

SUN CSA Workshop: Nutrition & the First 1,000 Days in Lao PDR

Date: 16-17 November 2015

Location: New Rose Hotel, Vientiane

Report Written by: SUN CSA

Workshop Report

Background:

Save the Children in coordination with SUN CSA organised a technical nutrition workshop for civil society organizations currently working on, or interested in, integrating nutrition into their current work. The workshop was for two days (16-17 Nov 2015) at D’Rose hotel under the SUN CSA umbrella. It was based on the needs and interests of SUN CSA members from an online needs assessment survey conducted in late September 2015. The design of the workshop was to mainly assist local civil society organizations to:

1. Understand the government’s new National Nutrition Strategy 2025 and Action Plan 2016-2020 for organizations to better align their nutrition programs and activities to meet the government’s nutrition goals and priorities.
2. Provide an overview of the conceptual framework of malnutrition and the various factors that causes malnutrition in Laos with focus on the first 1000 days.
3. Examine each of the factors and discuss how to improve or integrate them into existing programs through examples and lessons learnt from actual programs, interactive activities, and knowledge sharing lead by technical staff from various organizations.
4. Display and provide available Information Education Communication (IEC) materials for nutrition promotion and training used by the government, UN agencies and development partners.
5. Promote SUN CSA as a central hub for nutrition related materials, information and space for knowledge sharing and skills building for its members. Additionally gather the needs and interests of SUN CSA members on nutrition.

There were a total of 40 and 48 participants taking part in the workshops on the first and second day respectively from 15 NPA/CSOs, 10 INGOs, National Centre for Nutrition (NCN), and Mattiphab Children’s Hospital. Participants were from 8 provinces: Vientiane Municipality, Vientiane province, Saravane, Oudomxay, Savannakhet, Champasack, Xiengkhouang and Luangprabang province.

Workshop summary and discussions:

Day 1: 16 November 2016

Session 1: National Nutrition Strategy 2025 and Action Plan 2016-2020

This workshop was honourably opened by Dr. Bounthom Phengdy, the Director of National Center for Nutrition, Ministry of Health. She presented the new Nutrition Strategy that will soon be endorsed later in the year, the current nutrition situation in Laos, the progress and goals for 2025. Dr. Bounthom also highlighted the convergence approach and role of civil society to support the government’s efforts to scale up nutrition by aligning their programs and activities to those of the government’s priorities to make a collective impact to achieve those nutrition goals.

Session 2: Working together under the Scaling Up Nutrition Civil Society Alliance and the Conceptual Framework of Malnutrition in Laos

This session was led by the new SUN CSA secretariat manager, Banthida Komphasouk, who introduced SUN CSA, its role and available resources and support available for members. Banthida also presented on the conceptual framework of the cause of malnutrition specific to the Lao context and how each factor impacts on each other, as well as emphasized the importance of the first 1000 days of life.

Session 3: Benefits of Breastfeeding

Vimala Dejvongsa and Manivone Sonvilaysack from the World Vision Laos (WVL) health team led discussions on the importance of promoting breastfeeding through interactive activities of breast anatomy, benefits of breastfeeding for the mother and child, and Q & A session from participants to health, medical and technical attendants. This session also allowed participants to share successful stories, experiences and brainstormed together on how to encourage and promote breastfeeding in their current projects.

Session 4: Behaviour change and barriers

Plan International's maternal and child health program manager, Boualaphanh Inthaxay, gave a short presentation about the importance of good personal and environmental hygiene and sanitation on disease prevention and malnutrition. She then led dialogues on the challenges of behaviour change in WASH and health related behaviours in the community, and opened discussions for participants to share their techniques and approaches to overcome such challenges.

Day 2: 17 November 2016

Session 5: How much milk a baby needs and dispelling breastfeeding myths

Save the Children's health advocacy manager, Kelly Khamphouxay, presented about newborns' stomach size at different ages to demonstrate how much milk babies need as well as dispelled myths and beliefs around breastfeeding. She then highlighted statistics on child malnutrition and how Laos ranks the second highest among ASEAN countries. She also raised some of the underlying reasons, such as early and frequent pregnancies, the practice of food taboos during and after pregnancy, too early introduction of foods, and poor weaning. She then led discussions on the importance of being aware of these issues when designing programs and working with the community to tailor them to suit the context to have an impact.

Session 6: Complementary Feeding

World Vision Laos' health team used their Positive Deviance Hearth (PD Hearth) program to demonstrate nutrition promotion in communities, food groups and complementary feeding through video demonstrations and interactive games. Participants learnt the types of foods in the main food groups and its functions.

Session 7: Soap 4 life

Soap 4 Life manager and technical consultant, La Vaiyakone and Mac Maness, demonstrated how to make soap from natural products for the organizations that would be interested to promote this as an income generation activity for the community. Soap 4 Life have experience in conducting training courses for women in rural communities and these soaps are popular as they are a source of income generation derived from natural ingredients, and they are affordable and can also be used as a detergent for washing clothes. Participants all got some of bars of soap as a sample.

