

INSIDE

Research conference

Capacity building for systematic analysis

UHS's new nutrition modules



On 19 August 2024, a pivotal gathering aimed at bridging the gap between climate change and nutrition was held in Vientiane Capital. The **“Climate Change and Nutrition in Lao PDR: Intersections and Interventions Conference”** brought together 109 experts and development practitioners from 42 implementing organizations, donors, and ministries, representing various sectors, both in person and online, to explore and address these critical issues. Hosted by the Scaling Up Nutrition Civil Society Alliance (SUN CSA) in Laos, through the support of the USAID-funded Applied Nutrition Research Capacity Building project (ANRCB), the conference served as a dynamic platform for discussion and collaboration. Participants included representatives from the Lao government, academic institutions, civil society organizations, international donors and development agencies.

Dr. Viengkhan Phixay, the Deputy Director General of the Department of Hygiene & Health Promotion opened the conference and described the GoL commitment to address the challenge. *“The government of Laos is actively engaged in this endeavor, with numerous policies and initiatives aimed at addressing both climate change and nutrition. Various Ministries—including Health, Natural Resources and Environment, Agriculture and Forestry, and Education—are spearheading these efforts.”* Kelley Khamphouxay, Program Manager at Catholic Relief Services, noted the need to come together around this new challenge: *“The presentations today showcased the vital connections between climate change and nutrition. From health impacts to water access and environmental considerations, the tools and strategies discussed are making a tangible difference in Laos. Networks like SUN CSA are crucial for amplifying these impacts across the country.”* Dr. Sayvisene Boulom of the National University of Laos highlighted the urgent need to transform the food systems in Lao PDR. His presentation described the "triple burden" of malnutrition in Laos—coexisting undernutrition, overweight, and micronutrient deficiencies. Key factors leading to this situation include limited access to diverse and healthy foods, poor infrastructure, cultural food taboos, and low coverage of nutrition-sensitive programs. High dependency on rice, declining physical activity, and an increase in unhealthy food consumption further exacerbate the problem. He called for fostering multi-stakeholder collaboration to improve both the production and consumption patterns in Lao PDR.

Find all the conference presentations here: <https://bit.ly/3XA0gbk>

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Turning Research into Action

On Wednesday, August 28th, 2024, USAID-supported ANRCB Project and SUN CSA Laos organized a **Health and Nutrition Research Day** to connect development and civil society agencies implementing nutrition projects with Lao nutrition researchers.

Participants explored how local research can be used effectively and how enhancing collaboration between academia and practitioners can speed adoption of evidence-based approaches and better policy decisions.



Presentations from Lao researchers delved into new research findings, highlighting groundbreaking studies and actionable insights. The National Nutrition Research Agenda was presented and included a panel discussion to help identify practical ways to better coordinate research by development agencies. The event was inspired by the interest and contributions of civil society at the Greater Mekong Subregion Public Health Conference held in Luang Prabang this past June. A total of 47 participants attended in person and online, contributing to a day of sharing, learning, and advocating for nutrition research! View the event livestream at: <https://tinyurl.com/nhxu84ad>

Leveling Up Lao Research via Systematic Review



Members of the Faculty of Public Health of the University of Health Sciences and key partners recently attended a special short course on *Systematic Reviews & Meta-analysis* at Faculty of Public Health, Khon Kaen University, Thailand. This dynamic workshop introduced participants to essential methodologies for conducting systematic reviews of interventions. Twelve lecturers and researchers were taught by Assoc. Prof. Dr Porjai Pattanittum and Assoc. Prof. Dr Chetta Ngamjarus, via lecture, demonstrations, small group activities, and practical exercises. Through this hands-on training and expert guidance, they gained confidence and skills in evidence-based medicine research synthesis, such as those done by Cochrane Reviews. They also got experience with Covidence, RevMan, and Cochrane software packages. This high-level training will allow more sophisticated analysis of existing studies on the Lao nutrition sector and help provide better policy guidance, crucial for improving outcomes in Laos.

