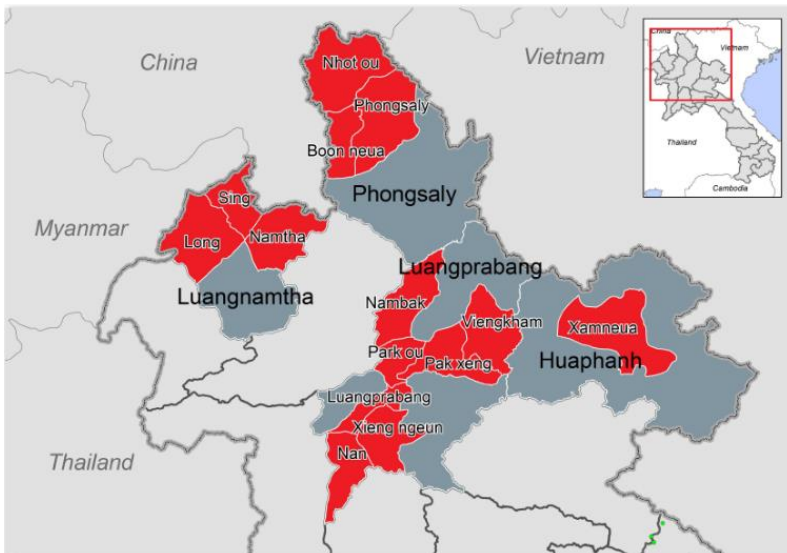


Partnership for Improved Nutrition in Lao PDR Pillar 3: Sustainable Change Achieved through Linking Improved Nutrition and Governance

Welcome!

Welcome to our 6th issue! This 6-monthly publication aims to bring you updates on the Sustainable Change Achieved through Linking Improved Nutrition and Governance (SCALING) project in Huaphanh Province, implemented by ChildFund in Laos. The project is funded by the European Union (EU) under the Partnership for Improved Nutrition in Lao PDR (PIN).

The overall objective of SCALING is to improve the nutritional status of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women, and children under 5 in 14 target districts in the provinces of Huaphanh, Luang Namtha, Luang Prabang and Phongsaly. The action supports the Government of Laos (GoL) to implement at scale the current National Nutrition Strategy (NNS), NNS Action Plan (NNSAP) and convergent approach. The project period covers December 2017 to December 2021 (four years).



In this 6th issue we focus on results achieved under the project so far per province under the three main outcomes. We also would like to share some perspectives and key messages from the project beneficiaries through case studies with direct quotes.

Nutrition Context in Huaphanh Province:

Indicators	Huaphanh Province	National Average
Malnutrition among children under 5 years old – Stunting (LSIS 2017)	41%	33%
Malnutrition among children under 5 years old – Wasting (LSIS 2017)	16%	9%
Malnutrition among children under 5 years old – Underweight (LSIS 2017)	25%	21%

As classified by World Health Organization (WHO) Huaphanh Province is one out of 11 provinces nationwide is reported to have very high stunting prevalence among children under five years old. As can be seen from the table, 41% of children under 5 years old suffer from stunting while 25% from underweight and 16% from wasting. (LSIS 2017)

The children who are too short for their age (stunted) may suffer from different factors such as inadequate nutrient intake, water-borne and infectious diseases, food insecurity of the household (HH), poor mother and child care, poor access to health services and facilities, remoteness, etc. The government is making efforts to address malnutrition issues through implementing the National Nutrition Strategy (NNS) 2016-2025 from central to provincial and to district level.

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The government of Laos has received contributions from international organizations, INGOs and other Development Partners in terms of technical expertise and financial support to address the malnutrition issues in Laos.

Key Accomplishments and Achievements:

ChildFund in Laos is working a long side with local government of Huaphanh to support in implementing National Nutrition Strategy Action Plan (NNSAP) at the provincial and district level through convergent approach in line with the objectives of Partnership for Improved Nutrition (PIN) or SCALING project. Through this project, EU funding enabled SCALING to implement it planned project activities in 30 selected target villages in Sam Neua District, Huaphanh Province that mainly focuses on three main objectives and the achievements so far are listed below:

I. **Objective 01: Improved nutrition and hygiene-related behaviors and access to quality nutrition and Reproductive Maternal Newborn and Child Health (RMNCH) services.**

- 1) 30 villages in which adapted "Our Promise SBCC" modules have been implemented.
- 2) 2,961 of 1,000-day HHs have been visited by trained volunteers on a regular basis.
- 3) 411 peer support groups on nutrition were formed at village level.
- 4) Completed conducting first round of peer educators in six target Lower Secondary Schools (LSS) by establishing of teacher advisors, adolescent leaders and implementation of peer group support for 18 groups.

