in urban and rural areas “are not finding a job according to their studies [...], they have to go outside” for overseas labor migration. This brain drain Nepal experiences, which Bhusal (2025) has already described, causes challenges for youth agri-

businesses. One explains, “to our business, it's very difficult because we are losing the technical expertise to the outside world”. For another, some participants perceived “the education system is a big, big drawback in our country”. Multiple youth criticized the lack of practical skills and critical thinking taught in education, adding to the constraint of skilled labor shortage.

In consequence, many young agri-entrepreneurs experience the challenge of finding (skilled) labor. They have applied different strategies to address the problem creatively. Multiple participants actively trained their employees or partners, such as communities and cooperatives, to build capacity. Some entrepreneurs also provided internship opportunities to young people, thereby strategically training them and creating a qualified workforce. This exemplifies how youths have mitigated a problem through action and agency, transforming their human resources and thereby creating a more conducive context for their business (Haines & Townsend, 2014; Townsend, 2012). However, sometimes these structural constraints are also too difficult to overcome for individuals, which will be examined in the discussion (Chapter 6).

Market Constraints

A second major challenge for most participants concerned marketing. Both commercial farmers and agro-processors struggled with strong competition from cheaper and large-volume Indian and Chinese products. Additionally, multiple agro-processors described the problem that customers “do not believe that nice products exist in Nepal”, thus lacking trust to purchase youths’ agri-business products. To navigate these challenges, many participants adopted a problem-solving mindset. Some became creative in marketing their products, for example, two participants distributed free samples to convince customers. One agro-processor stood out in social media marketing by showing how to cook with the product. Another youth trained students in writing research papers, so that their scientific output could be used to build customer trust in the young entrepreneurs’ product. This demonstrates the use of entrepreneurial agency to create an environment favorable to business survival (Townsend, 2012), and how youth through action try to solve the problems they faced.

To conclude, youths' embeddedness in a challenging context, beyond skilled labor shortage and difficult market conditions, requires exerting agency through action to continuously solve problems and navigate constraints.

5.2.3 Multiple Roles and Doing Themselves

Next, youth were found to navigate diverse challenges through taking on multiple roles. The study's findings show that young agri-entrepreneurs often need to be active beyond the scope of business. Many participants explicitly mentioned that they have to “look after everything” in the context of a small business in Nepal and that they “are not bound by one role”. This required their continuous commitment, effort, and adaptability to switch between roles. This pattern was identified across different challenges, including resource, societal and governance constraints.

Resource Constraints

Resource constraints in Nepal required youths' agency to navigate scarcities through their capacity to create on their own. Participants explained facing challenges of machinery, equipment and technology shortage with their agri-business. One youth, for instance, overcame the lack of machinery by using his technical skills and network to finally construct the required machines himself. Thus, pre-existing skills play a beneficial role in navigating challenges in a resource-constrained agri-entrepreneurial context, giving youths the ability to ‘do themselves’. Further evidence for this was found, for example, in another participant's experience of insufficient laboratory capacity to test their product. They navigated this challenge through taking the role of conducting the tests themselves: “We just wanted to make it work. So I switched from business perspective to the research mindset and we just developed protocols or the testing parameters”. Findings like this show how youth take up additional roles to navigate resource constraints. They act on their pre-existing skills from education or work experience, which are relevant factors shaping effective agency (Small, 2022).

Societal Constraints

Another consistently reported challenge participants faced concerned rural communities' hesitation to collaborate with young agri-entrepreneurs. This poses a societal constraint. Participants explained this problem as stemming from rural communities' lack of trust or knowledge, skepticism toward innovation, or strong opposing power dynamics exerted by agricultural aggregators. Consequently, communities often did not engage with youth as hoped at the beginning of their agri-business trajectories. To navigate the challenge, some participants initially took production into their own hands. For instance, a couple of entrepreneurs adapted by processing the agri-product themselves at home, thereby demonstrating their capacity for action. Through this initiative, the youths could step by step convince family and community members. This exemplifies youth agency in agri-entrepreneurship, as participants demonstrated

their desire and ability to act despite constraints. Through their commitment to manage independently, youth could pursue their intentions by exerting their agency.

