



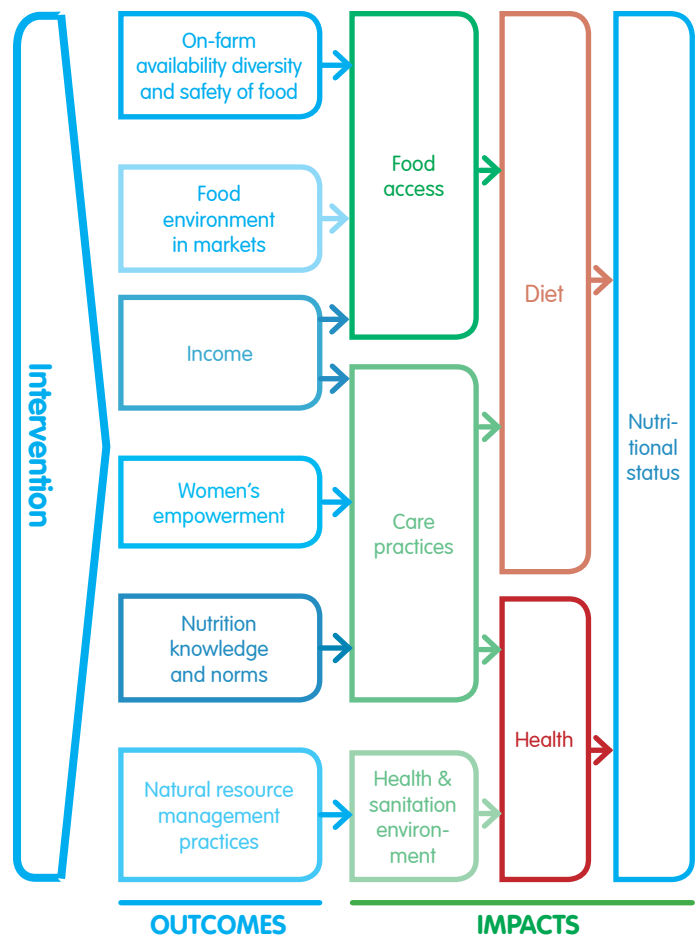
From Agriculture to Nutrition

Insights from Enhanced Nutrition in Upland Farming Families (ENUFF) -
 Technical Paper No. 2 - Summary

Poor dietary quality, particularly among vulnerable groups, continues to challenge the nutrition targets in Lao PDR. Despite significant progress, Lao PDR still has relatively high levels of malnourished children. In response to this, the Government of Lao PDR (GoL) has prioritized nutrition with the adoption of the National Nutrition Strategy and Plan of Action (2016–2025) (NNSPA). This includes objective and priority actions in nutrition sensitive agriculture (NSA), including improved access to nutritious food, and improved nutrient intake.

The Enhancing Nutrition of Upland Farming Families (ENUFF) project is a programme of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), implemented by SNV – The Netherlands Development Organisation with the assistance of Agrisud International in Lao PDR. The project is implemented together with government counterparts and other development partners with the aim of improving family nutrition in remote and ethnically diverse upland farming communities through nutrition-sensitive agricultural production, sustainable management of natural resources and good practices in health and hygiene. A core pillar of ENUFF is NSA, which is seen as a key way to improve food production and diversity at the household level. NSA is complemented by improvement of women’s skills in nutrition and care practices, in particular women of reproductive age (WRA); physical and economic access to nutritious and diversified food through income generation activities, market and short value chain opportunities and a development of a conducive policy, strategic and institutional framework to address and prevent food and nutrition insecurity. The project is being implemented in Xiengkhor and Viengxay districts of Houaphanh province and Nga and Beng districts of Oudomxay province in collaboration with the Provincial Health Departments (PHD), Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Offices (PAFO) and Lao Women’s Union (LWU) with their subordinate offices in the target districts. The project targets 4,000 farming families in 40 villages across the four districts of these two provinces.