II. **Objective 02: Local environment mitigates adverse underlying causes of malnutrition.**

- 1) 11 Health Centers have been equipped with growth monitoring equipment and IT equipment to enter data online, correctly and on time in the government District Health Information System (DHIS2).
- 2) 36 health staff (20 females) at district and HC level have been trained on Infant and Young Children Feeding and Growth Monitoring and Promotion.
- 3) 15 women Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLA) have been formed and are functioning.
- 4) 30 villages have been completed training on Women Workload Reduction (WWR) and/or Gender Equality in Relationship interventions.
- 5) 374 couples have participated in WWR or Gender Equality in Relationships training.
- 6) 766 women have attended workload reduction training.
- 7) 03 Water Supply Systems have been constructed with local contributions of 03 target villages, and another extra one is under construction.
- 8) 717 households in 30 target villages have constructed a latrine as a result of the WASH Marketing approach.
- 9) 07 target villages have been declared Open Defecation Free (ODF) by the local authorities.

III. **Objective 03: Nutrition governance strengthened at district, cluster and community levels.**

- 1) 02 inter-district learning exchange visits have been facilitated between SCALING target districts and provinces.
- 2) 03 provincial assemblies visit to SCALING implementation sites was organized.
- 3) 30 target villages have completed a new Village Development Plan 2020-2024. All have included one or more nutrition Priority Interventions.



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Case Study: “The Power of Ethnic Language Translator Intern toward SBCC”

To change the traditional ways of life and practices and reserve the simply beauty of culture that has been practicing for a long period of time is very difficult and challenging. As a result, therefore, the Government of Laos, and its party including the strategies, programming of the ChildFund in Laos, the EU SCALING/Nutrition Project has focused and emphasized Social Behavior Change Communication (SBCC) on Nutrition in the community through the various activities of Village Saving Loan Association (VSLA), Women Workload Reduction, Water Sanitation and Health (WASH), and its marketing and water production. In the activity, there are creative volunteers, and 1000-days households visited by volunteers. The team leaders of these interventions are the Provincial and District SBCC steering committees who paid high attention to monitor and support the village health volunteers to implement the activities in their villages based on the nutrition work plan assignment.

The targeted population is approximately 50% of the Hmong, and the project focus groups are the reproductive women and adolescent girls in the villages who participate more in the implementation of the project activities, but they find it difficult to understand Lao language especially Hmong women. Sometimes, the village chief or the government staff who speak Hmong volunteered for doing the translation or interpretation, however, by doing this, we still found some misunderstandings, for example, miss-translation, and time consumption. The targeted groups of Hmong women were very poor in understanding Lao language, feel shy, and not have the courage to share their experiences and ideas with the project team during discussion sessions.



Kao Lahxiong helps with translation during EU visit to Kungthy Village, Sam Neua District, Huaphanh Province. Date of visit: 05/08/2020; Photo by: Khamdee Ernthavanh

How the SBCC succeed while the targeted groups do not fully understand your language? According to the project management team, a Hmong translator intern should be recruited to fulfill this gap. As a result, therefore, the SCALING steering committees in four targeted provinces requested and finally approved by the donor, the EU to recruit the Hmong Translator Intern based on the recruitment process and procedures of ChildFund in Laos.

The translator intern, Ms. Kao Lahxiong, 25 years, a Hmong woman from Outhai Village, Houamueng District, it is 70 KM away from the urban center of HUA province. She is single, from a poor family, with 11 members in her family, nine siblings (4 girls). From 2002 – 2007 she was learning in primary school (G1-G5) in Outhai village. From 2007-2010 she was learning in lower secondary school (G6-G9) in Na Ngiew village. From 2020-2014 she was learning in upper secondary school (G10 -G11) at Ban Phon secondary school. After she completed secondary school she furthered her education at Samai Hounghueng Business College in Xam Neua district, HUA province from 2014-2017 and she graduated from the college in Business Administration.