Governance Constraints

Moreover, several participants related the need to handle things on their own to their personal views on governance. They expressed that poor governance, corruption and an institutional void disturb their business and pose structural obstacles to the sector and young people in general. Participants' own words show this most firmly: "There are a lot of challenges, especially the institutional void. You have to figure out everything. You want to do business, you not stick to business". Another criticized, "there is no proper government agencies who can provide you legal background. [...] You have to fight for everything". This indicates that youth agri-entrepreneurship in Nepal faces governance issues and institutional constraints. Participants navigate this by putting in more effort on their own side. Their descriptions reflected the underlying reasons for the Gen Z movement and participants' embeddedness in this contemporary context.

Delving deeper into governance constraints, one of the biggest critiques of the Gen Z movement in Nepal was corruption (Gnawali, 2026). Multiple participants experienced this reality with their agri-businesses. Two participants reported trying to convince the local government of the importance of their agri-business initiatives to receive support, "not only for myself but for the whole village and for the community". Both did not succeed, attributing it to their perception that local government would be "more based on commission projects [...] They do nothing but only corruption". The second participant confirmed this by explaining, "it's just all corruption at the end. You have to beg them or do something in return to be able to get this. We're just not trying to do that". A third rural agri-entrepreneur understood "you got to have the connection with political parties to get the funds of the government".

Some youth navigated these governance constraints by shouldering burdens alone. For example, one participant reflects: "Even my mom told me, 'If you connect with that guy, he will give you funds.' I'm like 'no, I think I'm good'. I don't want to be into this party politics bullshit". Instead, this agri-entrepreneur took financing in own hands, working multiple jobs while developing the business to be able to reinvest the salaries. Others even concluded to have to 'do on their own': "If they're not supporting the ideas that you create, then it's not good to keep after them. So I just ignore and do my job and work ahead". One participant concludes: "This Gen Z revolution would not have happened if the government was good enough and capable enough". This exposes the connection of youth political agency in Nepal, which stood up

against corruption and misgovernance, and youth agency in agri-entrepreneurship to navigate governance constraints, because young agri-entrepreneurs are embedded in the same context of Nepal.

To conclude, young agri-entrepreneurs in Nepal are not just business managers. They have to take multiple roles and do things by themselves, thereby exerting entrepreneurial agency to navigate a context constrained in different ways, including resource, societal and governance-wise. This required effort and adaptability, and benefited from the prior skills youths brought to agri-entrepreneurship.

5.2.4 Active Learning

Being able to solve problems or do things themselves to navigate challenges requires youths to be skilled and knowledgeable in their field. In this context, an additional pattern was identified: Almost two-thirds of participants mentioned they were actively learning. This indicates the importance of learning for youth agency in agri-entrepreneurship.

Participants perceived that learning played a key role in increasing their initial confidence, being taken seriously by others and progressing with their agri-business. An agro-processor reflected on establishing the agri-enterprise: “The thing that made me stand out in the crowd was that I used to read a lot. Because I was a very insecure person, I had no business in agriculture, I had no idea. [...] So I used to read about those products”. Similarly, another participant reported studying in the evenings to learn everything about tea production and trade. The youth considered this knowledge essential to their business strategy and self-confidence, because of having no prior experience in this field. Likewise, another established a poultry farm without “having any idea in meat business”, beginning by joining some training. These and similar findings indicate that pre-existing skills or education in agriculture must not always determine youths’ ability to found agri-businesses. Also ‘newcomers’ with no prior knowledge were able to develop agri-businesses, supported by their intentional action to learn intensively. However, the ability to establish a business or learn is, of course, a matter of additional intersectional or structural factors, such as finance or literacy.

Equally, for youths with pre-existing relevant knowledge (both tacit knowledge from growing up on farms or educational knowledge), continuing learning was essential to their ability to overcome challenges of their agri-businesses. One agro-processor taking advanced training expressed this directly: “You know, if you want to do something in Nepal, you have to have such kind of mindset”. This implies that youth action of learning is also a response to the

structural constraints in Nepal, enabling youth to overcome challenges through additional knowledge and skills.

To conclude, youth agri-entrepreneurial trajectories were mostly accompanied by participants' decision and action to learn actively. This connects to youth agency because participants intentionally made efforts to increase their abilities. They were driven by the awareness that they needed these abilities to navigate the challenges of establishing and managing an agri-business, and achieve the goals they desired.

5.2.5 Perseverance, Patience and Passion

The following two chapters will discuss youth perseverance (5.2.5) and persistence (5.2.6). Perseverance describes remaining active despite a delay in achieving one's goals, while persistence refers to continuing action despite opposition.

