

CARITAS LUXEMBOURG IN LAO PDR

Focus on the Nutrition situation in Laos | ProCSpNut Project
Financed by the EU and the Ministry of Foreign affairs of Luxembourg

Caritas strategy

As part of the Caritas 2024 strategy to contribute to the reduction of poverty in Lao PDR, our organization works on four main objectives: (1) increased resilience, (2) diversified income generation, (3) strengthened governance systems and (4) adapted infrastructures in place.

Those objectives are all covered through projects divided in four main themes: Nutrition, Livelihood, Socio-Economic Development plan (SED) planning and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR).

This first newsletter of 2024 focuses on Nutrition and will guide you through the achievements of Caritas' ProCSpNut project and how it made a change the current nutrition situation in Lao PDR.



Map 1: Provinces of Laos where Caritas is currently active.

ProCSpNut Project

Promoting Civil Society Participation to Improve the Implementation of the Lao National Nutrition Strategy

Project summary

Co-funded by the European Union and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Luxembourg, the ProCSpNut project has as global objective to systematically manage malnutrition with strengthened health systems through Social and Behavioral Change Communication (SBCC), with the partnership of the Association for Rural Mobilization and Improvement (ARMI), a Lao Civil Society Organization, acting as the co-applicant to promote and improve the implementation of the Lao national nutrition strategy.

The 3 districts in the targeted provinces are: Thoulakhom (Vientiane province), Xaychamphone (Bolikhamxay province), and Phaxay (Xiengkhouang province).

As this project recently came to an end, this newsletter will highlight the main achievements led by Caritas and its local partners, as well as the main challenges faced and lessons learned.

Project's main objectives and achievements

The project's main objectives align with Lao PDR's NNS as it aims to reduce malnutrition by targeting two specific indicator targets: **increasing the identification of malnutrition cases** by at least 10% and **reducing the chronic malnutrition and stunting rates** by also 10%, both among children under five years old and pregnant women.

Caritas Luxembourg in Lao PDR strongly believes in the power of long-term empowerment of partners and local communities through a thoughtful and efficient capacity building strategy.

The ProCSpNut project is structured around a co-partnership with ARMI, a LCSO focused, among other things, on the improvement of nutrition in 10 provinces, including Vientiane Capital. The Caritas staff served as a strong support by offering ARMI trainings in M&E, WASH, Advocacy and the NIMCS system, the Nutrition Information Management Supply Chain system, providing a systematic framework for data collection and analysis, as well as direct reporting to responsible authorities.

ARMI's goal is then to act on the field, while still supported by the Caritas staff, with a tailored approach (SBCC) by:

- Training in their turn 9 local LCSO's on 11 topics, e.g., on Nutrition Tools Training, Proposal Writing Skills, M&E, HR or Communication Trainings;
- Holding discussions with Mother Support Groups (MSGs) and with local communities promoting best nutrition practices;

breastfeeding importance and techniques, postnatal care, growth and development as well as hygiene, gardening and stock management;

- Offering nutrition information sessions and activities such as cooking classes.

Caritas offered material assistance to local communities by distributing nutrition specific medical equipment.

The ProCSpNut project offered needed equipment such as malnutrition diagnosis delivery kits, blood tests, delivery beds or infant radiant warmers to chosen health centers. The project also contributed to the distribution of water filters to 2.065 households which allows more than 12.000 individuals to benefit from clean water to drink and cook without needing to pre-boil it.

10 new Water Systems and more than 250 latrines were constructed across 36 villages situated within the three target districts in the three provinces, allowing to meet sanitation needs for a total of 1,049 individuals. This effort helped to improve hygiene practices as well as reduce indiscriminate waste disposal practices, consequently reducing the risk of waterborne illnesses.

Caritas also conducted targeted and adapted trainings to local communities.

Caritas held Nutrition Specific Case Management and Reporting Trainings as well as maternal child health and nutrition technical training to Health Center staffs and Village Health Workers. The project also offered quarterly Health Centre outreach activities to help monitor and treat patients and finally established provincial and inter-provincial stakeholder meetings.

Some of the Project Key Figures

Mother Support Groups (MSGs)

MSGs were established in 37 villages across three districts within the target provinces.

- Thulakhom: 10 villages - 20 MSGs
- Phaxay: 10 villages - 20 MSGs
- Xaychamphone: 17 villages - 34 MSGs

74 MSGs (lead mothers) were trained on growth monitoring, nutrition for young mothers and WRA (Women of Reproductive Age), hygiene and sanitation and 1000 days care for new-born.

MSGs also organized regular open spaces for young mothers and WRA for knowledge sharing and learning.

- Total meetings organized: 217
- Total participants: 4,204 people of whom 3,183 are women

Malnutrition case management

100% of identified malnutrition cases (5,046) have intervention at district and/or village level.

Reduction in malnutrition rates amongst children:

- Prevalence of malnutrition is down 19%
- Wasting down by 4.56%
- Stunting down by 8.66%
- Underweight down by 5.6%

Hygiene practices

On a total of 287 latrines, 255 were installed by Caritas (88.85%) and 32 latrines were installed by the community, in line with the participatory approach.

FOCUS

Brief update on the nutrition situation in Laos in 2024

As part of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the fight against malnutrition, consequently linked to socio-economic growth and development, constitutes a key priority for Lao PDR.

Preliminary results from the Lao Social Indicators Survey 2023 (LSISIII) indicate that 32.8% of children under five years old suffer from stunting (*impaired growth and development*), 10.7% from wasting (*strong malnutrition*) and 24.3% are underweight. Since 2017, these numbers have either increased or stagnated, leaving Lao PDR with some of the highest rates of malnutrition in South-Eastern Asia region.

