

CFS plenary session

Session IX – Progress Report on follow-up to the second international conference on Nutrition (ICN2), including implementation of the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition

26th October 2023 (10:00 – 13:30)

Distinguished guests - Ladies and gentlemen

As a national convenor for sustainable food systems in Laos, I would like to highlight how our country has implemented a number of initiatives focused on promoting sustainable and resilient food systems for healthy diets which include:

1. **Diversifying crops:** promoting the cultivation of a diverse range of crops, including vegetables and fruits, to improve the nutritional quality of diets. The government is also encouraging the use of traditional crops that are well adapted to local conditions.
2. **Improving food preservation and storage:** investing in infrastructure to improve the storage and preservation of food, such as cold storage facilities and improved packaging.
3. **Promoting sustainable agriculture:** such as organic farming and crop rotation, to reduce the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides and improve soil health.
4. **Supporting small-scale farmers:** providing support to small-scale farmers to improve their productivity and income, such as providing training and access to credit.
5. **Addressing food waste:** developing initiatives to reduce food waste and loss, such as improving supply chain management and increasing awareness of the issue.
6. **School food and nutrition programs** have been implemented to address malnutrition and improve students' health and academic performance. In addition to the National School Meals Program, there are also school gardens and nutrition education programs that aim to promote healthy eating habits and food security.

Overall, these initiatives are helping to promote sustainable, resilient food systems for healthy diets in Laos. However, further efforts are needed to address the underlying causes of food insecurity and malnutrition, such as poverty and lack of access to education and healthcare.

As such please allow me to mention about the key tool that we use to guide our work on sustainable, resilient food systems for healthy diets which is one of the six action areas of the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition.

The CFS plays a vital role as an inclusive international and intergovernmental platform for all stakeholders to work together to ensure food security and improved nutrition for all.

One of the key contributions of the CFS to global food and nutrition governance is the development of the Voluntary Guideline for Food System and Nutrition (VGFSyN), which provides comprehensive guidance to support the achievement of sustainable food systems, enabling food security and healthy diets and improving nutrition for all.

In Laos, the Department of Planning and Cooperation (DOPC) /the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry plays a pivotal role in working alongside FAO and other UN agencies to develop

the National Plan of Actions on Sustainable Food System in Laos using VGFSyN as a guide in this journey.

To facilitate this critical process, DOPC/MAF, with the support of FAO and funding received from the Food Coalition, has conducted a series of consultations across the country to identify key priorities and gather valuable recommendations that will serve as a crucial contribution to the development of the National Plan of Actions on Sustainable Food Systems in Laos. From these consultations through-out the country, I would like to highlight that

The VGFSyN was well-received as a new, useful guideline by the government, marking a first set of structured discussions on food systems and nutrition involving a variety of players at provincial, national and international level.

During the consultations, we also identified some challenges and lessons learnt. I would like to highlight **three key challenges** among others:

1. **Technical Coordination:** Department of Planning and Cooperation (DOPC) as the coordinating agency appoints focal points across ministries to aid VGFSyN application in national planning.
2. **Local Community Engagement:** should be strengthened for enhancing coordination and getting valuable inputs to the National Action Plan.
3. **Financing Strategy:** there is need for a well-informed financing strategy, involving diverse stakeholders, for a sustainable agrifood system transition.

Utilizing VGFSyN as a guide for discussions, key themes have emerged from the five consultations that are essential to consider for the development of National Action Plan on Sustainable Food Systems. The Ministry is planning to take the following concrete next steps as a follow up to the consultations held:

1. **Development of Policy Framework** to guiding provincial actions towards improved food security, nutrition, and sustainability in Laos.
2. **Inclusive Consultative Process** to engage all key stakeholders in a consultative process to tailor a policy framework addressing each province's unique challenges and opportunities.
3. **Clear Implementation Plan:** Define roles, responsibilities, expected outcomes, and set up regular monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.
4. **Key Provincial Priorities:** Highlight agricultural productivity, market linkages, sustainable production, healthy diets and improved nutrition, policy improvement, and food safety enhancement.
5. **Community Participation and Behaviour Change:** Leverage local knowledge through community engagement to link agrifood systems to broader goals like nutrition, health, and environment.
6. **Provincial Coordination:** Establish multi-stakeholder platforms with strong policies and resources for effective provincial coordination to tackle food system challenges.
7. **Linkage Between National Plans:** Link the National Plan of Action on Nutrition (NPAN) and the Food Systems Action Plan (FSAP) to promote nutrition-sensitive agrifood systems, sustainable agriculture, food safety, and multi-stakeholder engagement.
8. **Communication and Information Sharing:** Utilize various strategies like provincial information centres and mobile technology to spread knowledge and promote best practices.