



Study to Analyze Institutional Constraints to Effective Implementation of the National Nutrition Policy in Lao PDR

I Phase One report I

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Cover: Local foods such as ants eggs and small fish are a good source of protein

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Abbreviations and acronyms

CN	Centre for Nutrition (MoH)
DHHP	Department of Hygiene and Health Promotion (MoH)
DHO	District Health Office
DP	Development Partner
ECCD	Early Childhood Care and Development
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FNS-AP	Food and Nutrition Security Action Plan
GoL	Government of the Lao PDR
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
LWU	Lao Women's Union
LYU	Lao Youth Union
MAF	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
M+E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MPI	Ministry of Planning and Investment
MES	Ministry of Education and Sports
MoH	Ministry of Health
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NCMC	National Commission for Mother and Child
NNC	National Nutrition Committee
NNP	National Nutrition Policy
PAFO	Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office
PHD	Provincial Health Department
PHO	Provincial Health Office
PM	Prime Minister
PMC	Program Management Committee (provincial level)
PNC	Provincial Nutrition Committee
SUN	Scaling Up Nutrition
TWG	Technical Working Group
TWGFNS	Technical Working Group Food and Nutrition Security
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nation Children Fund
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WFP	World Food Program
WHO	World Health Organization



Executive summary

The government of Lao PDR (GoL), in collaboration with development partners, has made significant progress in developing the Multisectoral Food and Nutrition Security Action Plan (FNS-AP) 2014-2020. In order to support implementation of the FNS-AP, it is important that robust coordination and governance mechanisms are in place and functioning effectively, and supporting the necessary implementation platforms. This research study seeks identify and begin to address the critical institutional barriers that constrain effective implementation of the FNS-AP.

The study addresses four research questions:

1. What cross-sectoral linkages already exist and how well do these work? What are the major constraints to improved cross-sectoral coordination?
2. What cross-scale¹ (vertical) linkages already exist and how well do these work? What are the major constraints to improved cross-scale coordination?
3. What donor/development partner coordination mechanisms already exist and how well do these work? What are the major constraints to improved donor/ GoL coordination?
4. How can institutional roles, responsibilities and operating practices (encompassing cross-sectoral, cross-scale, and development partners) be improved to underpin effective implementation of the Food and Nutrition Security Action Plan.

The study is being conducted in two phases, an initial Scoping Phase 1 of approximately two months, followed by a Detailed Research Phase 2 (forthcoming). This report outlines the key findings and prioritized recommendations arising from Phase 1 of the study, and includes proposals for Phase 2.

¹ 'Cross-scale' refers to institutional relationships between national & sub-national (provincial & district) levels.

1 Key findings

The various processes around the development of the FNS-AP have created a number of opportunities for enhanced cross-sectoral governance and coordination. At central level, these opportunities include:

- ♦ High level endorsement and support to multi-sectoral coordination – evidenced by the decree signed by the Prime Minister on the establishment of the National Nutrition Committee (NNC) and its Secretariat;
- ♦ Different government agencies at the national and sub-national levels coming together to discuss priority actions, available and required capacities and resources, and operational framework;
- ♦ The establishment of the Lao SUN Civil Society Alliance has created space for NGO and civil society engagement with GoL related to improving nutrition;
- ♦ The establishment of a dedicated and equipped 'Office of the Secretariat' for the National Nutrition Committee (NNC) led by resourceful Secretariat Coordinator, and supported by one international consultant and two national consultants;
- ♦ The formation of supporting governance mechanisms, including (at central level) the Government Core Group and the Technical Working Group – Food and Nutrition Security (TWG-FNS); and at sub-national level - Provincial Nutrition Committees (PNCs).

However, this study has identified a number of institutional constraints at both central and decentralized levels. There are indications that the various concerned ministries, and the focal departments within these ministries, are at different stages of engagement with the multi-sectoral approach, and are making progress on this at different rates. It is important that developments are shared and agreed, so that there is a common platform of understanding, ownership and commitment towards process, outputs and outcomes.

As work proceeds on developing and refining plans and outputs, there is a need for clear governance



structures and processes to coordinate and provide oversight to the convergent approach, and to share, review and make decisions on the various outputs. At present, these governance structures, and the processes for sharing, review and oversight remain unclear.

The role, composition and authority of the Government Core Group and the TWG-FNS remain unclear, and their functioning is reported to be variable. The effective functioning of the Office of the Secretariat is constrained by overlap of the Centre for Nutrition's (and the Coordinator's) health/nutrition functions and coordination functions. This is contributing to some confusion and concern among external stakeholders about the role and independence of the Secretariat Office in undertaking its coordination function. These uncertainties are exacerbated by TORs for the Secretariat Office that are broad and ambiguous, and the lack of TORs for the Coordinator herself, which may result in unclear responsibilities within the Secretariat Office, and unrealistic expectations from external stakeholders.

Major challenges to multi-sectoral governance and coordination exist at sub-national level. The functioning of the newly formed Provincial Nutrition Committees (PNCs) and their Secretariats is reported to be uneven, and the PNCs remain challenged on how (and what) to coordinate across sectors. Provincial authorities continue to engage with districts largely, if not entirely, on a sectoral basis, and PNCs are challenged on how to support the districts to coordinate implementation at village/khum ban level. District level engagement at village/khum ban level is reported to be sporadic, and there are indications that much needs to be done to facilitate the convergent approach at this level.

Development partner (DP)/donor coordination is constrained by the fact that different DPs/donors have access to different ministries and decision-makers, with various levels of negotiating power and influence on internal decision-making processes. Despite improved coordination, the main engagement mode of DPs, donors and NGOs remains bilateral and project-specific/sector-specific.

Until recently there has been limited formal engagement of the Government Core Group with DPs/donors/NGOs, and this may be constraining opportunities for aligned planning, implementation and monitoring.

2 Recommendations

The study proposes the following tentative recommendations for strengthening governance and coordination at both national and sub-national levels:

Strengthening the functioning of the Office of the Secretariat:

It is recommended that MoH:

- ◆ Provides clear communication to all focal ministries that:
 - reinforces the role of the Office of the Secretariat as a coordination hub for all sectoral planning and implementing partners related to the FNS-AP (including MPI, MoH, MAF, MES and technical assistance)
 - clearly differentiates the coordination role of the Office of the Secretariat (coordination and communication with the various Ministries for their nutrition interventions), from the operational work of the Centre for Nutrition (working on the content of the MoH sectoral efforts for nutrition-specific interventions), i.e. emphasizes the independence of the Office of the Secretariat²;
- ◆ Appoints a Secretariat Coordinator on a full-time basis in the Office of the Secretariat, with no (or minimal) operational responsibilities for the Centre for Nutrition. It is acknowledged that this may be challenging, due to the currently limited human resources within the MoH. Nevertheless, a number of key stakeholders have emphasized that a full-time Coordinator is critical if the Office of the Secretariat is to operate effectively;

2 'independence' in this context means that, while the Secretariat Office lies within the MoH, its work is to act as the coordination hub across all the focal ministries, and thus it should be independent from the day-to-day work of the MoH. This is in line with international best practice.



- ◆ Provides the Secretariat Office with the political support and connections that it requires, while allowing the Secretariat Office to operate fairly autonomously³;
- ◆ If necessary, revises decision-making and budget structures, in order to better support the Secretariat Coordinator to lead effectively.

It is recommended that MAF and MES:

- ◆ Each nominate one staff member to support the Office of the Secretariat. The representatives from MES and MAF may not need to be at the Secretariat Office full time, but they need to be effective focal points of their respective ministries on multi-sectoral coordination.

In conjunction with MoH, MPI, MAF and MES, the Secretariat Office:

- ◆ Should develop clear TORs for the Secretariat Office;
- ◆ Should develop clear TORs for the Secretariat Coordinator.

Strengthening the functioning of the Core Group

It is recommended that MoH, MAF, MES, MPI and NPRC:

- ◆ Provide clear communication within their respective ministries and institutions:
 - about the role, functions and composition of the Government Core Group;
 - to request consistent and active participation of nominated GoL focal points in Core Group meetings. MAF and MES nominated staff members to assist the Office of the Secretariat could act as the respective focal points for the Core Group
 - to identify budgets to train and incentivize Core Group members;
 - where necessary, to establish official processes and procedures within each of the focal ministries / institutions for sharing the minutes and deliberations

of Core Group meetings internally. This will help to address a major constraint of limited communication and information-sharing within departments, ministries and institutions.

It is recommended that the Secretariat Office:

- ◆ Review, and if necessary revise, the TORs of the Core Group to better reflect:
 - its technical mandate;
 - how it operates internally and externally;
- ◆ Establish and formalize a mechanism for periodically bringing together the Government Core Group and the DP Core Group to:
 - facilitate aligned planning and monitoring;
 - identify and coordinate all external technical and financial resources available to support nutrition interventions;
 - ensure that joint Core Group meetings, are regularly scheduled, chaired by the Secretariat Coordinator, have an agreed agenda and an agreed procedure for taking and sharing minutes.

Strengthening the functioning of the TWG-FNS

It is recommended that GoL decision-makers:

- ◆ Clarify the role, functions and composition of TWG-FNS;
- ◆ Clarify the status of the TWG-FNS as an official mechanism for DP/donor engagement.

Strengthening donor coordination

It is recommended that the lead DP/donor/NGO agencies:

- ◆ Nominate a small Core Group of DPs/donors/NGOs to represent the interests of the DP/donor/NGO community and provide systematic feed back to this community
- ◆ Ensure active participation of the Core Group of DPs/donors/NGOs at Secretariat-led joint Core Group meetings;
- ◆ Lead the development of a communication plan for DPs/donors/NGOs, with agreed common advocacy objectives and messages to the GoL at different levels to improve consistency and facilitate negotiations;
- ◆ Lead the development of a coordinated joint plan for technical assistance to the Secretariat, line ministries and at sub-national levels;

³ 'autonomous' in this context means that the Secretariat Office should be able to move forward without asking for permission for every issue, although the extent of its autonomy will need to be agreed and included in its TORs.



- ◆ Continue to provide appropriate technical and financial resources to support the functioning of the Office of the Secretariat.

Strengthening governance and coordination at provincial level

It is recommended that the Secretariat (through the Secretariat Office) should:

- ◆ Support the development of tools and guidelines to facilitate effective functioning of PNCs;
- ◆ Support the Salavan PNC Secretariat to engage with the Salavan Provincial Vice-Governor to establish a provincial Core Group of 4 members;
- ◆ Provide technical and institutional support to the PNCs to facilitate links between national, provincial and district planning and monitoring;
- ◆ Assist the PNCs in all three pilot provinces to develop detailed TORs outlining the roles and functions of the PNC and Provincial Core Group;
- ◆ Support action-research in conjunction with provincial partners to document in real time the evolution and functioning of the multi-sectoral provincial coordination mechanisms in the three pilot provinces. The purpose is to ensure that lessons learned can feed into the policy dialogue around scaling-up to other provinces.

Strengthening governance and coordination at district and village/khum ban levels

It is recommended that the Centre for Nutrition, in collaboration with local partners, supports the implementation of a study in a small number of purposively selected villages/khum ban to map and document the various institutional structures and processes, together with their roles and functions. The study findings will be used to inform the policy dialogue and improve the implementation approach of the convergence model and action plan at district and village/khum ban levels.

3 Areas for further study

Two inter-related major areas for further study are proposed under Phase 2 of the research:

1. Review and document in real time the evolution and functioning of the multi-sectoral provincial coordination mechanisms in the three pilot provinces. Lessons learned would contribute to the policy dialogue around scaling-up to other provinces;
2. Conduct a focused study in a small number of purposively selected villages and khum ban to obtain a better understanding of the functioning of the various institutional structures and processes at district, khum ban (cluster) and village level. The aim is to contribute to the policy dialogue around implementation of the convergence approach at district and village/khum ban levels.