The findings suggest that perseverance, patience and passion were important factors for youth to navigate the challenges of agri-entrepreneurship. Multiple participants reported that agri-entrepreneurship required their continuous commitment, being willing to dedicate their time to a step-by-step evolution of the business and persevere through longer phases through patience.

Some challenges youth could only navigate through patience. For example, the challenge of a lack of community trust required patience as a slow mindset change unfolded, until participants could collaborate with communities as hoped. Further, most participants highlighted the importance of their patience in persevering until achieving initial success with their agri-business, with waiting times ranging from 2.5 months to 5 years to break into a market.

During that effort-straining process, again, peer support can be essential for youth to persevere through the difficulties. For example, one participant developing the business with his partner explained: "There's been a time when I'm like 'I'm done. I don't want to do it anymore'. And then we just keep pushing each other". This shows how the identified youth capacities are interconnected, with perseverance, for example, strengthened by peer support. This is also reflected in theory, which recognizes that because of relationships, youths "are able to endure hardships" (Jeffrey, 2012, p. 250).

This and other participants connected patience and perseverance to their passion: "Because this was our passion project right. And then all I wanted to do is to support my community". Equally, another youth deemed his passion for contributing to the farmers' community his greatest strength. Making no sales initially, he reflected: "If I was passionless, patienceless, then I would

have left that business. But I decided that, someday the people will come”. Such perseverance stemmed from participants’ belief that they had to make the business work at any cost.

Thus, findings suggest that passion to realize intentions plays an important role for young agri-entrepreneurs to navigate challenges patiently and persevere through difficulties. These findings align with earlier research that an entrepreneur’s passion can help them continue with a business (Haines & Townsend, 2014). Since participants did not give up facing obstacles, they demonstrated their entrepreneurial agency (Haines & Townsend, 2014).

5.2.6 Persistence

Finally, the last pattern identified was persistence. This seemed particularly relevant in light of two societal constraints: gender and older generations' aspirations for youth.

Societal Constraints

The findings provided insight into gender and its influence on youth agency in agri-entrepreneurship. From the young women’s accounts, it can be inferred that female gender can place entrepreneurs in a constrained position in context, adopting the perspective from Refai et al.’s (2025) theory (see Chapter 3). It must be highlighted that the five women’s experiences and perceptions of gender as a constraint differed. Some talked more, others less about it, while one did not address the topic. This suggests that the extent and perceptions of gender constraints are connected to intersectional factors, like family and location.

Female participants pointed to a societal gender hierarchy and to difficulties for women in many areas, including agri-entrepreneurship. Two participants shared their experience with a challenging societal mindset on female entrepreneurship in more detail. According to them, in society, “they don’t want to see women doing greater things, or they believe women could not achieve those things”. This kind of mindset can put additional barriers to young female agri-entrepreneurs. One participant shares her experience with a government office: “I went there with the whole documents. Everything was prepared [...]. And the officer did not even look at me. He rejected the things, and he was like, 'No, that's not going to happen’”. When she returned with a man later, “that guy didn't even glance once at the documents. He signed it right away. And he was just talking to that guy who had no idea of my business”.

In navigating the challenges of a constrained position within the societal context, female participants demonstrated persistence, firmly continuing despite such opposition. One reflects for example, “I kept on working without listening to anyone. That was the simple thing. People

kept on telling”. This indicates young women’s capacity for persistence, which was important for continuing action in agri-entrepreneurship and, thus, for youth agency. These findings are similar to those of Atshan et al.’s (2024) study in the Middle East, which highlighted persistence, dedication, and refusal to give up as central success factors for women’s entrepreneurship.

It can be added that societal opposition was not only experienced by women, though. Data from all genders suggest that family members and older generations have opposed youths’ agri-business intentions, which participants attribute to societal mindset toward business. One entrepreneur recalls it was

very very challenging even to think of doing business from societal perspective. [...] I was not confident with saying that I am doing my business. I used to say, 'Oh, we used to train people. [...] My mother literally cried seeing me working in the factory.

Another participant confirms such societal constraints on youth in entrepreneurship, assessing: “The generation before us, they don't value this”. Youths explained that parents aspired for children to pursue university education and/or migrate abroad, not only for financial reasons but also as a status symbol for the family. Therefore, multiple participants experienced opposition from family members. Participants navigated these difficult situations through persistence. One male youth remembers: “My uncle he's like, 'No, why are you doing that? Go study'. And I'm like 'This is my studying'. And I never gave up”. For another, the capacity to persist societal and family opposition was also crucially supported by a peer. Confronted with self-doubt because of the backlash, this participant reflects: “But still I pulled through because my sister who was with me, she actually believed in the idea”. This again demonstrates how peer support can be vital to youth agency, highlighting its social nature as theorized by Jeffrey (2012).

