

SUN CSA CAMBODIA RAMPING UP NUTRITION EFFORTS

The Cambodia Demographic Health Survey in 2014 found that exclusive breastfeeding until 6 months and continued breastfeeding to 2 years and beyond has declined and bottle-feeding for infants 6 months and above has increased. The use of breast-milk substitutes (BMS) has become more common over the last two decades, with commercial promotions for BMS becoming increasingly prevalent.

Cambodia is one of the first countries to actively enforce the BMS Code, and has levied fines against companies violating the BMS Code. SUN CSA Cambodia members have worked together to develop research, evidence, and policy briefs to support this work. In 2017-18, Alliance members participated in a government pilot to monitor and enforce the National BMS Code. The Cambodian Government adopted the Code as the national standard in Sub-Decree 133 on the Marketing of Products for Infant and Young Child Feeding. The government also created and implemented a monitoring and reporting system.

Following the formation of a multisectoral Oversight Board supported by an Executive Working Group (EWG) in 2014, and the development of detailed guidance documents for the implementation and enforcement of Sub-Decree 133 in 2015, a pilot test was conducted in 2017 to trial a monitoring system in four urban areas of Cambodia. The pilot included training of monitors from the Ministries of Health and Commerce, screening for violations at retail locations and health facilities, testing reporting mechanisms, and taking action against violators.

The EWG convened a multi-stakeholder meeting in 2018 to review the results of the pilot, to identify corrective and follow-up actions, and to establish a joint workplan for next steps. As a result, adaptations and modifications were made to streamline monitoring tools and reporting processes before rolling out the monitoring and enforcement trainings in 25 provinces. Currently, rollout of the monitoring system has reached 20 provinces.



Training on SD133 monitoring as part of MOH's routine monitoring system in Siem Reap province by the Department of Drugs and Food Safety.

The SUN CSA Cambodia collaborated with the government in documenting violations of Sub Decree 133, reporting 32 violators to the EWG for actions. Warning and agreement letters were sent to 11 companies that violated Sub Decree 133, requiring them to create proper product labels. In addition, monetary penalties were imposed upon repeat violators, ranging from 2,500,000 – 5,000,000 Riel (US\$625 – US\$1250), depending on how many times they have violated the law. To compliment the current government monitoring system, in 2021 the SUN CSA Cambodia developed a new online system for reporting violations of Sub-Decree 133.

SUN CSA Cambodia provided support in different advocacy activities as well. The CSA participated in multi-sectoral discussions, such the Codex Meeting held on Nov 26-30, 2019 in Germany to discuss a standard for follow-up formula. The Alliance also shared Cambodia's experiences, best practices, and lessons learned on BMS monitoring at the Breastfeeding Workshop in Da Nang, Vietnam and at the Global SUN CSN Steering Group Meeting. They also shared these experiences and lessons learned with SUN CSA Zimbabwe.

Despite these gains, SUN CSA Cambodia notes that funding is always a challenge. There was also the issue of getting buy-in from enforcement officers and healthcare workers on the ground, and ensuring they are trained and will report violations. Despite these challenges, the CSA persists with government support for their work, as well as the support of the civil society sector and development partners in Cambodia.

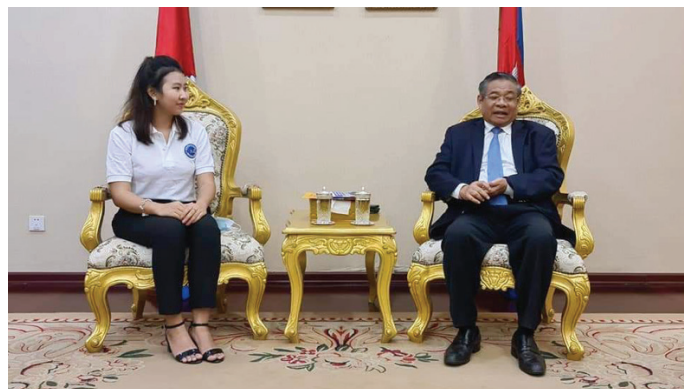
Empowering Youth Nutrition Champions

The Youth Nutrition Champions (YNC), composed of youth selected and trained by the Helen Keller International, have been using social media to engage with their peers on this subject and coordinate their views with policymakers.

A three-day Youth Nutrition Camp was held in 2020 to train the Youth Nutrition Champions on how to educate their peers on topics related to food systems and healthy diets. The aim was to raise the awareness and understanding among young Cambodians on how food systems impact their lives and the social and economic development of the country.

These young individuals, who are future leaders and agents of change, have been active in hearing the voices of youth during the COVID-19 pandemic. The YNCs conducted a survey that looked into how their lives have changed since the pandemic. Results showed that some were not eating well because food prices were too expensive. Instead, they ate more noodles and fast foods. The results of the survey were an excellent tool for the YNCs to develop ideas and advocacy campaigns that were relevant for young people all over the country.

The voices of young people have been receiving a lot of attention, especially from multi-sectoral stakeholders working in nutrition governance. In recent months, the team has participated in national and sub-national events, as well as in moderating panels on nutrition for government officials. The work of the YNCs has also been well recognized by the Council for Agricultural and Rural Development, Chaired by H.E. Deputy Prime Minister, and youth were included as a priority in the government's recently issued Directive No. 934.



YNC leader, Ms. Bormey Chhun, meeting with the Deputy Prime Minister

SUN CSA Cambodia supported YNC Leader, Ms. Bormey Chhun, in addressing the Deputy Prime Minister and seeking support for YNC involvement in food security and nutrition decision-making processes in high-level government. As such, they successfully advocated for the YNC Leader to be a part of high-level national groups and decision-making processes, such as the Technical Working Group for Food Security and Nutrition (TWG-FSN) and the Provincial Working Group for Food Security and Nutrition (PWG-FSN).

SUN CSA Cambodia recognizes the vital role that youth play in the fight against malnutrition, and with their support, the YNCs have established themselves as a key stakeholder in FSN in Cambodia.