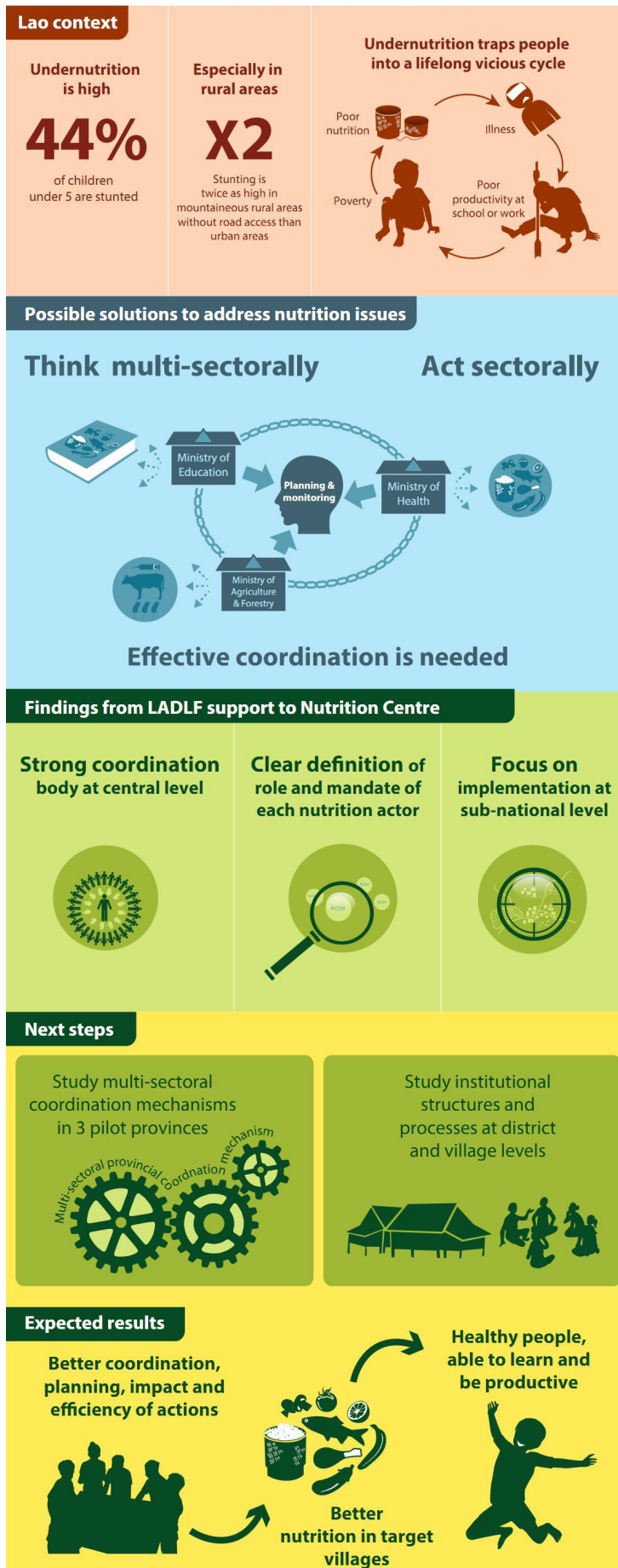
A detailed research proposal, which brings together these two inter-related areas of study, is under development.

In addition to the two proposed areas of study outlined above, it is recommended that the Centre for Nutrition supports continued engagement by LADLF with central-level decision-makers and DPs on how best to rationalize and achieve consensus on central level governance structures, including the Secretariat Office, the Core Group and the TWG-FNS.

The purpose of this continued engagement is to support and facilitate stakeholder ownership and implementation of recommendations from Phase 1 of the study, and ultimately to strengthen the effectiveness, efficiency and accountability of central level governance mechanisms to support coordination and implementation of the FNS-AP.

LADLF Research Project 2014-15

Analysis of institutional constraints to effective implementation of the nutrition policy in Lao PDR



Infographic showing main findings of the study

Sources: World Bank and UN - Lao PDR Country Note on MDG Acceleration Framework, 2014; Lao Statistics Bureau - Child population estimates, 2013; World Bank - World Databank Statistics, 2014

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Background and introduction

1 Lao PDR Context

Lao PDR suffers from the highest level of stunting (44 per cent of children) of all countries in the Greater Mekong Sub-Region. Current modest progress is insufficient to achieve MDG 1c by 2015.

The reasons for this high level of under-nutrition are well recognised, but efforts to address the immediate causes have had limited success.

In seeking to improve the response, the Government of Lao PDR (GoL) and development partners have made significant progress towards the development of the Multisectoral Food and Nutrition Security Action Plan (FNS-AP) 2014-2020. GoL and DPs agree on the need to ensure that well designed policies, strategies and plans are effectively implemented, including through:

- ◆ Identifying key individuals and agencies that are responsible for program delivery and that are accountable for results;
- ◆ Ensuring there are clear lines of communication and coordination within and between key Ministries, and between national, provincial and district levels of Government;
- ◆ Ensuring that the efforts of donors, development partners, NGOs and civil society are aligned with national plans and priorities;
- ◆ Developing an agreed planning, reporting and review system;
- ◆ Ensuring that adequate government budget and development assistance are allocated and disbursed on time;
- ◆ Systematically monitoring progress and documenting lessons learned;
- ◆ Ensuring that robust coordination and governance mechanisms are in place and functioning;
- ◆ Establishing mechanisms to identify and address critical institutional obstacles.

This research study seeks identify and begin to address the critical institutional barriers that constrain

effective implementation of the FNS-AP.

In July 2013, the Prime Minister signed the decree (decision no.73/PM office) on the establishment of the National Nutrition Committee (NNC) and its Secretariat. The NNC is chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister/Minister of Education, and includes representatives of seven ministries (agriculture, health, education, finance, industry, planning, culture and information), the National Commission for Women and Children and mass organizations. The Committee held its first meeting in August 2013, and established the NNC Secretariat, chaired by the Ministry of Health (MoH) and co-chaired by the Ministries of Agriculture & Forestry (MAF), Planning & Investment (MPI) and Education & Sports (MES).

The NNC Secretariat consists of 21 members at Director/Deputy Director level and is chaired by the Deputy Minister of Health and co-chaired by the Deputy Ministers of Agriculture and Forestry, Planning and Investment, and Education and Sports. A key role of the NNC Secretariat is to coordinate the development of the Multi-Sectoral Food and Nutrition Security Action Plan (FNS-AP). The Secretariat is reported to have met quarterly, and UN agencies are invited to attend the meetings. To facilitate the work of the NNC Secretariat, the recently established Centre for Nutrition (CN), has been designated to assist the MoH Department of Hygiene and Health Promotion as the 'Office of the Secretariat', to manage the 'day-to-day' Secretariat functions.

In addition to the NNC, the NNC Secretariat, and its support office, two additional structures have been established, and are in the process of being formalized:

- ◆ The Technical Working Group – Food and Nutrition Security (TWG FNS) is a new group whose membership is drawn from the ten existing sectoral TWGs. It consists of 33 members at Director/Deputy Director level, and is chaired by the Deputy Minister of Health;
- ◆ The FNS Government Core Group is still in the process of being formalised, and in theory will consist of five members – one each from MoH, MAF, MES, MPI and the National Poverty Reduction Committee.



2 The Multi-sectoral Food and Nutrition Security Action Plan (FNS-AP)

With support from development partners, three key ministries - the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF), the Ministry of Education and Sports (MES), and the Ministry of Public Health (MoH) have made major progress in drafting a Multi-Sectoral Food and Nutrition Action Plan (FNS-AP)⁴, which has three key objectives:

- ◆ To set multi-sectoral strategies for implementation of national nutrition policies and plans;
- ◆ To create cross-sectoral linkages;
- ◆ To test an implementation approach in three selected provinces and six selected districts where the Action Plan is being piloted.

The strategy agreed to, based on international experience in multisectoral nutrition, is 'multisectoral prioritization and convergence', meaning the implementation of a set of high impact priority interventions in all villages of a selected set of districts that are targeted on the basis of poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition. These interventions from the agriculture, education, health and WASH sectors will be implemented by these sectors, with planning and review carried out multisectorally.

At present, the FNS-AP has not been formally approved by the GoL, and exists as a set of recommendations from UN agencies. However, agreements have been reached among the focal ministries and development partners on the strategy to be pursued, which is implementation of a set of 22 high impact priority interventions in all villages of a selected set of districts that are targeted on the basis of poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition. This 'convergence approach', which implements a defined set of nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions in the same vulnerable districts, has been found to create important synergistic effects. The intention is that implementation will be carried

out sectorally, with planning and review carried out multisectorally.

The FNS-AP recommends that Provincial Nutrition Committees (PNCs) are established in the Office of the Vice Governor in each of the pilot provinces, supported by a small administrative staff. The function of the PNCs is to coordinate actively with management/oversight entities in the target districts within the province. The PNCs will have responsibility for coordinating joint planning and joint monitoring, while each sector will be responsible for implementation within their respective areas of expertise. The PNCs will be responsible for action responses to monitoring team reports, and for reporting quarterly to the National Nutrition Committee.

It is important to recognise that, while there are lessons learned from other countries on multi-sectoral programming for nutrition, there is no standard approach or implementation platform for multisectoral programming that Lao PDR can simply adopt or adapt. Implementing the FNS-AP will be a learning process for both the Government of Lao PDR and Development Partners, and it is expected that the convergence model advocated in the FNS-AP will evolve over time, drawing on lessons learned from implementation in the initial six pilot districts. From this experience, the various institutional partners can learn how to work together, including how to design and implement high quality, effective interventions; how to make sure interventions converge to reach the target groups at the same time and place; and how to establish robust institutional structures and processes to support these efforts.

The institutional structures and processes to support this initiative are still evolving, along with the implementation platform, and there is an identified need at this stage to assess and begin to address institutional issues that may constrain implementation and coordination. There is also a need to document lessons learned, in order to inform the policy dialogue prior to scaling up the initiative to other provinces.

4 Recommendations for Multisectoral Food and Nutrition Security Action Plan 2014-2020, UN, December 2013.



Research study

This research study, proposed by the Centre for Nutrition, is designed to assess and start to address key institutional constraints affecting implementation of national nutrition policies and programs, and to directly inform finalization of the Multi-Sectoral Food and Nutrition Action Plan.

The Concept Note for the study was reviewed by the Research Steering Committee established under the Laos-Australia Development Learning Facility (LADLF) at its meeting held on 1 August 2014, and subsequently approved for implementation in the first round of research projects to be funded by LADLF. The study is being implemented by one national and one international consultant, with support from LADLF.

The study addresses four research questions:

1. What cross-sectoral linkages already exist and how well do these work? What are the major constraints to improved cross-sectoral coordination?
2. What vertical (cross-scale⁵) linkages already exist and how well do these work? What are the major constraints to improved cross-scale coordination?
3. What donor/development partner coordination mechanisms already exist and how well do these work? What are the major constraints to improved donor/ GoL coordination?
4. How can institutional roles, responsibilities and operating practices (encompassing cross-sectoral, cross-scale, and development partners) be improved to underpin effective implementation of the Food and Nutrition Action Plan?

The Study is being conducted in two phases, an initial Scoping Phase 1 (ongoing) of approximately two months, followed by a Detailed Research Phase 2 (forthcoming).

This report outlines the findings and recommendations arising from Phase 1, which undertook a preliminary scoping of institutional settings and constraints, and includes a detailed design for the Phase 2 of the study. Phase 1 identifies key stakeholders, current practices and issues, and refines the scope of the research.

Phase 1 was essentially qualitative in nature, utilizing a multi-method approach that included desk research⁶, semi-structured interviews with key informants at central and provincial levels⁷, focus group discussions at provincial, district and village levels, and field visits to two pilot districts and two villages. The aim was to obtain the views of a range of key stakeholders on relevant institutional constraints, and to develop recommendations on and build consensus around how these constraints can be best addressed.

Data collection for Phase 1 (scoping phase) was preceded by an inception workshop that brought together stakeholders from the key GoL ministries and institutions involved in the multisectoral FNS-AP, together with development partners, donors and technical assistance. The workshop validated the study objectives, helped to refine the study approach, and served as an initial data collection mechanism. During the scoping phase, the consultants held regular debriefings with LADLF and the Centre for Nutrition. At the end of the scoping phase, CN facilitated a stakeholder consultation workshop, which brought together approximately 50 participants from various central Ministries and Institutions, Development Partners, and representatives from Salavan Provincial Administration. The workshop validated the findings from the Phase 1 study, noted that the recommendations were appropriate, and that the proposed Phase 2 research was relevant⁸. Feedback and comments from the consultation

⁵ 'Cross-scale' refers to institutional relationships between national and sub-national (provincial and district) levels.

⁶ A list of documents reviewed is provided as Annex 2.

⁷ A list of stakeholders consulted is provided as Annex 3.

⁸ A Country Note on the MDG Accelerated Framework review process for Laos, which focused on nutrition, was developed towards the end of 2014. At the consultation meeting it was reported that several key findings from this Country Note were consistent with the findings from Phase 1 of this study, particularly on the need to improve governance, coordination and multi-sectoral working.



workshop and from individual reviewers have been incorporated, where appropriate, into this final report of Phase 1.

The plan for Phase 2 (of up to 6 months) will set out agencies/individuals to be consulted with and at what levels; critical lines of enquiry; procedures and timelines for data collection, analysis and reporting; and procedures for ensuring full involvement of GoL partners in the process so that 'ownership' of results is maximized.

Phase 2 will implement the detailed study designed during Phase 1. This will involve undertaking a detailed analysis of institutional constraints, and developing and testing specific recommendations for improving institutional settings to support implementation of national nutrition policies and programs. These recommendations will help inform finalization of the Multi-Sectoral Food and Nutrition Action Plan. This Phase will involve wide-ranging and systematic consultation with relevant GoL stakeholders at national, provincial, district and community levels, as well as with key development partners. Field investigations for this Phase will likely be focused in selected provinces and districts where it is planned to test implementation approaches for the Multi-Sectoral Food and Nutrition Action Plan.

The study TORs are attached as Annex 6.