The aim of this brief is to present some lessons learned to date in the implementation of NSA activities and their impact so far on dietary diversity in the target communities. The brief will also provide some recommendations for projects using NSA with a multi-sectoral approach in similar contexts.



Impact pathway framework of Nutrition Sensitive Agriculture (NSA) projects. Source: Herforth and Ballard, 2016

Based on ENUFF's experience so far, SNV makes the following recommendations to fulfil the potential of NSA to eradicate malnutrition:

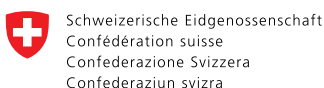
Development Partners and Public Sector:

- 1. Invest in participatory SBCC resources and actions that involve caregivers as well as influential family members and can address poor complementary feeding:** The findings of ENUFF's monitoring and other national surveys (LSIS II) indicate that more attention has to be placed in the nutrition of children between 6 months and 2 years old. While important strides have been made in the adoption of exclusive breastfeeding, adequate complementary feeding of infants is still lagging behind. Nutrition activities need to be focused and devoted to improving the way diverse food is prepared and given to infants. This will require an investment in a number of areas such as the production and access of nutritious food for infants, changing gender norms and practices, in particular in the distribution of household activities to alleviate workload and caring practices, and on monitoring growth of children and looking for signs of malnutrition. It is also recommended to extend SBCC activities to fathers and all caregivers including grandparents, who may have responsibility for feeding infants when their parent(s) are in the field. The time is opportune for government and development partners to join forces in strategising and developing key tools, communication channels, and implementation plans to promote SBCC among target populations as well as to identify and fill existing knowledge gaps.
- 2. Align and integrate agriculture activities with SBCC,** for example cooking demonstrations that utilise locally available and readily accessible foods that are in season; promote gender messages such as joint decision making in agriculture activities that reach men and women. A coordinated planning and implementation of activities is required to ensure that the potential benefits of acting multi-sectoral are obtained.
- 3. Ensure vulnerable farming communities are included:** There is a need to have an intense focus on the production of nutritious food for families. While better production of cash crops or livestock could produce higher incomes if this is paired with efficient interventions to facilitate access to markets, in the short term it is more important to ensure that families have access to nutritious foods locally. It is key to keep in mind that special considerations need to be made for the most vulnerable families.
- 4. Invest in better data collection and analysis.** Progress is hindered by a scarcity of good quality data. The existing tools to monitor progress in agriculture, for example only capture some elements of the food system such as agricultural output, and total food supply. These indicators provide only a partial assessment of actual food and nutrition needs of vulnerable populations. Qualitative research related to SBCC, as well as the drivers of food choice, is highly necessary, to capture in particular the motivations, barriers and incentives to make particular food choices, as well as the potential sustainability of interventions. To ensure that the way in which projects have an impact on nutrition is well understood, it is vital to trace the impact pathway. This will provide clear evidence of which combination of activities and in which sequence produce the highest impact, in particular contexts. Understanding the impact pathways that work will also allow to address opportunities and constraints that affect each pathway such as the institutional environment, gender or environmental sustainability, through policy and stakeholder engagement.

Private Sector

- 5. Develop strong business cases to incentivise private sector nutrition action that link producers to markets:** While the promotion of cash crops, fruit trees and others could be in theory a good option to increase family income, in reality the impact of this activity will be minimal in contexts where there are serious systemic bottlenecks and challenges to bring products to markets (i.e. remote communities, no roads, small volumes, lack of buyers, etc.). However, the involvement of the private sector at the early stages of production could be beneficial to incentivise producers and to help them have access to useful market information.
- 6. Invest in the infrastructure, technologies and mechanism to sustainably produce safe and diverse nutritious foods.** Cold chain management, storage and processing can improve the nutrient value and safety of food as well as reducing post-harvest loss. Both public and private investments are essential to provide the market infrastructure for year-round availability of these foods. Working collaboratively, government and private sector participants can take targeted actions to address specific nutrition objectives. Certain processing, storage and home food preparation activities can preserve or improve nutrient values. Energy or time saving devices can reduce the amount of time it takes to prepare more nutritious foods.

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