To conclude, youth persistence to challenging gender norms and societal and family opposition to entrepreneurship clearly demonstrates the exertion of agency, because they have continued to pursue their goals despite these backlashes (Haines & Townsend, 2014). Here, entrepreneurial agency manifests as the emancipation from constraints (Refai et al., 2025).

6 Discussion

This study researched youth agri-entrepreneurs' experiences and agency in Nepal. 14 qualitative interviews with youth agri-entrepreneurs from diverse backgrounds and business types were conducted. The investigation focused on youth motivations to engage in agri-entrepreneurship and how they navigated the challenges and constraints of establishing and managing an agri-business. This informed the main research question, on how youth experienced their agri-entrepreneurship trajectories and what can be inferred about youth agency. Based on a thorough analysis of the data and relevant literature, the following discussion should transcend the previous report of principal findings.

The results emphasize how young agri-entrepreneurs' experiences, motivations, challenges and agency are all embedded in the structural context of Nepal. Although youth trajectories and motivations are individual and diverse, shaped by personal background, different business types and locations in rural and urban areas; their overall experience of agri-entrepreneurship constraints and understanding of contexts regarding youth, agriculture and migration was largely consistent.

Youth Motivations to Engage in Agri-Entrepreneurship

The research found that youth trajectories in agri-entrepreneurship often began with an awareness of agricultural or societal issues in their contexts, thus motivations were shaped by embeddedness and experiencing challenging structures. Youth agency is reflected in their consideration of these issues and consequential action, intending to change circumstances through agri-entrepreneurship. Young agri-entrepreneurs desire to challenge the locally experienced structures of migration, farmers' low revenues, gender constraints or heritage loss. They often envisioned agri-entrepreneurship as a way to support their communities, families, and society through generating income, direct sourcing, and creating employment. Thereby, some hoped to provide an alternative to rural outmigration. The intention to challenge and transform external structures to achieve some valued effect reflects entrepreneurial agency, as defined by Refai et al. (2025, p. 460). The fact that participants did not refer to intentions of generating personal wealth can be contextualized with the fact that agri-entrepreneurship entails large risks and limited probability of success, compared to other career or migration choices. Overall, it can be concluded that youth desired to drive change through agri-entrepreneurship – in their own lives, families, communities, and larger spheres of influence – which reflects the intention element of youth agency in agri-entrepreneurship.

Constraints to Agri-Entrepreneurship in Nepal

The study further investigated youth capacities to navigate challenges and constraints in agri-entrepreneurship, a largely unexplored question in existing literature, which neglects youth agency, the ability to act despite challenges.

Overall, the data highlighted the multiple challenges young agri-entrepreneurs face in Nepal, on *resource*, *market*, *governance*, and *societal* levels. Youth reported these challenges across business types and regions. Regarding *resource* constraints, most commonly, youth experienced (skilled) labor shortage, finance challenges, scarcity of quality agricultural inputs and machinery, and road infrastructure limitations. On the *market* level, the most frequent challenges were strong competition from India and China, a lack of customer trust in Nepali products, and the absence of enforced intellectual property protection, which leads to the copying of youths' business ideas. This last point adds to *governance* constraints, including an institutional void, corruption, clientelism and lack of government support perceived by multiple, but not all, participants. Finally, *societal* constraints encompass opposing aspirations by parents and older generations to youth agri-entrepreneurship, a lack of community trust to collaborate with youth entrepreneurs and innovate, and unequal gender norms that impose additional barriers for female entrepreneurs.

These findings align with and add to an emerging body of scholarship that identifies and discusses constrained agri-entrepreneurship in developing countries and rural areas (Raza et al., 2025, 2026). Relative to other countries, the constraints on youth agri-entrepreneurship in Nepal are significant, suggesting that this context can be viewed through the lens of *constrained entrepreneurship* (Refai et al., 2025).

Navigating Challenges to Establishing and Managing an Agri-Business

In such contexts, existing literature has focused on informing policy, but has rarely considered youths' room to maneuver through agency. This thesis contributes a new analysis of action and capacities of young agri-entrepreneurs, demonstrating how youth agency can operationalize against constraints.

