

PURSuing RELENTLESS NUTRITION PROMOTION IN LAO PDR

SUN CSA in Lao PDR was established in 2014. Currently, it has 76 member organizations, including 23 international non-government agencies; 45 Laos civil society organizations (CSO), and eight other stakeholders. SUN CSA Lao PDR is implementing a proactive 5-year nutrition improvement strategy. In 2020, this included 34 joint activities, 16 of which were learning events, 12 were advocacy events, and six were coordination events. Fifty-five projects have been implemented across 16 provinces of Laos in 2020.

The Ministry of Health has created various strategies and guidelines on nutrition, most notably the 5-year National Plan of Action on Nutrition (NPAN), which involved the active participation and input of the SUN CSA members. The NPAN includes a section on “Best Practices”, which contains examples of SUN CSA organizations’ work and new models they have piloted. CSOs had formerly not been given the opportunity to contribute actively to national-level policy drafting and had only previously been seen in ‘service-delivery’ roles and not helpful, nor desired, to develop policy. This was therefore a significant step for SUN CSA, who had contributed to the decline

in malnutrition rates through projects, funds, and technical assistance, particularly focusing on the First 1000 days of Life.

With ongoing donor support for CSOs’ nutrition projects, nutrition coordination and advocacy was also improved through SUN CSA and other mechanisms, enabling CSOs to productively contribute to a range of nutrition solutions in Laos. Useful nutrition tools were developed for implementation and dissemination, which aided stakeholders to work together. Some of the innovative contributions of SUN CSA included facilitation of the “New Normal Skill Sharing” Zoom meetings with a focus on nutrition. SUN CSA has progressively improved relations with the government for years, demonstrating to the government that CSOs are essential to achieving national nutrition goals, and providing support to policy and actions. Such project partnerships fostered harmony of practice between SUN CSA organizations and the government.

SUN CSA in Lao PDR contributed to nutrition finance tracking and resource mobilization and



SUN CSA Nutrition Research and Monitoring Tools Training Day in April 2019, a panel discussion on Qualitative Research Techniques and Field Experiences

encouraged proper budget allocation for nutrition programs via NPAN for high-risk provinces and districts. Information on funding and expenditures for programs on nutrition was also made accessible through the Ministry of Planning. Both the government and donors exhibited heightened efforts in ensuring long-term funding for nutrition and improved financial allocation.

SUN CSA Laos continues to grow and improve. Aside from the increasing number of member organizations, it has 12 provincial focal points in 11 provinces and a nutrition advocacy group. Member organizations were trained to advocate for heightened efforts in nutrition promotion, though it is acknowledged that CSOs needed time to develop skills and a voice, which came with experience. INGOs gave space and share resources with CSOs, which achieved larger nutrition goals that were less project dependent. Having a strong Secretariat and SUN-specific funding enabled more organisations to contribute actively to the network's goals and other members' development and participation. Multi-partner projects helped build collaboration and widen skills. SUN CSA and its members advocate for better nutrition during the annual National Nutrition Forums, with participants from both the national and sub-national levels discussing nutrition policy and practice. Member organisations are actively involved in nutrition advocacy. For example, the Local CSO, Association for Rural Mobilisation and Improvement (ARMI) led a learning workshop for provincial nutrition stakeholders

including civil society and government together. SUN Business Network was also launched and was supported by the UN WFP, EU, PSI, and Save the Children. SUN CSA Laos is using its Strategic Plan to methodically work with members to build capacity, share resources and knowledge, and identify opportunities to collaborate and advocate.

World Breastfeeding Week 2020

The Ministry of Health celebrated World Breastfeeding Week in August 2020, where the "Decree on Food Products and Equipment for Infant and Young Children in order to protect breastfeeding" or the Lao BMS Decree, was presented. SUN CSA Laos, as a partner in this advocacy, helped shape this national policy and participated in the celebration in several manners, one of which was through media engagement. Members created a joint video entitled "I support breastfeeding in Laos" in celebration of WBW. A Facebook campaign, #LaosLovesBreastfeeding #WBW2020, was also initiated and reached over 100,000 people. A FAQs sheet on breastfeeding particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic was also created. The organization likewise spearheaded the training for CSA members on the BMS Code. Overall, SUN CSA organisations have implemented projects across the country, focusing on the first 1000 days of life and piloted new models which have been adopted by the national government and rolled out best practice approaches across Laos.



SUN CSA Advocacy Working Group Meeting in August 2021. Due to COVID-19, the meeting was held in person with a limited number of participants while other people joined online.