Theoretical perspectives

This section provides an overview of global research findings related to multi-sectoral programming and the convergence model. It also outlines the key factors for successful partnerships that underpin multi-sectoral collaboration. These theoretical perspectives provide a useful context for assessing the opportunities and constraints of central and decentralized institutional arrangements associated with the implementation of the FNS-AP.

1 The convergence model

The development of the Multi-sectoral Food and Nutrition Security Action Plan (FNS-AP) in Lao PDR drew upon lessons learned in other countries on the value of a multi-sectoral approach to addressing under-nutrition⁹. The nutrition community now increasingly recognizes the need to address nutrition problems directly through nutrition-specific interventions (primarily based in the health sector) and to tackle the determinants of under-nutrition through nutrition-sensitive interventions in other sectors (primarily agriculture and education).

A successful approach in other countries, which is being adopted in Laos, is the identification of target districts based on nutrition vulnerability, and the requirement that related sectors carry out 'convergence' programming, targeted to vulnerable households. The convergence approach capitalizes on the synergy between combined nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions. The convergence model requires multiple sectors to work together in planning and monitoring, with implementation undertaken sectorally. This is sometimes referred to as 'think multi-sectorally, act sectorally'. Geographical targeting is critical to this model, as is the targeting of

vulnerable populations within these areas to ensure equity focus.

A recent set of case studies¹⁰ of multi-sectoral nutrition programs in a range of countries, primarily focused on Peru, Brazil and Bangladesh, have provided evidence that a convergence approach can work, and identified this approach as one of the main elements contributing to successful multi-sectoral collaboration. The research also highlights a number of other key lessons learned through successful implementation of the convergence approach:

- ◆ Planning and budgetary allocations in governments are carried out sectorally, as is accountability and review. In order for multisectoral nutrition undertakings to work, a critical minimum of both planning and review need to be carried out multisectorally, even as implementation is done sectorally;
- ◆ Sectoral commitment can be generated by highlighting the ways in which improving nutrition also can improve the functioning of that sector. For example, in the education sector, a student population that has been well nourished—particularly during 'the 1,000 days'—will have higher active learning capacity and thus increase the returns on other investments in education (e.g., teacher training, materials development);
- ◆ There is a need to focus on implementation at the sub-national level and in making local governments pro-active in nutrition-related activity rather than simply conduits for top-down programming;
- ◆ Nutrition-related results-based incentives are important to generate meaningful action at sub-national levels;
- ◆ Practical issues relating to implementation and to coordination are resolved at the technical level rather than the political level;
- ◆ The coordination system must be strongly supported by high levels of government. It can be carried out by a line ministry, but only if that line ministry is officially given that responsibility by high level government officials who continue to provide stewardship to this effort. In a number of countries multi-sectoral

9 Levinson, F. J. and Yarlini Balarajan, Addressing malnutrition multi-sectorally. What have we learned from recent international experience? United Nations, 2013. Improving Nutrition through Multi-sectoral Approaches, World Bank, 2013.

10 Levinson, F. J. and Yarlini Balarajan, 2013, op cit.



nutrition programmes are coordinated within the Ministry of Health, but the coordinator is responsible to a higher authority;

- ◆ It is important to think vertically (i.e. cross-scale) as well as horizontally (cross-sectorally) in multisectoral nutrition efforts. Experience indicates that coordination structures need to be replicated at subnational levels to support coordination efforts and the convergence approach. Experience suggests that regional teams are best comprised simply of 4-5 members, each responsible for one of the programme components;
- ◆ There is no assurance that simply involving multiple sectors will produce the desired results. This is perhaps seen most clearly in the case of multisectoral AIDS projects globally, where the large number of sectors and actors involved have often had the effect of reducing clarity and specificity on the role of each sector;
- ◆ Sustained civil society advocacy is important: a) at the policy level, serving to ensure political and administrative commitment to nutrition and food security, and b) at the programmatic level, to ensure adequate budgeting, well-designed and implemented programmes and programme impact that addresses the needs of the population.

2 Partnerships and coordination

Successful multi-sectoral initiatives depend on the establishment and maintenance of successful partnerships. There has been a significant amount of research into multi-sectoral partnerships in countries other than Lao PDR¹¹. A review of the literature identifies a number of 'success factors' for multi-sectoral partnerships. While different studies of multi-sectoral partnerships have emphasised different elements as contributing towards effective

partnerships, they generally fall within the scope of six inter-related factors, sometimes described as 'Partnership Principles'¹².

1. Recognising and accepting the need for partnership: This includes the need for all sectors involved to understand the need for the partnership, and the policy context in which it will take place (i.e. is it a voluntary or mandatory partnership), as well as identifying potential barriers to partnership and ways of addressing these. Sector partners need to have an appreciation of their interdependence, to facilitate collaborative problem-solving. It is also important to identify and agree areas where a sector is not dependent upon others to achieve their goals. This will help to avoid partners overstepping the limits of agreed areas of partnership working;
2. Developing clear and practical goals and objectives: Members of the multi-sectoral partnership need to develop realistic interrelated or shared goals, objectives, and outcomes, and focus initially on those areas where there is more likelihood of success in order to encourage and motivate team members. It is important that such objectives are expressed as outcomes for service recipients. There needs to be a clear indication of how partnership working will lead to these improved outcomes;
3. Ensuring commitment and ownership: This is particularly important among senior management and heads of each sector (as well as among technical staff responsible for implementation), as limited support at higher levels within each sector will impact negatively on multi-sectoral collaboration. Commitment, at whatever level, also needs to be consistent;
4. Developing and maintaining trust: Ensuring fairness and equity across sectors, both in terms of participation as well as distribution of resources is also important. This also relates to ensuring the right people are selected for

11 Harmann, R. et al. What makes cross sectoral partnerships successful? A comparative case study analysis of diverse partnership types in an emerging economy context. 2007

12 Adapted from Hardy, Hudson and Waddington, Assessing Strategic Partnership - The Partnership Assessment Tool, 2003.



coordination and leadership positions;

5. Creating clear and robust partnership arrangements: It is important to develop operational partnership arrangements that are simple, time-bound and task-oriented. It is also important to be clear about roles and responsibilities and promote financial transparency. There is a need to ensure that partnership working is not hindered by complicated and time-consuming working arrangements. The main focus of partnership working should be on processes and outcomes rather than structure and inputs;
6. Monitoring, measuring and learning: Monitoring and reviews should aim to examine: a) whether the service objectives and outcomes of the partnership are being achieved, and b) how well the partnership itself is working and what changes might be needed to improve its effectiveness. Even if the jointly agreed service objectives are being successfully met, it is important to reflect on how far this is due to a healthy and smoothly functioning partnership. There needs to be agreement on a range of success criteria, and widespread dissemination of monitoring and review findings amongst partners.



Key findings

The four research questions (below) were used to guide the analysis and synthesis of the key findings and recommendations.

1. What cross-sectoral linkages exist and how well do these work? What are the major constraints to improved cross-sectoral coordination?
2. What cross-scale (vertical) linkages exist and how well do these work? What are the major constraints to improved cross-scale coordination?
3. What donor coordination mechanisms exist and how well do these work? What are the major constraints to improved donor/ GoL coordination?
4. How can institutional roles, responsibilities and operating practices be improved to underpin effective implementation of the Food and Nutrition Security Action Plan?

Each of these is addressed in turn in the sections below.

1 Cross-sectoral linkages

Lao PDR has had limited experience of working cross-sectorally, although the Avian Influenza and Emerging Infectious Diseases (AI) initiative is often cited as an example where government coordinating bodies demonstrated good inter-ministerial work. The AI response was led by the Ministry of Health in collaboration with the Department of Livestock and Fisheries within the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, and backed by donor convergent regional funding.

The UN REACH initiative, which conducted a pilot project in Laos from 2008-2011, supported the development of the two key documents that provide a framework for action on nutrition: the National Nutrition Policy (NNP) and the National Nutrition Strategy and National Plan of Action for Nutrition (NNS/NPAN). These were developed by a multi-stakeholder team, including government ministries, UN agencies, donors, NGOs and the private sector,

and supported by UN REACH facilitation. UN REACH supported the Ministry of Health to facilitate discussions with key external stakeholders that led to the creation of a Nutrition Task Force, which was charged with overseeing the implementation of the nutrition components of the MCH plan, as well as the components of the National Nutrition Plan of Action. A key lesson learned is that having a full-time UN REACH facilitator accelerated the coordination process across a broad spectrum of government ministries and committees.

A number of International NGOs have experience in implementing multi-sectoral projects and programs in the Lao PDR that involve a variety of institutional arrangements with government. For example, PLAN's multi-sectoral programs in WASH and ECCD in three districts in Bokeo Province involve multi-sectoral collaboration, primarily between the education and health sectors at district and village levels. A recent case study of these initiatives notes that multi-sectoral program coordination mechanisms are more effective at district level rather than at provincial level, and reveals that the proposed Provincial Implementation Management Committees never really functioned, perhaps because they are too far removed from implementation of the programs and thus see little benefit in giving a priority to these management arrangements¹³. The case study also highlights the importance of ensuring that multi-sectoral teams have a shared understanding of purpose, are provided with effective leadership and have clearly documented roles and responsibilities for each sector involved.

1.1 Opportunities

With support from development partners, the MoH, MAF and MES have developed a draft Food and Nutrition Security Action Plan (FNS-AP)¹⁴, although this currently exists only as a set of

¹³ Multisectoral education and WASH programming in the Lao PDR – a case study of PLAN's ECCD and WASH programs in Bokeo Province, Plan International, 2014 (forthcoming).

¹⁴ Recommendations for Multisectoral Food and Nutrition Security Action Plan 2014-2020, UN, December 2013.



recommendations, and its official status is presently unclear. Nevertheless, the various processes around the development of the FNS-AP have created a number of opportunities for enhanced cross-sectoral governance and coordination. At central level, these opportunities include:

- ◆ High level endorsement and support to multi-sectoral coordination - evidenced by the Decree signed by the Prime Minister in 2013 on the establishment of the multisectoral National Nutrition Committee (NNC), chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister. The NNC Secretariat is chaired by the Ministry of Health and co-chaired by MAF, MPI and MES;
- ◆ The process for developing the FNS-AP created space where different government agencies at the national and sub-national levels came together to discuss priority actions, available and required capacities and resources, and operational frameworks. The process also included a discussion on the role of development partners and civil society for the implementation of food and nutrition security actions;
- ◆ Lao PDR is a signatory to the international 'Scaling Up Nutrition' (SUN) movement, and the recent establishment of the Lao Civil Society Alliance has created space for NGO and civil society engagement with GoL related to improving nutrition. Discussions prior to periodic conference calls to SUN Secretariat are reported to provide opportunities for meaningful discussion of critical issues by a range of stakeholders;
- ◆ The establishment of a dedicated and equipped Office of the Secretariat for the National Nutrition Committee (NNC) led by a resourceful, dynamic and committed Secretariat Coordinator, and supported by one international and two national consultants.

The Office of the Secretariat itself has a limited operational role, as it does not directly implement nutrition interventions. Rather, its role is to coordinate and promote horizontal (cross-sectoral) and vertical (cross-scale) linkages and communication: a) between central and sub-national level government

authorities, b) between the various focal ministries, and c) between the government and development partners, to support multi-sectoral planning and review processes and to contribute to more coordinated and coherent policies/ strategies in order to enhance the implementation of the FNS-AP.

On 4th February 2015, the Secretariat Coordinator chaired the first joint meeting of the GoL and DP Nutrition Core Groups, together with selected technical assistance, to review the road map and the Secretariat Action Plan.

1.2 Constraints to central-level coordination

This study has identified a number of institutional constraints at central level. These are outlined below.

a) Effective Functioning of the Office of the Secretariat

A key lesson learned in other countries is that, while a multisectoral coordination unit can lie within a specific ministry (e.g. MoH), its coordination role should be clearly differentiated from the work of that ministry. This point is further emphasised by Garrett, 2014¹⁵, who notes that: "...dynamism and relative independence is necessary for the (technical group in the) Secretariat to lead effectively".

There are indications that the MoH is challenged to find the right balance between its multisectoral coordination role (as Chair of the NNC Secretariat) and its sector-specific role for nutrition. In theory, the recently established Centre for Nutrition (CN) supports the MoH's Department of Hygiene and Health Promotion (DHHP) as Office of the Secretariat. The overall responsibility for the work of the Secretariat Office lies with the Coordinator, who reports to both the Director of the Centre for Nutrition and to the DHHP Deputy Director responsible for nutrition. The

15 Garrett, J. "Secretariat of the National Nutrition Committee, Lao PDR - An Overview Note on Capacity and Technical Assistance", mimeo, November 2014.



Coordinator also has significant other operational responsibilities related to the Centre for Nutrition, in addition to her role as Coordinator. This is resulting in work overload for the Coordinator, and the potential for over-reliance on technical assistance to undertake the work of the Secretariat.