Strengthening Nutrition Education and Research in Laos

The USAID-supported ANRCB Project recently completed the last two nutrition-related modules for the University of Health Science's Faculty of Public Health. Since 2021, teams from Purdue and Indiana Universities in the US have developed 12 original teaching resources on nutrition and research, significantly improving the quality of teaching and research on nutrition in Lao PDR.



The new in-depth module on **Social Behavior Change** was developed by Dr. Katherine Eddens of Indiana University in collaboration with UHS professors in 2024. It covers Theories and Models of Behavior Change, Tools for Assessing Multilevel Determinants of Behavior, and Applied Health Communication Approaches for diverse communities, and evaluation of SBC initiatives. The module was presented by its authors during a three-day orientation for 30 professors and researchers from UHS and the Lao Tropical and Public Health Institute (Lao TPHI).

The new module on **Nutrition Assessment** was created by Dr. Carmen Tekwe from the Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics at the School of Public Health of Indiana University, with contributions from her colleague Dr. Roger Zoh. Both professors travelled to Laos to help share this new resource with Lao researchers and professors from UHS and LaoTPHI. The module teaches about options for dietary assessment in epidemiological studies and the key issues to consider when selecting methods for evaluating individual food and nutrient intake. This hands-on training prepared participants to integrate the new module into their university classrooms as well as upcoming research in community and clinical settings.



Nutrition Counseling Services for Better Health Outcomes

Laos is now facing increasing rates of noncommunicable disease (NCD), much of which is diet related. In recognition of this new challenge for the Lao health system, the Center of Nutrition at MOH, created a two-month course for health professionals on Nutrition Counseling for NCD Patients with USAID and ANRCB support. The course was developed with leading national medical experts on diabetes, kidney and liver disease, and cardiac specialists, and counseling master trainers from MOH's Center of Health Statistics and Information. 20 learners from Central Hospitals studied in classrooms and on the wards at local hospitals over July and August. In addition to extensive technical lectures, extensive hours were spent practicing the skills needed to provide complex quality care. Participants learned in-depth about the role of diet in NCD treatment as well a practical skills and intrapersonal communication techniques to help patents successfully follow their physician's advice. The course materials have been endorsed by MOH and provide an important guideline in a newly emerging area for Lao health care.





New materials to target the NCD threat

We are excited to announce the release of three new posters promoting nutrition among adolescents! These posters were designed to raise awareness about the role of diet in NCD risk and the importance of healthy habits among young Lao people. The posters were designed by Center of Nutrition technical staff as part of their learning about Social Behavior Change techniques and use a novel approach to capture the attention of urban young adults.

If your organization would like to display these posters in health offices or other relevant locations, please contact the Center of Nutrition. You can also download the posters directly here: <https://bit.ly/3AV2pqO>

Let's work together to inspire healthier choices and build a brighter future for adolescents in our community!

Nutrition Research Webinars

There are now 24 webinars hosted on the ANRCB YouTube channel providing an excellent opportunity to catch up on new research and review techniques. Recent additions include:

3 July 2024 "Baseline Survey Results: Improved access to health services for women, infants and young children" by Mrs. Ketsadasak Kiattisak, Head of Public Health and Nutrition Program. Plan Internation Laos.

7 August 2024 "Emergence of National Nutrition Policy in the Lao People's Democratic Republic: an analysis of collaborations between governmental and external actors" by Dr. Viengsamay Sengchaleun Research Associate, NUS Public Health Lao Program.

5 September 2024 "Result of Training Gestational Diabetes Mellitus for the Health care Provider" by Dr. Souphaphone Louangdouangsithideth, Deputy head of nutrition department, Mahosot hospital.

Webinars are uploaded in English and Lao on ANRCB YouTube Channel: <https://bit.ly/4buFq2F>

Please note: the ANRCB project will close in September 2024.

Project materials and products will remain available via:

- **Purdue University:** <https://ag.purdue.edu/department/ipia/anrcb/index.html>
- **ANRCB YouTube Channel** <https://bit.ly/4buFq2F>
- **SUN CSA Laos website** <https://suncsalaos.org>