End of 2015, the country launched its 2016-2020 National Nutrition Strategy (NNS), part of the 8th National Socio-

Economic Development Plan (NSEDP), updated every five years. Working across several sectors, they aim, by 2025, to reduce malnutrition by tackling its main causes, such as food insecurity and poor nutritional quality, lacking mother-and-child health practices, poor access to clean water or hygiene, as well as inefficient health services.

The 9th National Nutrition Forum took place the 5th and 6th of March 2024, gathering Lao National and local authorities, development partners and organizations from the public and private sector, as well as Civil Society organizations. The NNF served to assess the global progress and commit to the necessary actions to follow the 2021-2025 NNS.

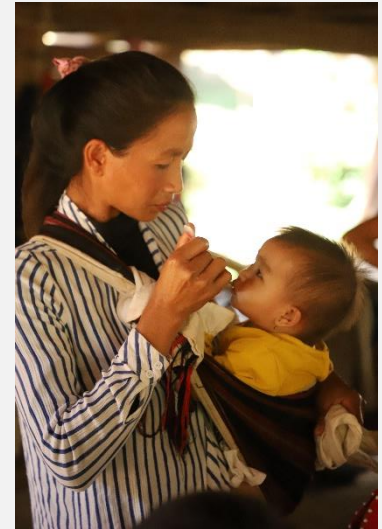


Figure 1: Infants feeding with the project cooking demonstration. 30/11/2022, Pong village, Phaxay district, Xiangkhouang province.

Story from the field

Water System Management in the Village: Households benefitting from the Water System

Like many other villagers in ProCSpiNut project targets, the water system benefits to many villagers in Phoukaonang village. An eased access to water helps women and children to have more time at home and to reduce their daily workload in the family. Mr. Sengtong, 37, a deputy chief of village from Phoukaonang village (Toulakhom district), said that *"in the past, there was not enough water, so villagers had to carry water from Namngern Lake."* He smiled and happily expressed that *"Caritas supported our village with water systems and school renovation projects and provided water pipes, cement, sand, and steel for us."* He continued by saying that *"I learned how to support and lead villagers with water system construction, maintenance, and utilization."* He added that *"with the support of the project, today we have enough water, and people, especially children and women, don't need to carry water too far like in the past."*



Figure 2: Children testing the new clean water systems. 21/09/2023, Naxay village, Phaxay district, Xiangkhouang province.



Figure 3: Measuring a child's MUAC (middle upper arm circumference). 16/03/2023, Nayang village, Thoulakhom district, Vientiane Province.



Figure 4: MSG open-space discussion. 20/11/2023, Namyam village, Thoulakhom district, Vientiane province.



Figure 5: Pregnant woman receiving medical assistance. 17/11/2023, Naphaeng village, Thoulakhom district, Vientiane province.

What is Social and Behavior Change Communication (SBCC) ?

As UNICEF states, Social and Behavior Change Communication (SBCC), as a part of the global SBC interactive process, is a way to influence positive social change through strategic communication. This can involve raising awareness, advocating for change, and using interpersonal communication or public campaigns. It's most effective when tailored to a specific community, taking into consideration its geographic, economic and cultural context.

Why and how is SBCC applied in the ProCSpINut project?

The ProCSpINut project has been built around the utilization of the SBCC method, characterized by a strong emphasis on

participatory methodologies and capacity-building efforts, engaging stakeholders across different sectors. As a matter of fact, 79% of the key informants, featuring actors from LSCO's, Health centers, Provincial and District actors, agreed the project's right tailoring to meet the specific needs of the direct beneficiaries, especially at the community level.

In more concrete terms, this tailored approach focused for example on equipping the population in targeted villages with essential hygiene practices, ensuring access to clean water, and establishing proper latrines. Pregnant women and children were identified as key beneficiaries who gained increased access to vital health services.



Figure 1: Children enjoying clean water. 28/03/2023, Nayang village, Thoulakhom district, Vientiane province.



Figure 2: Mother and child. 19/11/2023, Nayang village, Thoulakhom district, Vientiane province.

Zoom in

“VMoN” – Village Model on Nutrition

VMoN, also known as “Village Model on Nutrition”, is an initiative aiming to build strength and sustainability for the living system of communities in target villages and province and eventually contributing to the reduction of poverty in the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

A model village represents a village that coordinates and organizes a single strategic plan followed by many sectors, adopting 22 priority measures as a principle to follow. As these measures appear in the National Nutrition Strategy (NNS), the VMoN initiative follows the government's National Plan of Action on

Nutrition (NPAN) 2021-2025.

The first main objective of VMoNs is the strengthening of community-level coordination across relevant sectors (health, education, agriculture, and planning). This coordination should, among others, facilitate multi-sectoral interventions by district authorities in the target villages. The second main objective is to reduce malnutrition in the villages with a focus on children under 5, especially in the first 1,000 days of life. The third main objective is the improvement of SBCC.

Some of the means to reach these objectives include the promotion of

domestic kitchen crops, support diversifications of income, and building of relevant infrastructures such as irrigation systems.

The goal of the government for 2023 was to count 1 VMoN per province, meaning 18 VMoNs in total. As of today, Caritas has successfully implemented the first 4 VMoNs in Laos, namely one village in Vientiane Province through the ProCSpINut project, and 2 villages in Xiengkhouang and one village in Houaphanh through the SLS II project, another Caritas project mainly focusing on improving livelihoods.



European Union



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