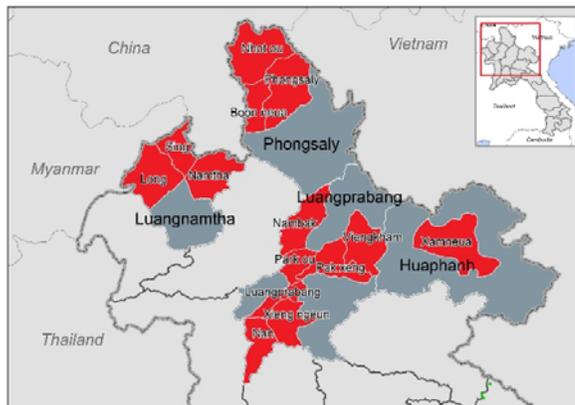


## Partnership for Improved Nutrition in Lao PDR Pillar 3: Sustainable Change Achieved through Linking Improved Nutrition and Governance

### Welcome!

Welcome to our 3<sup>rd</sup> issue! This 6-monthly publication aims to bring you updates on the Sustainable Change Achieved through Linking Improved Nutrition and Governance (SCALING) project, implemented by Save the Children, CARE, Comité de Coopération avec le Laos (CCL) and Child Fund. The project is funded by the European Union (EU) under the umbrella initiative Partnership for Improved Nutrition in Lao PDR (PIN).

Our overall objective 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 Luang Prabang (LPB), Luang Namtha (LNT), Phongsaly (PSL) and Huaphanh (HUA). The action supports the Lao Government's (GoL) to implement at scale the National Nutrition Strategy (NNS), NNS Action Plan (NNSAP) and convergent approach. It runs from December 2017 to December 2021.



In this 3<sup>rd</sup> issue, we would like to report about the results so far on selected indicators across the project areas. We will also describe in short the approach under four selected themes with case studies and quotes from direct beneficiaries.

Since the last SCALING MoUs were signed on LPB and LNT at the end of January 2019, implementation has fully started. The results so far can be summarised as follows.

	<p><b>Social Behavior Change Communication (SBCC)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Our Promise” SBCC on nutrition rolled out in 124 villages.</li> <li>- 428 trained Community Facilitators (CF) are visiting 2,724 1,000-days households on a regular basis.</li> <li>- Community Events conducted in 90 villages which 50% of the participants are females.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Health Systems Strengthening (HSS)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 14 Health Centers entering and submitting data online in the government DHIS2 system on a monthly basis.</li> <li>- 14 support visits by provincial mentors to district based mentors strengthening skills and supervising HC staff.</li> <li>- 7 health centers equipped with growth monitoring equipment.</li> <li>- 48 district and HC staff trained on IYCF.</li> <li>- 19 district health management meetings held and 7 provincial health management meetings held.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Gender</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Women Workload Reduction (WWR) workshops conducted among 3,124 women in 105 villages.</li> <li>- 78 couples participating in gender negotiation and workload reduction training</li> </ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 55 Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLA) formed and functioning</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Infrastructure</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Water supply system constructed/rehabilitated in 5 villages.</li> <li>- 18 additional villages have been selected for completion of water supply construction/rehabilitation in 2019</li> <li>- 222 households which procured a water filter and 518 households constructed a latrine as a result of WASH Marketing.</li> </ul>

### Approaches:

The Social and Behavior Change Communication (SBCC) Community Nutrition approach under SCALING is closely aligned to the National Social and Behavior Change Multisector Communication Strategy for Nutrition, Lao PDR, 2018, and adapted to the context of rural ethnic communities in the northern region. The SBCC sub national plan will contribute to the achievement of the Government of Lao PDR priority to reduce the high level of chronic malnutrition (stunting) in children under five years old and improve the health of mothers and young children in the northern region of Lao PDR.

#### The aim of the Community Nutrition Approach

- ✓ Increased cross sector collaboration, commitment and action for nutrition improvement
- ✓ Increased community ownership, participation and action for improved maternal and young child nutrition
- ✓ Enhanced individual behaviors and household practices for maternal and young child care and nutrition
- ✓ Increased quality and uptake of health services for maternal, newborn, child health and nutrition
- ✓ Enhanced enabling environment for improved nutrition, hygiene and health seeking behaviors