The overlap of the Centre for Nutrition's (and the Coordinator's) health/nutrition functions and their coordination functions is contributing to some confusion and concern among external stakeholders about the role and independence of the Secretariat Office in undertaking its coordination function¹⁶. These uncertainties are exacerbated by TORs for the Secretariat Office that are broad and ambiguous, and the lack of TORs for the Coordinator herself, which may result in unclear responsibilities within the Secretariat Office, and unrealistic expectations from external stakeholders.

b) Effective Functioning of the Government Core Group

A Government 'Core Group' is in the process of being established, with the aim of bringing together one representative (ideally at Deputy Director level) from each of the key ministries/institutions (MoH, MAF, MES, MPI and NPRC) to be the focal points for a number of critical tasks:

- ◆ Coordination with all sector ministries to ensure that food and nutrition security actions are reflected in their sectoral plans and budgets;
- ◆ Compilation of sectoral plans from each sector into multisectoral plan;
- ◆ Establishing and maintaining the database on resources for food and nutrition security;
- ◆ Planning and implementation of the multisectoral monitoring;
- ◆ Organizing and participating in internal monthly (and/or other ad hoc meetings as required) of the Core Team;

- ◆ Organizing/participating in broader discussions and advising on short, medium and long term development plans, M&E and reporting on the progress of multisectoral food and nutrition security action plan;
- ◆ Organizing/participating in the quarterly meetings (and other ad hoc meetings as required) with the Nutrition Secretariat and the TWG-FNS.

While the Core Group is reported to have met a number of times, it still remains to be formalized, and there are indications that its functioning needs to be strengthened. Discussions with stakeholders highlighted the following issues:

- ◆ No clearly identified focal point/representative from each Ministry within the Core Group;
- ◆ Limited incentives for participation in Core Group;
- ◆ Constantly changing representatives at meetings;
- ◆ Representatives sometimes at inappropriate level;
- ◆ Unclear process for sharing minutes of meetings within Ministries;
- ◆ Limited intra-sectoral communication & coordination;
- ◆ Limited follow-up and unclear authority for decision-making processes.

Although the aim was to have a single representative from each Ministry, MAF has nominated six members for the Core Group, and MoH four members, in part because there are a number of departments and units within each Ministry that have different responsibilities for nutrition-related interventions.

Furthermore, while there are TORs outlining Core Group responsibilities, there is little guidance on how the Core Group should function. In particular, there is no guidance on intra-sectoral coordination and communication (i.e. within ministries), and between ministries (in terms of agenda setting, timing of meetings, responsibilities of chair, minute taking and distribution, etc.).

¹⁶ For example, the MAF Agreement related to the FNS AP (Number 020, dated 24 February) refers to coordinating with the MoH DHHP, rather than with the Secretariat.



Limited information-sharing and communication within and between ministries and departments is a major constraint to coordination, and undermines effective partnerships¹⁷.

Finally, some Core Group members see their contribution to multi-sectoral coordination as additional work to their normal duties. There is a need to explore how best to acknowledge these additional efforts, and how best to motivate staff to engage with the coordination process.

c) Effective Functioning of the TWG-FNS

To facilitate multi-sectoral coordination across the various sectoral working groups (TWGs), a TWG focused on the FNS-AP is being established. The TWG-FNS is a high level group whose membership is drawn from the ten existing sectoral TWGs. It consists of 33 members at Director/Deputy Director level, and is chaired by the Deputy Minister of Health.

The TWG-FNS has the following roles and responsibilities:

- ◆ With support from the Secretariat of the National Nutrition Committee, develop policy and technical guidance; strategies; action plans for short, medium and long term; standardized M&E tools on food and nutrition security;
- ◆ Review the implementation progress/reports of the short, medium and long term action plans on nutrition and food security;
- ◆ Support National Nutrition Secretariat and Core Group in data collection, M&E and reporting on nutrition and food security implementation to the National Steering Committee and all concerned parties DHHP/MOH as a member of the secretariat to follow-up with the Ministries and the concerned partners on the list of nominees for TWG.

There appears to be some confusion among key stakeholders about the composition and status of the TWG-FNS. Although this group has a list of nominated representatives at senior level across a range of ministries and institutions, some senior decision-makers in the focal ministries appear to be unaware of its existence, and its legitimacy and rationale have been questioned. For example, MAF has appointed an 'Advisory Committee, Secretariat¹⁸ and Technical Committee¹⁹ to implement the action plan of multi-sectoral approaches to nutrition' (MAF, #0240²⁰, attached as Annex 5). Each of these MAF committees has a set of TORs that overlap with the TORs of TWG-FNS and the Core Group²¹. Some DPs have also questioned the legitimacy of the TWG-FNS as a mechanism with which they can officially engage.

The Recommendations for the Multisectoral FNS-AP²² present a schematic framework of the proposed governance mechanisms (attached as Annex 1).

This framework was also included in the Background Paper: 2014 Round Table Implementation Meeting - Provincial Consultation, Salavan Province, 15th - 17th September 2014. However, discussions with various key stakeholders conducted during this study reveal limited knowledge or understanding of this framework.

17 Section 3 of this report highlights the importance of recognizing the need for partnership, developing and maintaining trust, and creating clear partnership arrangements, as core partnership principles. All of these are critically dependent on good communication and information-sharing between partners.

18 The first 4 members of the MAF Secretariat appear to be MAF's nominations for the Core Group.

19 The MAF Technical Committee are MAF's nominations for the TWG FNS. However, the TORs for the MAF Technical Committee are unaligned to the TORs for the TWG FNS.

20 Agreement - On the assignment of General Advisory Committee, Secretariat and Technical Committee for the implementation of multi-sectoral approaches to nutrition action plan (MAF, #0240).

21 A matrix setting out membership and TORs of the various governance mechanisms is attached as Annex 4.

22 Recommendations for Multisectoral Food and Nutrition Security Action Plan 2014-2020, UN, December 2013.



There is also a need to better understand: a) the links between the Centre for Nutrition and the MCH Centre; b) the potential roles of mass organizations, including the Lao Women's Union, in the convergence approach; c) how best to engage with the Lao Bureau of Statistics and the National Institute for Public Health; and d) the overall coordination role played by MPI²³.

On a pragmatic level, ad hoc meetings of technical staff from the various ministries and their technical assistance and are moving ahead in developing the common results framework, logframe, implementation platforms, etc. There are indications that the various concerned ministries, and the focal departments within these ministries, are at different stages of engagement with the multi-sectoral approach, and are moving forward at different rates. It is important that developments are shared and agreed, so that there is a common platform of understanding, ownership and commitment towards of process, outputs and outcomes.

As work proceeds on developing and refining outputs, there is a need for clear governance structures to coordinate and provide oversight to the FNS-AP and its development process, and to share, review and make decisions on approving the various products. At present, these governance structures, and the processes for sharing, review, oversight and approval, remain unclear.

2 Cross-scale linkages (from central to decentralized levels)

Programme coordination and communication between central and decentralized levels is largely through line ministries and institutions, and appears to operate effectively within sectoral boundaries.

To facilitate the process of multi-sectoral implementation of the FNS-AP, the GoL sought to replicate the newly established national mechanisms (i.e. NNC and NNC Secretariat) at decentralized levels, and mandated the establishment of Provincial Nutrition Committees (PNCs) and their associated Secretariats. Although PNCs are reported to have been established in all three focal provinces (Salavan, Oudomxay and Luang Namtha), there are indications that their functioning is uneven and may be in need of support.

IFAD reports that Oudomxay Province has established a dedicated Provincial Nutrition Committee. This is a new committee, chaired by the Deputy Governor, and consists of approximately 15 representatives of all the key ministries and institutions, nominated by the Governor. It is reported that the PNC only meets occasionally, and most of the work is handled by an informal 'secretariat' of 4-5 people at technical level drawn from the main implementing ministries.

In contrast, Salavan and Luang Namtha Provinces have opted to utilize the existing Mother and Child (MCH) Committee as the PNC, with an expanded mandate.

2.1 Constraints to provincial level coordination

The TORs for the Provincial Nutrition Committees (PNCs) are quite generic, and provide little indication of: a) what the PNC should do; b) what and how to coordinate across sectors; c) how to link with the focal districts; d) what is its authority, and e) what are its financial resources. Reporting and accountability continue to be through sectoral lines and there are no clear links or accountability between the PNCs and the NNC.

²³ It is noted that, while MPI has provided sustained engagement with the various governance mechanisms related to the FNS-AP, this engagement has been via MPI's Department of International Cooperation (DIC); its Department of Planning has exhibited little engagement with the FNS-AP.



A key constraint is the limited direction on how PNCs can best support the districts to coordinate implementation of the FNS-AP at village/khumban level, and what financial resources are available for this.

The recommendations for the Multi-sectoral FNS-AP indicate the need for a small administrative secretariat unit to support each PNC. However, apparently in line with its TORs, the Salavan PNC has established a Secretariat, with 14 ministries and institutions represented. Furthermore, (in Salavan at least) the term PNC 'Secretariat' remains a source of confusion, as its members are at a relatively senior level, and it is unclear who will act in a 'secretariat' support role. The Salavan Provincial Vice-Governor acknowledged the need to change the name of this committee, and suggested that this could be done at the annual provincial meeting. However, the role and functions of this PNC Secretariat remain unclear, as are its links, accountability and reporting responsibilities to the NNC, NNC Secretariat and the Central Level Core Group.

Finally, although the three 'first-phase' provinces are designated 'pilot provinces' (with the implication that lessons learned will feed into the policy dialogue around scale-up to other provinces), there is currently no mechanism for documenting and sharing lessons-learned in these three provinces.

2.2 Constraints to district level coordination

There are indications that multi-sectoral coordination at district level is limited, and in need of support. A recent visit to one of the pilot districts revealed that, while they are supporting a quasi multi-sectoral initiative in five pilot villages, the district representatives from the four sectors (health, agriculture, education and LWU) acknowledge that there is very limited joint planning or monitoring. The initiative is broadly market-focused (rather than nutrition-focused) and benefits from external technical and financial support. The visit also revealed minimal engagement and communication between the provincial and district authorities on the FNS-AP and little or no knowledge at district level of the FNS-AP or the 22 interventions.

A recent visit to a second pilot district revealed an uneven understanding of the multi-sectoral/convergence approach, but a general enthusiasm to move forward with this. The district authorities acknowledged that there had been no joint planning or monitoring, and highlighted the need for guidelines and technical assistance to help facilitate this. It was noted that the provincial authorities were still only engaging with the district on a sectoral basis, and the district had received limited support in implementing the multi-sectoral approach.

Visits to two villages (both near to the main roads) in the two districts revealed that district level engagement at village level was sporadic, and that much needs to be done to facilitate the convergent approach at this level. There is little up-to-date understanding of how some village/khumban structures and processes function, and the roles of the various village groups and committees, including mass organizations, in promoting nutrition remain unclear.

3 Donor/development partner coordination

A number of development partners and NGOs are already active in nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive operations in the target districts. It is noted that, while the UN provides significant financial and technical resources and provides strategic support, UN agencies' footprint within provinces is quite limited.

Civil Society in Laos offers significant resources in the provision of selected interventions in health, education, agriculture and WASH in almost all of the 17 provinces – often in remote and hard-to reach areas²⁴.

Development Partners (DPs) have been working towards a coherent and coordinated approach through the UN Task Team. The Development Partner (DP) Nutrition Group brings together three

²⁴ International NGO assistance in nutrition-related activity in Laos during 2013 totalled approximately \$23 million.



networks: Donors, UN, and NGOs. Each network has its own agreed internal coordination mechanisms and identifies 1-2 leads for the core group of DPs that would regularly interact with the Core Group of the Government on multisectoral issues. DP meetings on nutrition are convened every quarter and are co-chaired by the European Union and UNICEF on a rotational basis.

The stated aim of the DP Nutrition Group is to ensure best possible harmonisation, effective and efficient communication / information sharing and alignment of activities in support of the FNS-AP.

Membership of the group is on a voluntary basis and includes all DPs that support the implementation of interventions in the field of nutrition security. These include financial Institutions; UN agencies; multilateral and bilateral cooperation agencies; international and national NGOs; private sector; foundations.

The specific objectives of the DP Nutrition Group are:

- ◆ Coordination : Information sharing, monitoring of funds and activities, harmonisation of approaches, meetings with the government;
- ◆ Advocacy: For multisectoral collaboration, for improved visibility of nutrition, for government involvement in coordination and accountability mechanisms;
- ◆ Support for implementation: Identify needs and gaps, explore modalities for support, mobilise resources.

Lao PDR is a signatory to the international 'Scaling-Up Nutrition' (SUN) movement. As convenors of the SUN Network in Lao PDR, EU and UNICEF aim to ensure proper functioning of the group, act as facilitators and spokespersons for other DPs, and encourage communication and interaction between DPs and with the government. Conference calls with the SUN secretariat by a core group of DPs are scheduled every six weeks and discussions prior to the conference calls are reported to provide opportunities for meaningful discussion of critical issues by a range of stakeholders.

The INGO Health and Nutrition Working Group and local civil society members have established the Lao

PDR SUN Civil Society Alliance. A key aim of this Alliance is to coordinate and align NGO projects to government strategies and policy, in order to best ensure that civil society's contributions in Laos are leveraged and enabled to contribute to the achievement of MDG-1. The establishment of the SUN Civil Society Alliance has created space for NGO and civil society engagement with GoL related to improving nutrition.