The results highlight how young agri-entrepreneurs navigate challenges through *peer support*, *problem-solving*, *taking multiple roles* and *doing themselves*, *active learning*, *perseverance*, *patience*, *passion* and *persistence*. These capacities are characteristic of young agri-entrepreneurs' ability to act, their agency, to navigate the challenges of a constrained agri-entrepreneurial context.

First, the findings emphasize the important role of peer support and networks for youth agri-entrepreneurial trajectories in Nepal. These relationships strengthened youth in their ability to act, persist and persevere, thus to navigate challenges, especially in face of lack of family, community or institutional support. Peers encouraged youth and supported their confidence, skills and translation of ideas into action. This highlights that youth agency is indeed social (Jeffrey, 2012), with peer support sometimes crucial for youth agency to unfold.

Second, youth agency to navigate resource, market, societal and governance constraints manifests in problem-solving, as well as the willingness and ability to accept multiple roles and act independently. Youth often transformed external structures through creativity and personal effort. These capacities to act benefited from youths' pre-existing technical skills, allowing them to resolve issues on their own when insufficient support from societal or institutional side was provided.

Still, young agri-entrepreneurs' ability to develop an agri-business was not necessarily determined by prior knowledge and skills, which Refai et al. (2025) frame as internal structure. Youth could overcome their lack of prior know-how through active and continuous learning, acquiring new skills and knowledge. This constitutes a purposive strategy to increase their capacity to navigate challenges, reflecting agency in face of internal and external constraints.

Lastly, perseverance and persistence are relevant capacities of Nepali youth in navigating agri-entrepreneurship challenges. Through determination and resilience youth to remain patient and committed in the face of diverse challenges and societal constraints. These findings demonstrate youths' imaginative envisioning beyond limitations and the conviction in the ability to overcome constraints - entrepreneurial agency (Refai et al., 2025, p. 464). It further highlights the importance of intentionality for youth agency, because youths' strong motivations drove their passion and commitment to pursue agri-entrepreneurial goals despite backlash.

Youth Experiences in Agri-Entrepreneurship and Youth Agency

Overall, this thesis investigated the overlooked aspect of youth agency in agri-entrepreneurship by studying youth experiences, motivations and navigation of challenges and constraints in Nepal. The empirical findings discussed above suggest that agency is crucial to youth agri-entrepreneurship. It is manifesting in youths' desire to drive change through agri-entrepreneurship and in the capacity to act despite challenges and constraints.

Exerting youth agency in agri-entrepreneurship often emerges as a youth response to contextual challenges in Nepal – such as unemployment, low farmers' wages, and rural outmigration. At the same time, particularly in a context of constraints to agri-entrepreneurship in Nepal, youth agency - the capacity to act - is vital for agri-business survival. The relevance of agency in youth agri-entrepreneurship, both on the intention and action sides, is a pertinent finding for further research in this field, because existing literature has largely neglected this aspect.

When viewed within the broader context of contemporary Nepal, these results underscore that youth agency extends beyond the political agency of the Gen Z movement. In a challenging, changing context for youth in light of unemployment, migration pressures and misgovernance, youth agency still endures even in the field of agriculture. Thus, young people in Nepal act as development agents not only in politics, but some even in agriculture and agri-entrepreneurship.

Youth political agency through the Gen Z movement and agri-entrepreneurial agency are connected. Youth in general experience constraints in Nepal, and resist in multiple ways. The Gen Z protest in September 2025 showed youth collective agency against corruption, misgovernance and youth unemployment, desiring to drive political change. Likewise, youth agri-entrepreneurs in Nepal challenge their contextual structures, such as rural outmigration or low farmers' returns, with the development of agri-businesses. Both forms of youth agency in Nepal show how youth do not accept constraints in context as immutable, but reflect their desire to drive change in different spheres.

Still, the power of youth agency in agri-entrepreneurship has to be put in context. This research intentionally asked how youth *navigated* challenges rather than how they *overcame* them, because the latter is not always achievable. Beyond the findings chapter, the data revealed that external structure and constraints are sometimes too large for youth to overcome through entrepreneurial agency. To name only one example, an agro-tourism entrepreneur could not overcome labor shortage simply because no youth remained in the village to work on the farm stay. This shows that, as Refai et al. (2025) theorized, constraints on agri-entrepreneurship in Nepal entail that “the ability of entrepreneurs to act and employ their agency becomes more challenging” (p. 460). Together, these results reveal the following: Youth agency in agri-entrepreneurship can intend to transform structures and constraints, and can succeed in doing so. At the same time, structure can constrain youth agency in agri-entrepreneurship. It can limit the options available for youth to act and mediates the outcomes they can achieve. These

empirical conclusions exactly reflect the structure-agency debate on theoretical level (Cavazzoni et al., 2021; Refai et al., 2025).