#### Underlying principles of the design of the village nutrition approach

- ✓ Feasible, doable workload for community volunteers and rural villagers
- ✓ Capacity building activities focus on practical skills and increased agency of community stakeholders
- ✓ Community leadership and ownership for village level nutrition plan implementation
- ✓ Flexibility for villages to plan and adapt activities as feasible for their context
- ✓ Village level collection, recording and utilization of locally generated data
- ✓ District cross sector leadership, partnership and collaboration
- ✓ Quarterly district cross sector team supportive supervision to selected villages

Gender related inequalities are a key barrier to improving nutrition and health care practices. Women require not only the capacity to take action to improve their and their children's nutritional status, but also the support of their partners, family and the community at large to do so. This is recognised as part of the NNS and NNSAP. To transform gender relations, increase joint decision making by men and women, and foster women's leadership, SCALING is facilitating three training workshops on women workload reduction, gender negotiation and women's leadership skills in close cooperation with the Lao Women's Union (LWU). In addition, Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) for women are developed in selected villages to strengthen economic empowerment.

- **Women workload reduction** workshops are organized in all target villages for approximately 20-25 women per session. Discussions on women's workload and women workload reduction discussion help women to understand their workload burden. The women make a plan for improved workload sharing with their husband

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and other family members to challenge the existing gender norms. Formal and informal follow-up sessions are organized with 10-15 self-selected couples per village.

- **Gender negotiation** training sessions for approximately 10-15 couples per village are organised to reflect on the way social norms influence their relationships and to identify characteristics of healthy relationships. It provides an opportunity for participants to discuss the importance of joint decision making at the household level (on issues like finance, assets control, family planning, and sending children to school). Couples then have the opportunity to practice negotiating contentious issues in a safe setting, ultimately creating a household action plan. Two follow-up sessions are organized to support couples to implement their plans.
- **Women's leadership skills** training is targeted at the VSLA leadership. In two sessions of 2.5 days in total the women will understand the basic concepts of a leader and leadership roles, recognize the leadership characteristics, and build on the ones they already have. It will improve the leadership skills and confidence to represent the VSLA in communication with village authorities and outsiders and ability to lead their group members as appropriate.
- **Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA)** are self-governed and self-selected groups comprising of 15-25 members, in the case of SCALING all women. The members who meet on a monthly basis to deposit savings and take loans. The groups themselves define the minimum level of savings and the interest rate charged per month on loans. The VSLA model increases women's access to finance and therefore positively impacts women's and infant's nutrition by enabling households to regularly purchase nutritious food that is not available through village agricultural production. SCALING aims to develop VSLA in 50% of the target villages targeting villages with least access to finance (remoteness and high poverty levels) and encourages the participation of the most vulnerable, such as ethnic and disabled women. The monthly savings level should allow the poorest to participate. A savings cycle lasts one year and groups typically function independently during the second cycle. The approach is sustainable, relying on minimal inputs (a savings box and notebooks) and groups are self-managed.

Lack of access to Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) has both direct (e.g. diarrheal diseases, intestinal parasite infections and environmental enteropathy) and indirect (e.g. necessitating walking long distances in search of water and sanitation facilities and diverting a mother's time away from child care) impact on a child's nutritional status. These effects are recognized in the NNS and the NNSAP. SCALING aims to improve the capacity of Nam Saat as the department responsible for the supply of clean water in villages under the Ministry of Health, in two areas: improvement of sustainable water supply systems in selected villages and the marketing of selected WASH products. Under the WASH Marketing component households in the target areas are encouraged to invest in latrines and water filters in cooperation with selected private vendors and trained Community Sales Agents. The approach matches the government policy to make all villages Open Defecation Free (ODF) by 2023. In addition to the approach on marketing of selected WASH products the project has allocated budget for water system constructions in the target communities.



Pictures of water system construction in Naphieng village, Xamneua district, Huaphanh province



Pictures of water system construction in Khanoumnoy village, Phongsay district, Phongsaly province



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### Case Studies:

Ms. Pelu, 25 years old, lives in Houaysoung village, Boun Neua district, Phongsaly province. She is from the Akha ethnic group and is married with three children (two girls and one little boy). Every day she has to get up early in the morning to do household chores such as cooking breakfast, feeding the family's animals and taking care of the children. To earn a living, she spends most of her time working in the sugar cane and rubber plantations – especially during cropping and harvest seasons. Over the past six months, Ms. Pelu has had the opportunity to attend a Women Workload Reduction (WWR) training in her village.