It is noted that DPs and donors are supporting a significant amount of technical assistance to the NNC Secretariat, line ministries and at decentralized levels, in addition to planned and ongoing capacity development efforts²⁵.

3.1 Constraints to DP coordination

This study has identified the following constraints related to DP/donor coordination:

- ◆ Different development partners/donors have access to different ministries and actors, with various levels of negotiating power and influence on internal decision-making processes. Despite improved coordination, the main engagement mode of DPs, donors and NGOs remains bilateral and project/sector-specific;
- ◆ The DP Group on nutrition is large and diverse, and there is no clearly identified DP Core Group to engage with GoL on nutrition issues. Until recently there has been limited formal engagement of the Government Core Group with DPs/donors/NGOs, and this may be constraining opportunities for aligned planning, implementation and monitoring;
- ◆ There is no common advocacy/communication strategy adopted by DPs in relation to the multisectoral FNS-AP.

25 Garrett, J. "Secretariat of the National Nutrition Committee, Lao PDR - An Overview Note on Capacity and Technical Assistance", mimeo, November 2014.



4 How can institutional roles, responsibilities and operating practices be improved?

This section outlines a set of recommendations to strengthen institutional mechanisms, functions and operating practices, at both central and decentralized levels. The aim is to improve governance and coordination to support improved implementation of the FNS-AP. The main focus is on strengthening outputs and processes, (rather than structures and inputs).

4.1 Institutional mechanisms at central level

There is an identified need for improved conceptual clarity, including enhanced understanding and agreement on the roles, functions, membership and linkages of the various governance mechanisms associated with FNS-AP coordination and implementation. Part of Phase 2 of this study will continue to engage in policy dialogue around central level governance and coordination, including exploring how best to rationalize and achieve consensus on central level governance mechanisms.

a) Strengthening the functioning of the Office of the Secretariat

This study has identified the need to support and strengthen the functioning of the Office of the Secretariat. The following recommendations are proposed:

It is recommended that MoH:

- ◆ Provides clear communication to all focal ministries that:
 - reinforces the role of the Office of the Secretariat as a coordination hub for all sectoral planning and implementation related to the FNS-AP (including MPI, MoH, MAF, MES and technical assistance);

- clearly differentiates the coordination role of the Office of the Secretariat (coordination and communication with the various Ministries for their nutrition interventions) from the operational work of the Centre for Nutrition (working on the content of the MoH sectoral efforts for nutrition-specific interventions), i.e. emphasizes the independence of the Office of the Secretariat;²⁶

- ◆ Appoints a Secretariat Coordinator on a full-time basis in the Secretariat Office, with no (or minimal) operational responsibilities for the Centre for Nutrition. It is acknowledged that this may be challenging, due to the currently limited human resources within the MoH. Nevertheless, a number of key stakeholders have emphasized that a full-time Coordinator is critical if the Office of the Secretariat is to operate effectively;
- ◆ Provides the Secretariat Office with the political support and connections that it requires, while allowing the Secretariat Office to operate fairly autonomously²⁷;
- ◆ If necessary, revises decision-making and budget structures, in order to better support the Secretariat Coordinator to lead effectively.

It is recommended that MAF and MES:

- ◆ Each nominate one staff member to support the Office of the Secretariat. The representatives from MES and MAF may not need to be at the Secretariat Office full time, but they need to be effective focal points of their respective ministries on multi-sectoral coordination²⁸;
- ◆ In conjunction with MoH, MPI, MAF and MES, the Office of the Secretariat:

26 'independence' in this context means that, while the Secretariat Office lies within the MoH, its work is to act as the coordination hub across all the focal ministries, and thus it should be independent from the day-to-day work of the MoH. This is in line with international best practice.

27 'autonomous' in this context means that the Secretariat Office should be able to move forward without asking for permission for every issue, although the extent of its autonomy will need to be agreed and included in its TORs.

28 This recommendation was raised at the 13 March 2015 stakeholder consultation workshop.



- ◆ Should develop clear TORs for the Office of the Secretariat;
- ◆ Should develop clear TORs for the Secretariat Coordinator.

To stimulate discussion, the following indicators/success criteria are tentatively suggested. These are based on the 'Partnership Principles' outlined in Section 3 of this report:

- ◆ Development of a joint cooperation strategy between focal ministries;
- ◆ A set of agreed operational partnership arrangements between focal ministries that are simple, time-bound and task-oriented;
- ◆ A minimum level of joint planning and joint review at central and decentralized levels;
- ◆ Regular joint Government/NGO/DP Core Group meetings;
- ◆ Consistent participation of all key stakeholders in Core Group activities;
- ◆ A common results framework;
- ◆ A robust communication strategy and plan for the NNC Secretariat and the Office of the Secretariat.

b) Strengthening the functioning of the Core Group

The following recommendations are proposed to improve the effective functioning of the Core Group. It is recommended that MoH, MAF, MES, MPI and NPRC:

- ◆ Provide clear communication within their respective ministries:
 - about the role, functions and composition of the Government Core Group;
 - requesting consistent and active participation of nominated GoL focal points in Core Group meetings. MAF and MES nominated staff members to assist the Office of the Secretariat could act as the respective focal points for the Core Group;
 - to identify budgets to train and incentivize Core Group members;
 - where necessary, to establish official processes and procedures within each of the focal ministries/institutions for sharing the minutes and deliberations

of Core Group meetings internally. This will help to address a major constraint of limited communication and information-sharing within departments, ministries and institutions.

It is recommended that the Secretariat Office:

- ◆ Reviews, and if necessary revises, the TORs of the Core Group to better reflect:
 - its technical mandate;
 - how it operates internally and externally;
- ◆ Establish and formalize a mechanism for periodically bringing together the Government Core Group and the DP Core Group to:
 - facilitate aligned planning and monitoring;
 - provide coordinated support to the GoL on nutrition;
 - identify and coordinate all external technical and financial resources available to support nutrition interventions;
 - ensure that joint Core Group meetings, are regularly scheduled, chaired by the Secretariat Coordinator, have an agreed agenda and an agreed procedure for taking and sharing minutes.

c) Strengthening the functioning of the TWG-FNS

It is recommended that GoL decision-makers:

- ◆ Clarify the role, functions and composition of TWG-FNS;
- ◆ Clarify the status of the TWG-FNS as an official mechanism for DP/donor engagement.

d) Strengthening donor coordination

The lead DP/donor/NGO agencies should:

- ◆ Nominate a small Core Group of DPs/donors/NGOs to represent the interests of the DP/donor/NGO community and provide systematic feed back to this community;
- ◆ Ensure active participation of the Core Group of DPs/donors/NGOs at Secretariat-led joint Core Group meetings;
- ◆ Lead the development of a communication plan for DPs/donors/NGOs with agreed common advocacy objectives and messages



to the GoL at different levels (PM office, secretariat, sectoral ministries). This will help to improve consistency and facilitate negotiations, especially with the PM office and the Secretariat;

- ◆ Lead the development of a coordinated joint plan for technical assistance to the Secretariat, line ministries and at sub-national levels;
- ◆ Continue to provide appropriate technical and financial resources to support the functioning of the Office of the Secretariat;
- ◆ In line with the Vientiane Declaration on Aid Effectiveness²⁹, DPs should seek to rationalise their regulations and procedures by implementing, wherever possible, common arrangements for planning, design, funding, disbursement, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and reporting on activities and aid flow.

4.2 Institutional mechanisms at provincial level

The Salavan PNC Secretariat Committee identified the need for a 'Provincial Core Group' of four people – one from each of MoH, MAF, MES and MPI at provincial level to act as secretariat to the PNC and facilitate the actual work of coordination across the four main sectors (health, education, agriculture and planning & investment) involved in the implementation of the FNS-AP. This Provincial Core Group would act as the provincial counterpart to the central level Core Group. The Provincial Secretariat Committee noted that the establishment of such a 'Core Group' would need authorization and support from the Provincial Administration. The Salavan Provincial Vice-Governor endorsed this recommendation and suggested that the Core Group members could be drawn from Provincial Cabinet level. This proposed structure is similar to the informal working group that is reported to have evolved to manage the work of the PNC Secretariat in Oudomxay.

In order to support the effective functioning of the Salavan PNC, the following recommendations are

proposed:

The NNC Secretariat Office should:

- ◆ Support the development of tools and guidelines to facilitate effective functioning of PNCs;
- ◆ Support the Salavan PNC Secretariat to engage with the Salavan Provincial Vice-Governor to establish a provincial Core Group of four members. It is suggested that this group is:
 - chaired by the Deputy Director of Provincial Cabinet of the Governor's Office
 - comprised of one representative at technical level from each of the following ministries: MoH, MAF, MES and MPI;
- ◆ Provide technical and institutional support to the PNCs to facilitate links between national, provincial and district planning and monitoring;
- ◆ Assist the PNCs in all three pilot provinces to develop detailed TORs outlining the roles and functions of the PNC and Provincial Core Group. Key responsibilities of the PNC could include:
 - coordinating joint planning and joint monitoring across sectors at provincial level;
 - action responses to monitoring team reports;
 - reporting quarterly to the NNC Secretariat (through Secretariat Office);
 - active administrative interaction and support to each of the focal districts;
 - organizing sectoral lines of communication;
 - organizing provincial inception meetings to launch action plan activities in the province;
- ◆ Support action-research, in conjunction with provincial partners, to document in real time the evolution and functioning of the multi-sectoral provincial coordination mechanisms in the three pilot provinces. The purpose is to ensure that lessons learned can feed into the policy dialogue around scaling-up to other provinces. The proposed study is outlined in more detail in Section 5 of this report, and a full research proposal is under development.

29 Vientiane Declaration on Aid Effectiveness - Ninth Round Table Meeting, Vientiane, 29 November 2006



4.3 Institutional mechanisms at district, village and khum ban levels

There is a need for improved understanding of how district mechanisms can best support implementation of the convergent approach at village/khum ban level, and how provincial mechanisms can better support the districts in this function. There is also a need to better understand the functioning of the various institutional structures and processes at village and khum ban levels, in order to strengthen the implementation of village/khum ban level nutrition interventions, as part of the convergence approach. The need for improved understanding and engagement of existing district, village and khum ban institutions and committees was highlighted at the recent Round Table Consultation in Salavan³⁰.

The following recommendation is therefore proposed: It is recommended that the Centre for Nutrition:

- ◆ In conjunction with local partners, supports the implementation of a study in a small number of purposively selected villages/khum ban with the following objectives:
 - To map and document the various institutional structures and processes existing at village/khum ban level in Lao PDR, together with their roles and functions, and the engagement of women as well as men (including the relationship to the Three Builds (Sam Sang) and other processes of decentralisation);
 - To identify and document the extent to which these structures are contributing, or have the potential to contribute, to implementation of the FNS-AP;
 - To identify and document the nature and extent of village/khum ban interaction with district authorities;
 - To identify how can existing structures and processes can best be engaged and

mobilized to facilitate the convergence approach;

- To identify capacity development needs of the various village/khum ban structures and mechanisms, including specific capacity development support needs to ensure the meaningful engagement of and leadership by women.

The proposed study is outlined in more detail in the next section of this report, and a full research proposal is under development.

30 Report Of The Round Table Provincial Consultation - "Provincial Perspectives on the Multisectoral (Convergence) Approaches to address Food and Nutrition Security and the Implications for the Off-Track MDGs", Salavan Province, 15th-17th September 2014.



Proposed areas for further study under Phase 2 of the research

Two inter-related major areas for further study are proposed:

1. Review and document in real time the evolution and functioning of the multi-sectoral provincial coordination mechanisms in the three pilot provinces. Lessons learned would contribute to the policy dialogue around scaling-up to other provinces. The study objectives are to:

- ◆ Develop and pilot an ongoing process for monitoring decentralized multi-sectoral coordination and documenting and sharing lessons learned;
- ◆ Develop an agreed set of indicators for measuring the effectiveness, efficiency and accountability of decentralized coordination mechanisms;
- ◆ Identify and document lessons learned in the formation and institutionalization of provincial nutrition committees;
- ◆ Assess and document the effectiveness, efficiency and accountability of provincial coordination mechanisms and processes in the three pilot provinces;
- ◆ Identify and document the extent to which the provincial coordination mechanisms engage with and support district level coordination and implementation.

With the support of the Centre for Nutrition, Phase 2 research team would collaborate with a national institution and the Provincial Administration and relevant DPs working in Salavan, Oudomxay and Luang Namtha on a set of case studies to review and monitor the provincial coordination mechanisms in the three pilot provinces over a period of up to six months. The aim is to compare and contrast the three provincial coordination mechanisms, in order

to document in real time lessons learned about what is working (or not working) and why. A key focus of the study would be the extent to which the provincial coordination mechanisms engage with and support district level coordination and implementation. This would involve establishing a process for documenting and sharing lessons learned, as well as developing an agreed set of indicators for measuring the effectiveness, efficiency and accountability of the coordination mechanisms at provincial and district levels.