Session 8: Life of an ethnic girl

Plan International invited two girls from Nonghet district, Phongsalay province, Latsamy and Mayaiyang, whom are both mentors of a youth program funded by Child Fund and youth leaders in their village. Both girls shared their experiences growing up, their aspirations and the challenges they face, which differ from boys in their community and children from the city. These challenges are often not apparent or heard. This activity was followed by Q&A sessions and the purpose was to have participants consider and be aware of some of these issues faced by girls in rural ethnic communities when working and designing programs and activities in the community.

Session 9: Incorporating gender and nutrition into livelihood projects: findings from the Resilient Livelihood for the Poor (RLP) baseline project

Health Poverty Action's (HPA) researchers and gender consultant, Santi Owen, Banthida Komphasouk and Meagen Baldwin, led the discussion on how participants could incorporate gender issues into their existing projects by using findings from HPA's Resilient Livelihood for the Poor (RLP) project as an example. The study gave some background on what foods were actually eaten daily by the poorest in the community, what food items are bought, foraged and produced, breastfeeding trends, and how much time is spent to acquire enough food to sustain a family of six people. These topics then led to discussions on how to work with families, especially women, considering the demands they have when securing food for their families, as care givers, and also participating with projects.

Feedback

At the end of the workshop, participants were asked to fill out a short survey to ask for feedback on the workshop, which topics they found most useful, not so interesting, and what areas support they would like from SUN CSA. Overall the participants found the workshop valuable and expressed strong interest for SUN CSA to have similar workshops in the future. One participant expressed that she has only read nutrition related materials but does not know how to incorporate them into her work, and this workshop helped her understand the topics better and how to translate them into actual activities. She also appreciates the IEC materials and videos handed out so that she can use them directly in the field. Based on the votes from participants, the topics voted most interesting were the conceptual framework on the causes of malnutrition and the first 1000 days, followed by breastfeeding and supplementary feeding. Topics participants voted they would like more in-depth knowledge on were behaviour change in nutrition, rehabilitating underweight children, the national nutrition strategy and gender and nutrition. Most participants stated that they now understand the importance of investing in nutrition and breastfeeding; however, this area is still new for them and they require continued support and commitment from all levels and sectors.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the participants highly valued the SUN CSA workshop and found it insightful and interesting. However, they also made concrete recommendations, topic preferences and suggestions on how SUN CSA could support its members better. Firstly, almost all recommended having a longer workshop of at least three days, twice a year. They found the sessions to be too short to delve deeper into the issues and ask questions. Secondly, some of the topics that participants suggested they would like to include in future workshops could be grouped into four main areas. These areas included 1) child specific

nutrition, 2) health and care for the mother, 3) nutrition programs for the whole community, and 4) governance and program support. Specific issues in each area include:

- Child specific nutrition topics: how to encourage exclusive breastfeeding, increase breastmilk and help mothers' breastfeed (e.g. breastfeeding positions, expressing breastmilk, etc.) what foods should children eat at different ages; identifying the main cause of malnutrition in children and how to help families treat malnourished children and growth monitoring.
- Mother's health and care topics: what type of care and foods mothers need before, during and after pregnancy to ensure healthy babies and mothers, especially those in ethnic and rural communities; gender roles and empowerment; and what does the first 1000 days care include for mothers and children.
- Community engagement issues include: promoting behaviour change in communities; what foods are in each food group and how much of each is needed for different members of the family; promoting birth spacing and family planning methods; nutrition assessment and screening tools; and how to engage and work well in ethnic and challenging communities.
- Governance and program support included: how to align programs to meet the national nutrition goals and strategy, how to integrate agricultural and food security activities with nutrition outcomes, how to train community workers, how to implement the Positive Deviance Hearth Program (PD Hearth), proposal writing, and computer skills.

Participants also suggested having a discussion panel seated facing each other following each topic. The people on the panel would be technical personnel and field workers, as well as people from the community that are recipients of the nutrition programs to share their experiences promoting and implementing nutrition in the village. Discussions would be centred on the challenges field workers have working with the communities, implementing the programs and their personal experiences on how they overcame them, as well as sharing any community ownership and program sustainability success stories. Furthermore, there was a suggestion to have some people from the villages share their nutrition struggles and experience, how and what triggered them to change their behaviours, and how best to assist those changes. Lastly, recommendations that the members would like to have SUN CSA support them with include: to provide continued assistance in capacity building of its members on more technical nutrition related topics, support a platform and space for members to learn from each other and share experiences, provide guidance to ensure nutrition activities are being implemented according to the national nutrition strategy to meet the government's priorities and goals, as well as to assist them to access funding sources. One member organization suggested they would like to see SUN CSA do more advocacy work such as promoting six-month maternity leave within the workplace. SUN CSA will use these recommendations and suggestions to improve future engagement with and support to members.