

SUN CSA Laos Remarks for the National Nutrition Forum 2023

February 2024

Distinguished Representatives of Government Ministries, Provincial Governors, Provincial Health Offices, Distinguished Ambassadors, Heads of UN Agencies, Development Partners, Lao Civil Society, Distinguished Guests.

Thank you for including the Scaling Up Nutrition Civil Society Alliance (SUN CSA) in this the Ninth National Nutrition Forum. SUN CSA members are proud to join these important discussions today.

The Scaling Up Nutrition Civil Society Alliance in Lao PDR (SUN CSA Laos) is a network of **77 Civil Society organisations working in Lao PDR**, both Lao and international organisations. In 2023, SUN CSA organisations worked with the government on **109 nutrition projects in all 18 provinces** of Lao PDR, helping more than **1.7 million people improve their nutrition**. These projects focus on multisectoral nutrition improvement in health, agriculture, education, WASH, livelihoods, climate change, gender equality and inclusion. SUN CSA organisations coordinate with one another and with the Government of Lao PDR at the national, provincial, district and village level, sharing information and working together to promote improvement in the nutritional status of the Lao people, in particular mothers and children in their first 1,000 days of life. In 2023 we conducted **88 joint nutrition activities** through the SUN CSA network, that focused on learning, coordinating, and promoting nutrition-related actions and knowledge. Our **SUN CSA website was visited over 12,000 times last year**, providing a **library of nutrition resources with over 700 documents and videos** that everyone can use, in both English and Lao languages. We encourage you all to visit the SUN CSA website today and use these resources in your work.

Sharing resources, coordination and working in partnerships is essential to improve nutrition nationally. The SUN movement, which is lead in Laos by the Ministry of Health, focuses on working together – coordinated in our nutrition efforts. The SUN CSA members appreciate the partnerships we have with the key ministries working to improve nutrition: namely the Ministry of Planning and Investment, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, the Ministry of Education and Sports, the Ministry of Health and the Centre for Nutrition as the Country Lead for the SUN movement in Laos. Together we have made excellent strides forward to create a coordinated, collaborative and convergent approach to improving nutrition in Laos. But **we all need to improve our multi-sector nutrition coordination at provincial and district levels. We call on everyone to coordinate more at all levels and share information**

regularly. Only by improving these coordination mechanisms at a subnational level, bringing together different ministries and offices, can we address the multitude of factors that influence the health and well being of mothers and children all across Laos.

With support from the government the SUN CSA network has improved breastfeeding rates and we congratulate the government on introducing Model Breastfeeding hospitals. SUN CSA Organisations have also improved our own workplace breastfeeding practices and policies, beginning the SUN Lao Workplace Breastfeeding Awards. In the first year there has been a 16% increase in workplace policy and a 15% increase in working mothers breastfeeding at work. In the coming year all the SUN Lao network will support this effort, and the Lao Workplace Breastfeeding Awards will be open to all employers across the country. We hope you will all participate and encourage better access to breastfeeding for all women, in the workplace and at home.

The LSIS III results this year are a clear reminder that we need to continue to **focus on essential nutrition services for women and children**. We need to increase investment in maternal and child health services – this includes mobile outreach services and community coordination with village health volunteers; capacity building for essential services that address malnutrition and essential early-newborn care; integrated management of acute malnutrition, and; gender equitable nutrition services.

With the impacts of climate change on water supplies in many villages, **we encourage all stakeholders to prioritize securing water access for everyone, including women, children and people with disabilities, to improve overall health and hygiene.**

The past year has been challenging for many people in Lao PDR. We have seen in our work that inflation has increased pressures on family budgets which has reduced their access to enough nutritious food and reduced their spending on health and education. Recent food security surveys by SUN CSA, WFP and the World Bank all showed an increase in food insecurity in many parts of Lao PDR. Food security is central to our nutrition efforts to reduce stunting, wasting and all forms of malnutrition, and it is absolutely essential if we are to achieve Lao's National Nutrition Strategy. Civil society organisations commit to respond to this emerging need across Laos. Many SUN CSA member organisations are increasing their project activities that support livelihoods, food production, and climate-change adaptation to increase food security. Together we will work with government, donors and all stakeholders to reduce food insecurity and increase access to adequate, healthy food

and productive livelihoods. **We encourage government and donors to consider investments in targeted and effective safety net programs prioritizing the most vulnerable populations.**

We encourage government to strengthen multi-sector coordination through district and provincial nutrition committees and to include civil society in this coordination.

We encourage the government and all stakeholders to scale up multi-sector interventions and collaborate on the awareness raising and enforcement of the Code for Breast Milk Substitutes, as well as pushing for more ODF districts.

Nutrition improvements in the coming year is a challenge we must continue to work together to address. All organisations in SUN CSA offer our efforts and partnership to the Lao Government in support of nutrition for sustainable development so we can achieve better nutrition, faster. Future generations –and this generation – await our success.

We wish you the best of luck and good health and thank you for inviting us to join you.