2. A focused study in a small number of purposively selected villages and khum ban to obtain a better understanding of the functioning of the various institutional structures and processes at district, khum ban (cluster) and village level. The aim is to contribute to the policy dialogue around implementation of the convergence approach at district, khum ban and village levels. The study objectives are to:

- ◆ Map and document the various institutional structures and processes existing at village/khum ban level in Lao PDR, together with their roles and functions, and the engagement of women as well as men (including the relationship to the Three Builds (Sam Sang) and other processes of decentralisation);
- ◆ Identify and document the extent to which these structures are contributing, or have the potential to contribute, to implementation of the FNS-AP. If active, how effective are they?
- ◆ Identify whether and how these structures interact with each other, and what are the linkages and mechanisms for interaction;
- ◆ Identify and document the role and functions of village health committees, including the prevalence and roles (if any) of nutrition focal points;
- ◆ Identify and document the nature and extent of village interaction with district authorities;
- ◆ Identify how can existing structures and processes best be engaged and mobilized to facilitate the convergence approach;
- ◆ Identify capacity development needs of the various village structures and mechanisms,



including specific capacity development support needs to ensure the meaningful engagement of and leadership by women.

Many of the nutrition interventions under the convergence approach will be implemented at village/khum ban level, with coordination taking place at both village/khum ban and district levels. For effectiveness and sustainability of the convergence approach, active and sustained engagement of women and men at village/khum ban level is needed. It is likely that the effective engagement of people at this level will involve utilizing existing structures (village groups, party structures, project-related committees, formal and informal networks, patronage networks, etc), and existing processes (village meetings, fund-raising activities, project-related meetings, informal networking, formal and informal reporting, etc.). The need to use existing mechanisms and avoid creating new structures was highlighted at the March 2015 consultation workshop on Phase 1 of this study. Although there is significant global research on village structures and processes, there appears to be little documented data on the nature and functioning of formal and informal village structures and processes in Lao PDR (although this is still to be confirmed and further explored). The need for a better understanding of village structures and processes has been identified in discussions with Lao PDR stakeholders from government, donors, UN agencies, INGOs and the research community, and was highlighted in the 2014 Round Table Consultation in Salavan. The March 2015 consultation workshop noted that, given the presence of an active NGO community in Laos, it will be useful to explore how NGOs can assist, or already are assisting, multi-sectoral coordination at sub-national level. The study findings will be used to inform the implementation approach of the convergence model and action plan.

A detailed research proposal, which brings together these two proposed areas of study, is under development.

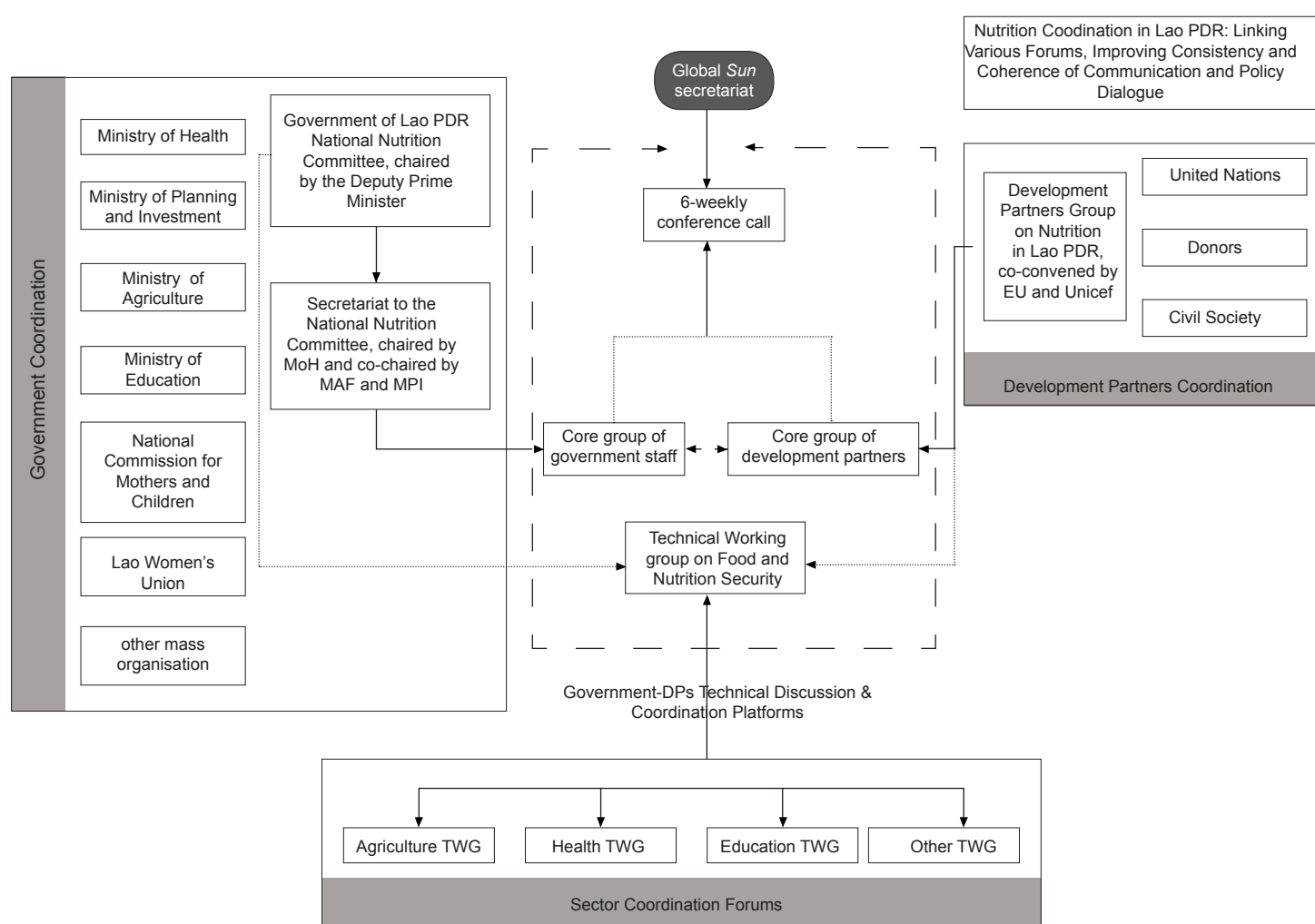
In addition to the two proposed areas of study outlined above, it is recommended that the Centre for Nutrition continues to support the Phase 2 research

team to continue to engage with central-level decision-makers and DPs on how best to rationalize and achieve consensus on central level governance structures, including the Secretariat Office, the Core Group and the TWG-FNS. There is also a need to better understand: a) the links between the Centre for Nutrition and the MCH Centre; b) the potential roles of mass organizations, including the Lao Women's Union, in the convergence approach; c) how best to engage with the Lao Bureau of Statistics and the National Institute for Public Health; and d) the overall coordination role played by MPI.

The purpose of this continued engagement is to support and facilitate stakeholder ownership and implementation of recommendations from Phase 1 of the study, and ultimately to strengthen the effectiveness, efficiency and accountability of central level governance mechanisms to support coordination and implementation of the FNS-AP.



Annex 1. Schematic framework of central level Governance mechanisms





Annex 2. Bibliography

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Annex 3. List of stakeholders consulted

Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry

Dr Phouangparisack Pravongviengkham Vice Minister, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry

Ms Phimmasone Xaymonty
Deputy Head of Planning Unit

Mr Korakot Vongsouthi
Technical Staff of Planning Unit

Ministry of Education and Sports
Dr LyTou Bouapao
Deputy Minister of Education and Sports

Ms Yangxia Lee
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Ms Dara Khiemthammukhoun
Deputy Director General, Centre for Inclusive Education

Ms Southasone Mounnivong
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Ministry of Health

Dr Phath Keungsaneth Director General, Department of Hygiene and Health Promotion

Dr Chandavone Phoxay Deputy Director General, Department of Hygiene and Health Promotion

Dr Bounthom Phengdy
Director, Centre for Nutrition

Dr Ratthiphone Oula
Coordinator, Office of the Secretariat

Ministry of Planning and Investment

Mr Morakot Vongxay
Director of UN System Division, Department of International Cooperation

National Institute of Public Health

Dr Sengchanh Kounnavong
Head of Health Research Department

National Committee for Rural Development and Poverty Eradication

Mr Thongvanh Vilayheuang
Vice-Chair, NCRDPE

Mr Bounkouang Souvannaphanh
Executive Director, Poverty Reduction Fund

UN agencies

Dr Viorica Berdaga
Head of Health and Nutrition, UNICEF

Ms Aachal Chand
Head of Nutrition Unit, World Food Programme

Dr Stephen Rudgard
Representative, Food and Agriculture Organization

Ms Stefania Dina
IFAD

Dr Juliet Fleischl
Representative, World Health Organization

Dr Margaret Jones Williams
Environment Unit Manager, UNDP

NGOs

Ms Vanhlee Lattana
Secretariat Coordinator, SUN Civil Society Alliance

Ms Mona Gigris
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Technical Assistance

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TA, MAF

Mr Mike Adair



Consultant to EU Nutrition Project

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TA, CCM Secretariat, GFATM

Mr Tim Bene
TA, MAF

Dr Lilia Turcan
TA, Office of the Secretariat

Salavan province

Mr. Sisouvanh Vongchomsky
Vice Governor

Mr. Dr Akhom lamvichit
Head of Cabinet, Provincial Health Office

Mr Sylisack Thamomha
Head of Provincial Education Office

Mr Thongdy Chanthavong
Deputy Head of Provincial Agriculture and Forestry
Office

Dr Khammuan Keokhao
Provincial Nutrition Coordinator

Ms Somkhith Baoulavong
Head of Provincial Mother and Child Health Division

Mr. Sompuan Vilaychit
Head of Ta-oy District Planning Division

Ms. Vilaphol
Deputy Head of Ta-oy District Health Division

Dr. Phanthulath
Head of Lao-ngarm Health Division

Dr. Sangvanh
Deputy Head of Lao-ngarm Health Division

Ms. Bounthong Sihalath
Deputy Head of Lao-ngarm Education Division



Annex 4. Membership and TORs of central level governance mechanisms

Key groups and committees involved in the management and coordination of FNS-AP

Working Document – Draft 6 February 2015

Group / Committee	Membership	TORs
National Nutrition Committee (NNC)	<p>Officially approved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Education and Sports (Chair) ◆ Minister of Health ◆ Minister of Agriculture and Forestry ◆ Minister of Planning and Investment ◆ Minister of Government office, Head of Rural development and Poverty eradication committee at Central level ◆ Minister of Government office, Chair of National Committee for Mother and Child ◆ Minister of Government office, Deputy Chief of Government Office ◆ Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Forestry ◆ Deputy Minister of Health ◆ Deputy Minister of Planning and Investment ◆ Deputy Minister of Education and Sport ◆ Deputy Minister of Finance ◆ Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade ◆ Deputy Minister of Information, culture and tourism ◆ Deputy President of Central Lao Front ◆ Deputy President of Lao Trade Union ◆ Deputy President of Lao Women Union ◆ Deputy President of Lao Youth Union 	<p>(Unofficial translation)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Provide guidance and monitoring for the effective implementation of nutrition activities ◆ Provide guidance for implementation of various agreements of the Central Party Polit Bureau, and other conferences related to nutrition ◆ Identify the rules for promotion of nutrition implementation ◆ Periodic monitoring and evaluation of nutrition activity implementation ◆ Provide guidance to related sectors, concerned parties, provinces, and Vientiane capital on nutrition implementation ◆ Coordinate with external and international organizations and private sectors in fund mobilization for nutrition activities ◆ The right to nomination of Nutrition Secretariat at national, provincial committees, and Vientiane capital, technical committee or task force committee if needed ◆ The right to mandate for the fund, personnel, resource mobilization for nutrition activity implementation if needed ◆ Considering and giving awards to the authorizations at each level, organizations, government agencies and individuals for good performance contributing to nutrition activities implementation