Ms. Pelu says, “After the training, I shared some knowledge with my husband about sharing the workload. Since then, I have observed my husband helping me with household chores. For example, when I am busy cooking or preparing food for our breakfast, he helps with feeding the pigs and chicken. He also helps look after the children for me. At the moment I still have little children, so my husband sets me the lighter tasks of weeding the sugar cane and he works longer hours gathering rubber from the plantation, which is considered to be harder and heavier work.”

Ms. Thong, Laolum ethnic group, lives in Houaxieng village, Xam Neua district, Huaphanh province. Her main occupation is rice farming, but she does some weaving for additional income. During cropping and harvesting seasons, Ms. Thong and her family members normally spend most of their time working in the rice fields. When Thong does not have to work in her rice field, she weaves skirts (Lao skirts) as this can provide some additional family income.



Ms. Thong says, “The Child Fund project team held a meeting with the women in my village to share some information about the idea of having a Village Savings & Loans Associations (VSLA) and to talk about forming a VSLA in my village. I was interested in the VSLA approach and discussed it with my husband.” “Then, I voluntarily applied to become a member. I think that VSLAs are a really good idea because every member can save their money on a monthly basis depending how much they can save. The minimum amount per month is 10,000 kip and the maximum amount is 100,000 kip. I know that it is much easier for members to get loans from the VSLA whenever they need for their particular purpose – especially when compared with the process of getting loans from banks. So far I have deposited and saved 300,000 kip with the VSLA in my village. In the future I wish to see the VSLA in my village continue to grow bigger so the members can get more loans when or if needed.”

Sorh Korh, Akha ethnic group, 26 years old, lives in Lor Meu village, Sing district, Luang Namtha province. There are seven people in his family – his parents, younger sister, his wife, his two children and himself. Sorh Korh works at his own rubber plantation for a living. However, the income is not sufficient for the whole family. Therefore, to supplement his income, he earns some money from helping others at their rubber plantations. He also collects bamboo for selling.

Before the SCALING project came to the village, there were a few families without a latrine, Sorh Korh family was one of those. Sorh Korh and his family used to go to the nearby forest when they wanted to use the toilet. It was difficult especially when it was raining or sunny because they could not hide from the rain or the sun. They sometimes got bitten by mosquitos or insects in the forest. Sometimes, they had to go to a cousin's house to use the toilet when it was raining.

When the project came, families without latrines were encouraged to build one. Sorh Korh has realised his latrine since about two weeks and he can feel the impact. He finds it very convenient to have a latrine at his own place. He no longer

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has to go to the forest, worry about the rain, the sun or getting bitten by insects. Most important, he does not have to visit his cousin's house for the toilet where there is rain. Having a latrine is also more hygienic.

*When asked about the impact of the latrine, Sorh Korh answered: 'very good'. He described his situation before having the latrine as "I used to go to nearby forest or someone else toilets when I needed to use toilet...I sometimes got bitten by mosquitos in the forest". He also said "after having the latrine, I do not have to worry about the rain when it is raining and I do not have to worry about sun when it is sunny...I do not get bitten by mosquitos or insects". He added that "one of the most significant impacts of having this latrine is I do not have to visit my cousin's place to use their toilet if it rains."*



Arsorh is from the Akha ethnic minority group and lives in Lor Meu community, Sing district, Luang Namtha province with her husband and four children (1 son and 3 daughters). Arsorh and her husband are farmers and spend most of their time working in their upland paddy fields and rubber plantations during cropping and harvest seasons. At home Arsorh also has to do household chores. For instance, fetching water, washing, collecting firewood for cooking food and boiling water for drinking. A few months ago the WASH marketing team including with Nam Saat staff from the Provincial and District Health Office, CARE Project Officer, WASH Marketing Officer and private vendors came to the village to explain the importance of water, sanitation and hygiene to the community and identify options for community to access clean and



save water, including WASH products like water filters. As a result, her family decided to buy one water filter set which costs around 250,000 LAK (some US\$ 29). Since Arsorh's family has gotten the water filter, her family members do not waste a lot of time boiling water at home and when they work in their fields. Also her family members don't waste their time and money to buy drinking water from the shop which is around 5 km away from their village. So their children have more time to do their homework assignment at home and the parents have more time to work in their fields.

*Arsorh says, "Since my family has owned this water filter we have enough safe drinking water at home and we do not waste much time boiling water with firewood. It is much cheaper if compared with buying bottled water from the shops"*

To subscribe to our 6-monthly newsletter, send comments or suggestions, please contact Houmphanh Soulivongxay at [Houmphanh.Soulivongxay@savethechildren.org](mailto:Houmphanh.Soulivongxay@savethechildren.org).

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