

People in Phongsaly benefit from EU/UNICEF nutrition programme

European Union (EU) Ambassador to the Lao PDR, Leo Faber, and UNICEF Representative Octavian Bivol recently made a four-day visit to Phongsaly province to observe nutrition interventions under the Partnership for Improved Nutrition (PIN).

After arriving in Bounneua district on April 8, the team met with the Vice Governor of Phongsaly province, Mr Thongsy Saosouliphom, and department directors to explain the purpose of the visit and the priorities of the EU-UNICEF support under PIN to Phongsaly province. On April 9, Mr Faber and Mr Bivol visited Huay Nhang village in Bounneua district where they participated in an integrated outreach scheme to observe hygiene promotion as well as maternal, newborn and child health and nutrition interventions.



Mothers and children wait for health outreach services in Savang village, Nhot-ou district, Phongsaly province.

This covered antenatal and post-natal care, infant and child growth monitoring, immunisation, vitamin A supplementation for children aged 6-59 months, deworming for children aged 12-59 months, screening children under 5 years for acute malnutrition, and health and nutrition education and cooking demonstrations.

The local community, health staff, village health volunteers and members of the Lao Women's Union and villagers including women and children participated in the activities. "The EU, UNICEF and the government are scaling up nutrition interventions through PIN focusing on multisectoral coordination, programme implementation, evidence generation, awareness raising and institutional capacity enhancement. Seeing first-hand the activities supported through PIN to improve the nutritional status of women and children in this province will help us understand what else can be done, through a convergent approach, in close collaboration with the government and other development partners," Mr Faber said. The integrated outreach strategy complements facility-

based service delivery by taking these essential services to women and children living in remote and hard-to-reach areas and by improving the referral pathway between the community and fixed site services. Integrated health outreach is an activity supported under the EU-UNICEF Partnership for Improved Nutrition. "Thanks to the support of the EU and UNICEF through the Partnership for Improved Nutrition, the health status of rural communities in Bounneua district has improved over the last years. Women and children from hard-to-reach areas now have access to health and nutrition services, including immunisation, and this has had a positive impact in reducing malnutrition," the Vice Governor of Bounneua district, Mr Saynoupap Souchanh said. The team also travelled to Huaypaenneua village in Nhot-ou district to see the EU-supported Northern Uplands Food Security project, managed by **Comité de Coopération avec le Laos**, which promotes sustainable livelihoods of communities through interventions such as establishing a steady income stream through growing tea and cardamom, health and hygiene promotion, natural gardening and the cultivation of fish. "I am impressed by the impact of this project that is improving the life of the community. Although there are multiple challenges to be addressed due to the remoteness of this place, I can see that the project has brought many benefits in terms of improved livelihoods," Mr Faber said, adding that the initiative has promoted a participatory approach where villagers join in decision-making. On April 10, the team visited Savang village, a mountainous village in Nhot-ou district, and participated in another integrated health outreach event. About 100 people from different ethnic groups including Akha, Hor and Kor participated in the activity. "The EU and UNICEF are working hand in hand with the government to improve the access of people in remote areas of Phongsaly to health, nutrition, WASH and education. Health and nutrition indicators are below the national average in this province and this is why we are working with provincial authorities to ensure that no one is left behind. There is a need for bringing services closer to hard-to-reach communities," said UNICEF Representative Octavian Bivol. Mr Bivol also said that more effort is needed to overcome language barriers and reach out to more ethnic groups in remote areas. "I see the interest of mothers in improving the lives of their children, but they face challenges when they come to the outreach sessions because they speak different languages and although there are translators sometimes communication is difficult. We need behaviour change communication materials in local languages. But we are here to understand what works and what needs to be improved, and we will work with the government and development partners to make sure every child survives and thrives," he said. The "Partnership for Improved Nutrition in the Lao PDR - Pillars 1 and 2: Strengthening

Nutrition Governance for Multisectoral Response and Scaling Up Nutrition Specific Actions” project started in July 2016 and runs until June 2021. The total budget is 11,250,000 Euros, with 9 million Euro contributed by the European Union and 2,250,000 Euros contributed by UNICEF. The project covers the 10 provinces of Phongsaly, Luang Prabang, Luang Namtha, Huaphan, Bokeo, Xieng Khuang, Khammuan, Savannakhet, Saravan and Attapeu. This project is part of the EU Partnership for Improved Nutrition in Laos with a total budget of EUR 50 million. The goal of this project is to strengthen the nutrition governance for multisectoral response, to scale up evidence-based and nutrition-specific sustainable interventions, and thus to improve the nutritional status of children and women in Laos. This goal is in line with the National Nutrition Strategy 2016-2025, Sustainable Development Goal 2 “End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture”, and Laos’ 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan for 2016-2020.

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(Latest Update April 23, 2019)