National Secretariat for Nutrition	<p>Officially approved</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Deputy Minister of Health (Chair) ◆ Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Forestry (Co-Chair) ◆ Deputy Minister of Planning and Investment (Co-Chair) ◆ Deputy Minister of Education and Sport ◆ Deputy Chief of Committee of Rural Development and poverty eradication of Central Level ◆ Director of Cultural and Social affair Department, Government Office ◆ Director of DHHP, Ministry of Health ◆ Director of Food and Drug Department, Ministry of Health ◆ Chief of Cabinet, Ministry of Health ◆ Director of Care Department, Ministry of Health ◆ Deputy director of Planning Department ◆ Director of planning and cooperation Department, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry ◆ Director of planning and cooperation Department, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry ◆ Director of livestock and fisheries Department, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry ◆ Deputy director of agriculture department, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry ◆ Director of Gender garden and primary school Department, ◆ Director of Mass media, Ministry of Information, culture and tourism ◆ Officer in charge of Chief of NCMC Secretariat ◆ Deputy director of DHHP ◆ Prime Minister Secretariat, Government office ◆ Director of Nutrition Centre 	<p>(Unofficial translation)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Implement the mandates and guidance of the National Nutrition Committee ◆ Be Secretariat for the planning, strategy identifying, and implementation arrangement, identifying mechanism for nutrition activity implementation and submit them for approval as well as regular reporting to the National Nutrition Committee ◆ Set up focal point for coordination with the National Nutrition Committee, Sub- National Nutrition Committee, Ministries, government organizations, mass organizations, social organizations and international partners as well as provincial committees nationwide to implement policies, strategies and nutrition plans effectively ◆ Provide guidance on short, mid and long term planning to sub committees ◆ Together with sub committees to draft related rule and regulations and submit for approval ◆ Together with sub committees conduct meetings for the National Nutrition Committee ◆ Nutrition Centre to assist DHHP in coordination with the National Nutrition Committee
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<p>Permanent Technical Team at the Secretariat Office</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Dr Ratthiphone Oula - Team Leader/Secretariat Coordinator (part-time) ◆ Dr Lilia Turcan - International Consultant (1 year contract) ◆ Ms Khouanheuane – National Consultant (1 year contract) ◆ Mr Phoutone – National Consultant (1 year contract) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ TOR for the permanent technical team at the secretariat office, Ministry of Health (unofficial translation). ◆ Roles and responsibilities of the secretariat office: ◆ To coordinate between Health and different sectors in the implementation of the nutrition activities ◆ Prepare, organise and make minutes of meetings of the Secretariat, TWG FNS and Core Group) ◆ Develop activity plans and budget for the National Nutrition Committee, National Secretariat and other relevant sub-committees (assumed to be the Core Group & TWG FNS) ◆ Assist the National Secretariat, TWG FNS and Core Group in coordinating with nutrition concerned sectors ◆ Assist the National Secretariat, TWG FNS and Core Group in report writing of the implementation of nutrition activities to concerned parties
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<p>TWG on FNS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Official status of TWG-FNS unclear ◆ MOH: DHHP, DPIC, NC, Nam Saat, CIEH, NMCHC ◆ MAF: Dept of Plantation, Dept of Livestock and Fishery, Dept of Planning and International Cooperation, Dept of Promotion ◆ MPI: DoP and DIC. ◆ MOE: Dept of Pre-school and Primary Education, Inclusive Education Center and DoP ◆ Government Cabinet: Rural Development and Poverty Alleviation Committee ◆ MOF: Department of Budget ◆ MOFA ◆ National Assembly: Commission for Economic Development and Commission for Socio-Cultural Development ◆ DPs : UNDP, UNICEF, IFAD, FAO, WFP, WHO, EU, INGOS, World Bank, ADB, JICA etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ With support from the Secretariat of the National Nutrition Committee, develop policy and technical guidance; strategies; action plans for short, medium and long term; standardized M&E tools on food and nutrition security ◆ Review the implementation progress/reports of the short, medium and long term action plans on nutrition and food security ◆ Support National Nutrition Secretariat and Core Team in data collection, M & E and reporting on nutrition and food security implementation to the National Steering Committee and all concerned parties ◆ DHHP/MOH as a member of the secretariat to follow-up with the Ministries and the concerned partners on the list of nominees for TWG ◆ Each sectoral ministry to work with DPs to detail action plans down to the village level; review available resources and clarify gaps; present the detailed plans and gaps.
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Core Group (Govt)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Membership still to be finalized: nominated members: ◆ MOH: ◆ Dr. Chandavone Phoxay, Deputy Director of DHHP ◆ Dr. Phasouk Vongvichit, Deputy Director of Planning Department ◆ Dr. Bounthom Phengdy, Director of Nutrition Center ◆ Dr. Khamheng Philavong, Deputy Director of Nutrition Center ◆ MPI: ◆ Mr. Morakot Vongxay, Chief of UN System Division, International Cooperation Department ◆ MAF: ◆ Mr. Khamtan Thadavong, Deputy director of agriculture department ◆ Mr. Bounthong Saphakdy, Deputy director of livestock and fisheries Department ◆ Mr. Savan Hanphom, Deputy director of planning and cooperation Department ◆ Ms. Phimmasone Xaimontry, Deputy Chief of planning Unit, Planning and Cooperation Department ◆ Ms. Kerthone Chommanivong, Deputy Chief of Cooperation Unit, ◆ Mr. Korakot Vongsouthi, Technical staff of Planning Unit, Planning and Cooperation Department ◆ MES: ◆ Ms. Yangyia Lee, Deputy director of Gender garden and primary school, Director of Inclusive Education Center ◆ Poverty Reduction Committee: ◆ Mr. Kingkeo Sengsouvanh, Deputy Chief of Planning Unit, Committee of Rural Development and Poverty Eradication of Central Level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Coordination with all sector ministries to ensure that food and nutrition security actions are reflected in their sectoral plans and budgets ◆ Compilation of sectoral plans from each sector into multisectoral plan ◆ Establishing and maintaining the database on resources for food and nutrition security ◆ Planning and implementation of the multisectoral monitoring ◆ Organize and participate in internal monthly (and/or other ad hoc meetings as required) of the Core Team ◆ Organize/participate in broader discussions and advise on short, medium and long term development plans, M&E and reporting on the progress of multisectoral food and nutrition security action plan ◆ Organize/participate in the quarterly (and other ad hoc meetings as required) with Nutrition secretariat and the TWG
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<p>DP Nutrition Group</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ All DPs that support the implementation of interventions in the field of nutrition security are eligible: ◆ Financial Institutions; UN agencies; multilateral and bilateral cooperation; international and national NGOs; private sector; foundations. ◆ From various sectors (health, agriculture, social protection, water and sanitation, education, commerce, etc.) ◆ Membership is on a voluntary basis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ TORs compiled from DP documents ◆ Brings together 3 networks: Donors, UN, and NGOs ◆ Aims to ensure best possible harmonisation, effective and efficient communication / information sharing and alignment of activities in support of the Government multisectoral food and nutrition security action plan ◆ Each network has its own agreed internal coordination mechanisms and identifies 1-2 leads for the core group of DPs that would regularly interact with the core group of the Government on multisectoral issues <p>Specific objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Coordination : Information sharing, monitoring of funds and activities, harmonisation of approaches, meetings with the government ◆ Advocacy: For multisectoral collaboration, for improved visibility of nutrition, for government involvement in coordination and accountability mechanisms ◆ Support for implementation: Identify needs and gaps, explore modalities for support, mobilise resources <p>Roles of EU and UNICEF as SUN conveners in Lao:- ensure proper functioning of the group, act as facilitator and spokesmen for other DPs, encourage communication and interaction between DPs and with the government.</p>
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		<p>Working modalities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ The core group will meet every 6 weeks at the call of the co-convenors before SUN conference calls (+ special meetings if needed) ◆ An expanded group of DPs can meet on quarterly basis for progress updates ◆ The areas of work should be defined in relation to the agenda of nutrition in Laos ◆ Members will be invited to share information on events, programs, missions, studies, etc. ◆ Common position and recommendations will be developed ◆ Meetings with the government core group will be organised ◆ Links with other structures: ◆ In priority, with the government core group ◆ Conference call with Global SUN secretariat ◆ Influencing the agenda and sharing key messages at the relevant Sector Working Groups
DP Core Group	Co-Chairs plus 1-2 representatives from each network	Specific TORs not yet developed



Annex 5. Agreement - On the assignment of general advisory committee, secretariat and technical committee for the implementation of multi-sectoral approaches to nutrition action plan (MAF, #0240)



Lao People's Democratic Republic
Peace Independence Democracy Unity Prosperity

Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
No. 0240/ກປ

Vientiane Capital, dated 24 Feb 2014

Agreement

On the assignment of General Advisory Committee, Secretariat and Technical Committee for the implementation of multi-sectoral approaches to nutrition action plan

- ◆ Re: Prime Minister's decree No. 262/PM, dated 28/6/2012 on the function and implementation of Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry;
- ◆ Re: the agreement of Prime Minister No. 73/PM, dated 31/07/2013 on the nomination of National Nutrition Committee;
- ◆ Re: the round table meeting which was held on 19/11/2013;
- ◆ Re: request of the Department of Planning and Cooperation dated 02 January 2014.

Minister of Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry agrees:

Article 01: Appoint Advisory Committee, Secretariat

and Technical Committee to implement the action plan of multi-sectoral approaches to nutrition:

I Advisory committee

1. Dr. Phouangparisak Pravongviengkham, Vice Minister of Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry Chair;
2. Dr. Mounthathip Chanphengxai, DG of the Department of Agriculture Deputy Chair;
3. Dr. Bounkhouang Khambounheuang, DG of the Department of Livestock and Fisheries Committee;
4. Mr. Xaipladeth Choulamany, DG of the Department of Planning and Cooperation Committee;
5. Ms. Douangchanh Samounty, DDG, PAFO Phongsaly Province Committee;
6. Mr. Cher Santisouk, DDG, PAFO Luang Namtha Province Committee;
7. Mr. Bounngeum Xayaven, DDG, PAFO Oudomxai Province Committee;
8. Mr. Khin Thoummala, DDG, PAFO Houaphan Province Committee;
9. Mr. Somsamone Phalichanh, DDG, PAFO Xiengkhouang Province Committee;
10. Mr. Thongdee Chanthavong, DDG, PAFO Salavan Province Committee;
11. Mr. Seumsy Soulita, DDG, PAFO Xekong Province Committee.

Responsibility:

- ◆ Advice the Secretariat and Technical Committee to implement the action plan of multi-sectoral approaches to nutrition in order to achieve its indicated goals effectively;
- ◆ Coordinate and support local authorities, Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Offices, District Agriculture and Forestry Offices and target villages to participate and implement the nutrition action plan in order to achieve the expected target and support the local level to report the progress of above nutrition action plan to the provincial governor and leaders of MAF period by period.



II Secretariat to the advisory committee

1. Mr. Khamtan Thadavong, DDG, Department of Agriculture Head;
2. Mr. Bounthong Sapakdy, DDG, Department of Livestock and Fisheries Deputy Head;
3. Mr. Savanh Hanephoun, DDG, Department of Planning and Cooperation, DoPC Committee;
4. Ms. Phimmasone Saymonetry, Deputy Head, Division of Planning and Cooperation Committee;
5. Ms. Khekhthone Chomemanivong, Deputy Head, Division of International Cooperation Committee;
6. Mr. Kolakoth Vongsouthi, Technical Officer, Division of Planning and Cooperation, DoPC Committee;
7. Ms. Phone, Deputy Head, Planning Sector, PAFO, Phongsaly Province Committee;
8. Mr. Thongsone Sisoulin, Head of Planning Sector, PAFO, Luang Namtha Province Committee;
9. Ms. Bouavone Keoamphone, Deputy Head, Planning Sector, PAFO, Oudomxai Province Committee;
10. Ms. Chanmaly, Deputy Head, Planning Sector, PAFO, Houaphan Province Committee;
11. Mr. Khamla Chanthavone, Head of Planning Sector, PAFO, Xiengkhouang Province Committee;
12. Mr. Khamphane Silavy, Head of Planning Sector, PAFO, Salavan Province Committee;
13. Mr. Bounsoum Boutsithongdam, Head of Planning Sector, PAFO, Xekong Province Committee.

Responsibility:

- ♦ Providing support to the Advisory Committee according to their assignment in each period for the implementation of the national action plan for multi-sectoral approaches to nutrition;
- ♦ Act as general coordination; represent the Advisory Committee to coordinate with the Department of Hygiene and Health Promotion and related technical department within MAF

for the implementation of national action plan for multi-sectoral approaches to nutrition and report to the Advisory Committee in each period;

- ♦ Participate with other related stakeholders at central and local level to monitor and evaluate the implementation of action plan in each period including report and present the next action plan for having guidance from the Advisory committee.

III Technical Committee

- A. Technical Team at the central level.
 1. Mr. Somvang Phanthavong, Deputy Head of planning sector, represent the Department of Agriculture;
 2. Mr. Soupha Vankeovilay, Head of Livestock Management Division, represent the Department of Livestock and Fisheries;
 3. Mr. Phanthavong Vongsamphan, Deputy Head of planning Sector, Represent the Department of Livestock and Fisheries;
 4. Mr. Saithong Phengboupaha, Head of Inspector Sector, Planning Division, represent Department of Agriculture.
- B. For the Technical Team from each related sector at the province level functions according to their own responsibility.

Responsibility:

- ♦ Implement the multi-sectoral approaches to nutrition action plan according to the defined role, assist and coordinate with PAFO, DAFO and villages (if it is necessary) to define projects and detail work plan for the implementation of below action plan such:
 1. Promotion of home garden including the technology of drip irrigation system package;
 2. Small animal promotion;
 3. Promotion of animal vaccination and animal treatment;
 4. Promotion of food processing, storage and preservation;
 5. Promotion of women's employment generating



through agriculture value chain and non-timber forest product;

- ◆ Support and participate with local level to develop detail project and work plan of the above action plan to ensure its high efficiency;
- ◆ Monitor and report the progress of each task to the Advisory Committee in each period through the Secretariat for providing direction recommendations.