This is crucial to understand when looking at youth agri-entrepreneurship from a broader development picture of youth crises and disengagement from farming. Although participants in Nepal were able to challenge agri-entrepreneurship constraints, youth unemployment, and migration, this does not imply that other young people are equally able or willing to do so. This intellectual fallacy risks imposing assumptions and expectations on youth that do not apply to their individual situations and intersectional positions in context. Agri-entrepreneurship is not a choice for everyone, especially given that this investigation has alerted the extent of challenges this choice entails in Nepal. Many young agri-entrepreneurs themselves assessed that Nepali youth “have to go abroad out of compulsion”. Young people’s ability to consider agri-entrepreneurship as a viable alternative for themselves depends on opportunity or the capacity to create one, as well as strong will, resilience, and capacities to act, as demonstrated by this research. Presently, youth agri-entrepreneurs in Nepal remain a minority group.

Overall, these considerations have implications for international development discourse, policy and programming on youth agri-entrepreneurship. Globally, development actors and research conceive agri-entrepreneurship as a way to address pressing issues of youth unemployment, migration, and economic and agricultural crises. This study from Nepal has indeed registered the impact of youth agri-entrepreneurship on local employment and income generation, although not discussed here due to the limited scope. Though, youth participation in agri-entrepreneurship and its potential development effects can be scaled up when more conducive agri-business contexts are created. When policy reforms reduce constraints at the resource, market, and governance levels, more youth will be able and willing to exert agency in agri-entrepreneurship in Nepal. This need for reforms aligns with the broader agenda of the Gen Z movement, placing high expectations on the new young Nepali government, also on part of youth agri-entrepreneurs. In the meantime, there is still some room for youth to engage in and navigate agri-entrepreneurship as this research has shown, building on youth agency. The young role models in this study have highlighted important capacities and resources for navigating constraints in agri-entrepreneurship and driving change in Nepal.

7 Conclusion

This research aimed to investigate the experiences of youth agri-entrepreneurs in Nepal from an agency lens, focusing on motivations and navigation of constraints. Drawing on 14 qualitative interviews with young agri-entrepreneurs, the results revealed how youth experiences are shaped by structures in society, rural areas and agriculture. Diverse motivations include generating income and employment, countering migration, preserving heritage, empowering women and driving change on societal level.

Further, constraints to agri-entrepreneurship in Nepal on resource, market, governance and societal levels challenge youth while establishing and managing agri-businesses. By investigating how young agri-entrepreneurs navigated these constraints, the research could address an identified research gap. The findings highlight the importance of peer support, problem solving, multiple roles, active learning, perseverance, patience, passion and persistence. These capacities and resources were crucial for youth in navigating challenges.

Overall, as demonstrated by participants' desires to drive change in their communities, families, own lives, or larger spheres of influence, and by their capacity to act despite constraints, this thesis found that youth agency plays an essential role in youth agri-entrepreneurship. This is a relevant contribution given that agency theory has been neglected in youth agri-entrepreneurship research. Thus, this study has introduced agency as a new lens to make sense of youth agri-entrepreneurial trajectories. It implies youths' power to navigate constraints and transform structure through agri-entrepreneurship. With data collection just three months after the Gen Z movement in Nepal, the results mirrored contemporary youth voices and youth agency in the country, highlighting youth as development actors beyond politics, in agri-entrepreneurship and rural areas.

Further research needs to expand on these insights by studying youth agency in agri-entrepreneurship in more detail, as well as in other countries. Several patterns indicated in the data could not be pursued due to the limited scope or data, which provide reference points for future investigations. These include gender as a cross-cutting theme in young agri-entrepreneurs' experiences and agency, impact on community level, and the role of youths' self-efficacy in agri-entrepreneurship (Ajzen, 2002; Bandura, 1997). Finally, with the inauguration of Nepal's new young government in the aftermath of the Gen Z revolution, it remains to be observed how Nepal's agri-business context will develop in future, potentially attracting more youth to the exciting opportunity of agri-entrepreneurship in Nepal.

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