From the interview Kao Laxiong said that before working as local translator with ChildFund, she worked for VIVO smartphone shop in Xam Neua district, HUA province, and she was in charge of marking and persuading customers to come and buy a cellphone from the shop. She also provided after-sale service and basic information about how to operate or use a cellphone. She had worked for the VIVO smartphone shop for 17 months. One

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day she visited her home village saw the district education staff and ChildFund project implementing Literacy Boost project activity there in her village that made her feel glad and impressive with the literacy boost activity. Later on she heard about job advertisement posted in the community and she also heard it from the local radio and TV that ChildFund needed a local translator intern and she wished be part of the ChildFund and she then had applied for the job position.”



Kao Lahxiong helps with translation during EU visit to Kungthy Village, Sam Neua District, Huaphanh Province. Date of visit: 05/08/2020; Photo by: Khamdee Ernthavanh

Kao Lahxiong, once recruited, she read the project background, MoU, SBCC guidebooks, VLSA, Women Workload Reduction, WASH Marketing, ChildFund’s policies of Child Safeguarding and Child Protection, Covid-19 Prevention Regulation, Teamwork, etc. She does a language translation and search for the difficult vocabularies, typed and printed into the Hmong language. She added that “if I off-track, or confused about some words, I can ask the team about the meaning, especially the one of the Hmong staff there. The translated documents and guidelines are so helpful for the team to encourage the Hmong people to

participate in the program activity in their villages. “Now, no worry much about the misunderstanding between CFL staff and the Hmong people”, she added.

According to Kao Lahxiong, one desirable outcome was that more Hmong community people participating in the activities implemented in their villages if compared to her first visit to the villages. The target community people fully participated, contributed their ideas, people felt enjoyable and felt confident to talk to the project team, she said. “This is a great communication pathway to make people understand each other and understand the objective of project activity”, she said that more Hmong families follow the advice given by the project team. For example, pregnant mothers go to HC for pre and post-natal care health checks as per stipulated date and/or appointment made by the health staff, 1000 households have supported the pregnant mother to rest more and avoid doing burden workload, consume more nutritious food. Also the pregnant need to be well-prepared themselves and some necessary stuff to be used at a time of giving birth at the nearest hospital and health center, bring their children/infants to the HC for a health check and get vaccinated. The Hmong women understand more about the objective of VSLA, and actively work on VSLA regarding saving money and releasing loans for the member to be used for their intended purpose or to be used for health care service in case they are having any health problems.

The ethnic woman who is having any problem or issue, but having no one consult, they come and talk to the local translator so she could convey the messages to the project team at the district level. It is now easier to communicate things with Hmong people. Also the project team also find it easier to approach the target community people and get the project activity implemented according to the plan.

Kao Lahxiong added that “I am so proud to be a part of the project as Hmong translator intern, and my success cannot be made without kind support from CFL-SCALING team, and the government partners. I have gained my knowledge and skills through attending training, receiving constructive feedback, having the opportunity to attend the implementation of project activities in the fields and on-site coaching that enable her communicate things

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better and do fluent translation job, and this can make the local community members participate more and more community people change their attitudes and practice.

In addition, she has developed herself through learning new things from the team and other people. She has adapted herself to working in teamwork, working with the community and government partners. She said that “The activity of VSLA is wonderful, and I can apply the VSLA approach to my daily life such as saving money and spending money on just necessary stuff or needs as well as passing on the knowledge of SBCC to her parents, brothers, sisters and relatives for their information and practice it. I also advise them to go to the HC when they are having any health problems. I have learned translation skills. I have assigned to take responsibility for coordinating, preparing and arranging the tools or materials needed for the project field. I also have the responsibility for gathering data, keeping project documents in the filing cabinet after field activity completes.

Lastly, she called to all people in the society, Hmong women in particular, be more cooperative, have the courage to share and discuss things or experience with the project team who implementing the project activities as well as keep applying the knowledge in their day-to-day life. Last but not least, “I strongly request the project to continue and support and give more opportunity for the Hmong women to participate in the implementation of the project activities in their community so this can be a good example other Hmong women to learn and understand that Hmong women have the ability to learn, have the rights to work, have their voice and equal right to participate like men.”

“For my future career, I would like to work as one of the Hmong staff with the ChildFund in Laos and continue to empower the mothers and sisters of my Hmong women and adolescent girls.” she added.

To subscribe to our 6-monthly newsletter, send comments or suggestions, please contact Soudaphone Sixomxeun soudaphones@childfund.org.la and/or

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