Article 02: handing over to assigned member listed under article 1 to divide detail responsibility and cooperate with related sectors for effective implementation, report to their line agency after completion of its implementation in order to have an agreement for the report.

Article 03: this agreement is effective from the date of signature.

Minister of Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry

Signed and sealed

Vilaivanh Phoumkhaei

Noted: This is an unofficial translation



Annex 6. Study TORs

Terms of Reference

Analysis of institutional constraints to effective implementation of the national nutrition policy in Lao PDR (Phase 1)

1 Background

Lao PDR suffers from the highest level of stunting (44 per cent of children) of all countries in the Greater Mekong Sub-Region. Current modest progress is insufficient to achieve MDG 1c by 2015.

The reasons for this high level of under-nutrition are well recognised, but efforts to address the immediate causes have had limited success. A major reason is a weak institutional framework that prevents effective implementation of the Lao Government's Nutrition Policy (2008) and the National Nutrition Strategy and Plan of Action 2010-2015.

There is a need to ensure that well designed policies, strategies and plans are effectively implemented, including through:

- ◆ Identifying key individuals and agencies that are responsible for program delivery and that are accountable for results;
- ◆ Ensuring there are clear lines of communication and coordination within and between key Ministries, and between national, provincial and district levels of Government;
- ◆ Ensuring the efforts of development partners and CSOs are well coordinated with national plans and priorities;
- ◆ Developing an agreed planning, reporting and review system;
- ◆ Ensuring that adequate budget is allocated and disbursed on time; Systematically monitoring progress;
- ◆ Establishing mechanisms to identify and address critical institutional obstacles.

A number of recent developments provide the opportunity for improving the existing institutional framework:

- ◆ Establishment of the multi-sectoral National Nutrition Committee;
- ◆ Establishment of the Centre for Nutrition (CN) within the MoPH, which acts as the secretariat for the National Nutrition Committee;
- ◆ Preparation by the three key ministries (the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF), the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES), and the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH)) of the Multi-Sectoral Food and Nutrition Action Plan (in process);
- ◆ This has been an intensive exercise involving the GoL and development partners;
- ◆ Establishment of the Provincial Nutrition Coordination Committees in Oudomxay, Luang Namtha and Salavan;
- ◆ Lao PDR becoming a signatory to the international 'Scaling Up Nutrition' movement in April 2011. The recent establishment of the Lao Civil Society Alliance has further opened opportunities for NGO and civil society engagement with GoL related to improving nutrition;
- ◆ Preparation of a Nutrition Law that will focus on establishing the legal framework for the appropriate marketing of breast milk substitutes and other baby foods.

The Multi-Sectoral Food and Nutrition Action Plan noted above has three key objectives:

1. To set multi-sectoral strategies for implementation of national nutrition policies and plans;
2. To create cross-sectoral linkages;
3. To test an implementation approach in selected provinces and districts where the Action Plan is being piloted.

This research study, proposed by the CN, is designed to assess and start to address key institutional constraints affecting implementation of national nutrition policies and programs, and to directly inform finalization of the Multi-Sectoral Food and Nutrition Action Plan.

The Concept Note for the study was reviewed by the Research Steering Committee established under



the Lao-Australia Development Learning Facility (LADLF) at its meeting held on 1 August 2014, and subsequently approved for implementation in the first round of research projects to be funded by LADLF.

2 Study objectives

The research questions to be addressed by the study include:

1. What cross-sectoral linkages already exist and how well do these work? What are the major constraints to improved cross-sectoral coordination?
2. What cross-scale linkages already exist and how well do these work? What are the major constraints to improved cross-scale coordination?
3. What donor coordination mechanisms already exist and how well do these work? What are the major constraints to improved donor/ GoL coordination?
4. How can institutional roles, responsibilities and operating practices (encompassing cross-sectoral, cross-scale, and development partners) be improved to underpin effective implementation of the Food and Nutrition Action Plan?

In line with these research questions, the study will:

1. Review current GoL policies, strategies and institutional mandates relating to improving nutrition in Lao PDR;
2. Assess the effectiveness of present management processes of the various GoL agencies involved, encompassing planning, budget management, implementation coordination and management, lines of accountability, and monitoring and evaluation;
3. Review the current role of development partners (including CSOs) in helping GoL implement its National Nutrition Policy, and assess the effectiveness of present mechanisms for aligning these efforts with GoL policies and programs;
4. Examine current budget allocation and coordination processes of GoL and relevant development partners, and identify

opportunities to make nutrition a priority within these processes (points of advocacy);

5. Assess the new multi-sectoral approaches being piloted in Salavan Province and assess the effectiveness of these approaches;
6. Building on (1) to (5), identify key institutional constraints related to effective implementation of national nutrition policies and programs. This will include assessment of the pros and cons of the current multi-sectoral platform and clear identification of constraints and lessons learned;
7. Develop specific recommendations to address these constraints, encompassing both GoL and development partner roles;
8. Work closely with GoL and key development partners to build cross-sectoral consensus on these recommendations;
9. Define the timeline, management decisions and resources required for implementation of key recommendations;
10. Establish a framework and responsibilities for monitoring the implementation of key recommendations.

3 Phasing and timeline

The Study will be conducted in two Phases, an initial Scoping Phase followed by a Detailed Research Phase.

Phase 1: Scoping Phase (1 month)

Phase 1 will undertake a preliminary scoping of institutional settings and constraints, and prepare a detailed design for Phase 2 of the study. It will identify key stakeholders, current practices and issues, and confirm/ refine the scope of the research. The Plan for Phase 2 will set out agencies/ individuals to be consulted with and at what levels; critical lines of enquiry; procedures and timelines for data collection, analysis and reporting; and procedures for ensuring full involvement of GoL partners in the process so that 'ownership' of results is maximized.



Phase 2: Detailed Research Phase (up to 6 months)

Phase 2 will implement the detailed study designed during Phase 1. This will involve undertaking a detailed analysis of institutional constraints, and developing and testing specific recommendations for improving institutional settings to support implementation of national nutrition policies and programs. These recommendations will help inform finalization of the Multi-Sectoral Food and Nutrition Action Plan. This Phase will need to involve wide-ranging and systematic consultation with relevant GoL stakeholders at national, provincial, district and community levels, as well as with key development partners. Field investigations for this Phase will likely be focused in selected provinces and districts where it is planned to test implementation approaches for the Multi-Sectoral Food and Nutrition Action Plan.

The research conducted through both Phases is expected to be essentially qualitative in nature. It will utilize a range of methods such as desk research, one-on-one interviews, focus group discussions, and structured/ semi-structured interviews with key informants to gain their views on relevant institutional constraints, and to develop recommendations on and build consensus around how these constraints can be best addressed.

The aim is to complete Phase 1 of the study by the end of 2014 (subject to timely finalization of these ToR and identification/availability of suitable consultants). Phase 2 will be conducted during the first half of 2015.

4 Resources

Phase 1

- ◆ Health Sector Institutional Specialist (International) – 1 month
- ◆ Health Sector Institutional Specialist (National) – 1 month
- ◆ GoL support costs – up to USD xxx (TBD)

Phase 2

Specific inputs for Phase 2 of the study will be defined as an output of Phase 1. Ongoing inputs from

the Phase 1 Health Sector Institutional Specialists (International and National) are anticipated, as are additional GoL support costs.

Resource management

TA will be directly contracted by LADLF, with all associated costs paid directly by the Facility. Consultant TOR for Phase 1 are provided in Attachment 1. TOR for Phase 2 will be developed as an output of Phase 1.

Support costs for GoL will include travel, accommodation, DSA, workshop and other cost items as agreed by the Facility. Unit costs will be based on standard GoL/ MoF rates where available unless otherwise agreed by LADLF.

For Phase 1, funds will be disbursed to MoPH as a lumpsum, in advance. For Phase 2, funds will be disbursed against milestone events to be defined in the Phase 2 workplan prepared during Phase 1. The NC will be responsible for administering all funds disbursed to MoPH for the purposes of the study.

5 Study management

MoPH is in the process of establishing a Reference Group and a Technical Working Group to support implementation of the study. The Reference Group will be chaired by a Vice-Minister of MoPH and will include DDG-level representation from relevant agencies including MoPH, MPI/DIC; MAF/Planning Department; MoES/ Inclusive Education Center; the Leading Committee for Rural Development and Poverty Eradication, and the Poverty Reduction Fund. This group will play a high-level oversight and coordination role for the study. It will also play an important role in building cross-sectoral consensus on recommendations resulting from the study.

The Technical Working Group will comprise nominated staff from the agencies represented on the Reference Group, who will directly participate in the organization and execution of the study.

The Research Unit of the CN will play a leading role in the study, including direct participation in meetings and field investigations, synthesis of findings, and the



development and presentation of recommendations. It will also be responsible for day-to-day coordination of study activities and logistics.

The Consultants will be based at the CN, and are expected to establish a close working relationship with the CN Research Unit Director and staff, and through the CN with the Reference Group and the Technical Working Group. They will also be expected to work in such a way as to build the capacity and skills of the CN staff.

- ◆ A representative from the LADLF Research Unit (ex-officio);
- ◆ A representative from MPI DIC (as observer).

The TRG will be responsible for reviewing and approving the Phase 2 design (developed during Phase 1), and key outputs from the Phase 2 study.

6 Outputs

Phase 1

- ◆ Preliminary assessment of current institutional settings and constraints;
- ◆ Detailed design for Phase 2 of the study (ie the detailed research proposal);
- ◆ Exit workshop to discuss preliminary findings and plans for Phase 2;
- ◆ Report documenting the above.

Phase 2

- ◆ Detailed analysis of institutional constraints (cross-sectoral, cross-scale, and development partner-related);
- ◆ Specific recommendations for addressing identified constraints;
- ◆ Progress workshops (as required) to discuss findings, develop recommendations and build a broad consensus with key stakeholders on the way forwards;
- ◆ Final workshop to present recommendations;
- ◆ Report documenting the above.

7 Monitoring

LADLF will establish a Technical Reference Group (TRG) to monitor implementation of the study. This will include:

- ◆ An independent expert with experience in working with GoL and development partners in the delivery of nutrition programs;
- ◆ The Head of the NC Research Unit;
- ◆ A representative from the LADLF Research Steering Committee;



Attachment 1

Consultant TOR for phase 1

Two Health Sector Institutional Specialists will be engaged for a period of 1 month each to assist CN with this study, one International and one National.

The overall scope of the study is defined in Section 2 of this document (see Study Objectives).

Phase 1 will undertake a preliminary scoping of institutional settings and constraints, and prepare a detailed Workplan for Phase 2 of the study. It will identify key stakeholders, current practices and issues, and confirm/ refine the scope of the research. The Plan for Phase 2 will set out agencies/ individuals to be consulted with and at what levels; critical lines of enquiry; procedures and timelines for data collection, analysis and reporting; and procedures for ensuring full involvement of GoL partners in the process so that 'ownership' of results is maximized.

The Research Unit of the CN will play a leading role in the study, including direct participation in meetings and field investigations, synthesis of findings, and the development and presentation of recommendations. It will also be responsible for day-to-day coordination of study activities and logistics.

The Consultants will be based at the CN, and are expected to establish a close working relationship with the CN Research Unit Director and staff, and through the CN with the Reference Group and the Technical Working Group. They will also be expected to work in such a way as to build the capacity and skills of the CN staff.

The two Consultants are expected to work closely as Team and in close collaboration with CN staff towards achieving the objectives of the study. Specific roles and responsibilities are as follows:

International

1. Provide overall leadership of the TA Team;
2. Develop a workplan for Phase 1, to be submitted to the CN and LADLF by the end of week 1;
3. Lead discussions with the CN, the NCC and other stakeholders sufficient to prepare a preliminary assessment of institutional settings and constraints;

4. Prepare a detailed workplan for Phase 2 of the study, including budget estimates;
5. Lead a workshop towards the end of week 3 to outline key findings from the preliminary assessment, and to outline the proposed Phase 2 workplan;
6. Establish agreement with the NC on key findings;
7. Prepare a draft report detailing current institutional settings and constraints, and the Phase 2 workplan, to be submitted to the CN and LADLF for comment towards the end of week 4;
8. Address comments received by the end of week 4.

National

1. Support the International Consultant in all aspects of the study;
2. Facilitate development of a strong working relationship between the Consultants and the NC;
3. Provide advice on current institutional roles, responsibilities and capacities;
4. Source and analyse secondary information (e.g. policy documents) relevant to the study;
5. Provide input to development of the Phase 1 workplan, ensuring that consultations are held with all key stakeholders;
6. Facilitate the organization and execution of meetings and consultations;
7. Work closely with the International Consultant on the assessment of institutional settings and constraints, and on the development of the Phase 2 workplan;
8. Liaise closely with the CN to ensure that the results from the preliminary institutional assessment are understood and considered to be sound, and that there is general agreement on the Phase 2 workplan;
9. Assist the CN with organizing the workshop to be held at the end of week 3, and facilitate discussion at the workshop;
10. Provide written contributions to the Phase 1 report as requested by the International Consultant.

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