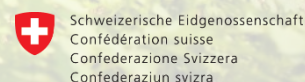




Converging for improved nutrition in Lao PDR

Enhanced Nutrition for Upland Farming Families (ENUFF)
Technical Brief no .1



Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC

Summary

Reducing undernutrition requires convergent action from many sectors and stakeholders. There is a recognition that health; education; agriculture; Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH); livelihoods; women's empowerment and nutrition all contribute to improved nutrition. Though multi-sectoral convergence is not a new concept, this renewal of interest has led to many questions about how to do it and whether nutrition outcomes are improved if it is done effectively. In four districts in the two provinces of Oudomxay and Houaphan, SNV with support from Agrisud International and funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and cooperation (SDC), is working with government structures to implement a programme that integrates gender, agriculture, nutrition and WASH. From the baseline study, it was found that the nutritional status of children is strongly influenced by education, women's knowledge and awareness, market integration and the financial capacity of households to diversify their livelihoods and improve their living conditions. Interventions in the food system can support agricultural livelihoods whilst also improving diets. This is especially true if the interventions do no harm to health or care practices and support integrated and multisectoral programming. A unique component of ENUFF is the coordination and alignment of the different sectors activities at district and community levels. Since its implementation, ENUFF has gained valuable insights to realise effective convergence across various sectors, in particular at the subnational levels, from district to community. This has been enhanced through participatory convergence planning with the use of village

convergence tools. Drawing on the ENUFF experience, the Technical Brief (No. 1) provides key insights into the district level coordination and implementation of a multi-sectoral nutrition programme and provides a set of recommendations to consider in nutrition-sensitive programming.

About ENUFF

The Enhancing Nutrition of Upland Farming Families (ENUFF) project is a multi-sectoral nutrition programme supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and implemented by SNV with support from Agrisud International. Together with Government partners, ENUFF combines nutrition-sensitive agriculture, gender, SBCC and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in one programme to improve family nutrition in remote and ethnically diverse upland farming communities.

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Policy Recommendations

Ensuring that all key nutrition actions are implemented necessitates convergent action between the field of nutrition, health, education, agriculture, livelihoods and women's empowerment. The relationships between these fields and their potential for accelerating nutrition gains have been previously explained through multiple pathways. The pathways suggest that effective convergence is desirable and it can be developed through a set of strategic mechanisms related to policies and programs, something being initiated in Lao PDR. The key outcomes of effective convergence is a set of decisions and actions across different sectors that together will eventually lead to improved nutrition, in particular for women and children. The actions may or may not be joint, but at a minimum should be strategic and coordinated. Since its implementation, ENUFF has gained valuable insights to realise effective convergence across various sectors. Implementation of convergent actions at the community level has been enhanced through participatory convergence planning. Valuable insights have been captured in intersectoral coordination and implementation. Nutritional issues appear strongly shaped by, if not entangled with local livelihood systems. Supporting agricultural development and diversification may contribute to create new opportunities for income generation, thus contributing indirectly to improve the local economic circumstances, while also improving diets. This is especially true if it does no harm to health or care practices and supports integrated and multisectoral programming. A unique aspect of ENUFF is the coordination and alignment of the different sector activities at district and village levels. From the comprehensive baseline data, four strategic avenues can be identified for nutrition sensitive programming to improve family nutrition in the Laotian uplands:

1. Engage in social and behaviour change communication, involving both women and men, in relation to:
 - Exclusive breastfeeding of infants (0-6 months) and complementary feeding of young children (6-23 months);
 - Food sourcing and consumption towards a minimum acceptable diet for children under two;
 - Improved dietary quality including diversity by all members of the household, particularly women and infants;
 - Improved hygienic everyday practices such as safe disposal of child faeces and hand washing with soap;
 - Promote use of improved sanitation facilities by all community members.
2. Provide technical and organisational support to farm and small business operators aimed at enhancing local capacities to:
 - Diversify food crop and small livestock production;
 - Process, store, market and generate income from food crop value chains.
3. Promote, support and engage in context-sensitive yet integrated initiatives across the health, agricultural, environmental and business sectors that account for the multidimensionality of livelihoods and nutritional issues.
4. Support nutrition coordination committees, which involve recruiting the right coordinators; establish mechanisms for accountability; decentralise national level actions to the village level; strengthen capacity at all levels and introduce a process of learning and not just reporting.