

ອົງການຊາຍພັນ ອົດສະຕຣາລີ
ChildFund Australia

ກໍລະນີສຶກສາ ກ່ຽວກັບ
ປະສິດທິພາບຂອງການພັດທະນາ
Development Effectiveness Case Study

ຊື່ເລື່ອງ:

TITLE: The Importance of Exclusive Breastfeeding for Infants from Birth to 6 Months

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| ຫົວຂໍ້: | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ການເຂົ້າເຖິງຄວາມໝັ້ນຄົງ | Access to Assets |
| Theme/s: | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ສຽງ, ຕົວແທນ ແລະ ຄວາມສາມາດ | Voice, Agency, Power |
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| Sector: | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ສາທາ | Health |
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The Children's Improved Nutrition through Integrated Approach in Nonghet and Khoun Districts (CINIA) Project, funded by the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP), is a community-based project being implemented by ChildFund Laos. The aim of the project is to improve nutrition among mothers and children under 5 years old. It focuses on working with new mothers, as well as communities more broadly, in the areas of pre- and post-natal nutrition, best practices for caring for infants and young children, safe hygiene practices and infection management, and growth monitoring of children under 5 years old.

An important outcome of this project is to bring about a reduction in stunting and wasting. Stunting and wasting are pressing issues in Laos. The recent Lao Socioeconomic Indicator Survey (2017) highlighted that national rates of child stunting have steadily declined from 44.2% in 2012 to 33.0% in 2017, but this is still among the highest rates in Southeast Asia. As of 2017, 9.0% of children in Laos suffered from wasting and 21.1% were underweight.

The CINIA project is being implemented in 12 target villages in Nonghet District, including Houaysom Village. Houaysom is a small village with less than 150 inhabitants. It is located about 45 kilometers from the district capital, but it takes 1-2 hours to drive there as the road is difficult to travel on, particularly during the rainy season.

Ms. Kalia (a pseudonym), is 25 years old and currently serves as the head of the Women's Union for Houaysom Village. She is married and has five children; the older children are aged nine, seven, five, and two, and her youngest is four months old. Kalia is also a village representative who participates in CINIA trainings along with her village's Village Health Volunteer (VHV). She is particularly interested in the topics of caring for infants and young children and exclusive breastfeeding during the first six months of life.

“Before I began participating in these trainings, I thought that to raise children, all you had to do was give them enough food to eat and milk to drink when they wanted it,” Kalia said.

When ChildFund said that it would provide training for VHVs, the village authorities in Houaysom asked one VHV and one member of the Women's Union to participate. “At first I didn't want to participate because I have so many children, including a young baby,” said Kalia, “It would also be hard for me to get to the trainings because I don't know how to drive a motorbike.”

In October 2018, the CINIA project held a training on the topic of *Caring for Infants and Young Children*. “The village chief came to tell me to go to the training in Nonghet,” said Kalia, “I said the same thing as before: that I have young children and can't drive a motorbike. But the village chief said that the VHV would take me and bring me back, because [ChildFund] wanted us to send two people. On the day I went to the training, I learned so many new things, like how important it is to exclusively breastfeed infants from the time they're born until they're six months old, and the need to provide babies with supplementary food from a variety of food groups from the age of six months on. At the training, they also explained the importance of mother's breastmilk for children and demonstrated how to prepare supplementary food for babies over six months old.”

Kalia further explained, “This is different from how I did things on a daily basis in the past because I used to give my children only rice and not any other kinds of food. I also didn't feed them breastmilk regularly. Sometimes when I wasn't home, I would give my babies to my husband and have him buy formula to feed them or just give them water when they were hungry.”

In the past, Kalia fed all four of her children a combination of breastmilk and formula, in addition to rice once they were three or four months old. She noticed that her children were rarely healthy, and that they were often sick or caught colds. “I think that for this fifth child, who’s now four months old, I won’t give him any other kind of food except for my breastmilk,” she said.

Exclusively breastfeeding from birth until the age of six months is critical to a child’s well-being because breastmilk contains all the nutrients that a baby needs to grow strong and healthy. Mother’s milk also helps protect children from respiratory infections and can reduce their risk of contracting other kinds of illnesses, as it contributes to the maintenance of a strong immune system.



Photo: Ms. Kalia brings her son with her to an activity in Nonghet

In the beginning of November 2018, ChildFund held another training on the topic of *Hygiene, Managing Infections, and Measuring Child Malnutrition using MUAC*. Kalia participated in the training, coming with the VHV and bringing her baby with her. “I didn’t want to leave my son at home because I was afraid that he would be hungry and wouldn’t have milk to drink, so I brought him here with me so he can drink breastmilk whenever he wants it.”

Since then, at each training Kalia always takes care of her baby, looks after him, and breastfeeds him when he wants milk. ChildFund staff encourage mothers to bring their babies to any activities or events in which they participate.

At the end of December 2018, the project team at ChildFund had the opportunity to go to Houaysom Village to observe the VHVs disseminating nutritional information to the people in the village. While we were at the training in Houaysom, we met with Kalia and her friend Houa, who joined the training that day. Kalia had brought her son along with her and was presenting at the training along with the VHV.

“Now, my son is four months old, and I still only feed him breastmilk,” she told us, “I think when he’s six months old, I’ll start giving him rice to eat but I’ll keep feeding him breastmilk until he’s two. I think this child won’t be sick as often as my others were. And compared to other babies, even at four months, my son is almost big as an eight-month-old.”



Photo: Ms. Kalia's 4-month-old son



Photo: Ms. Houa's 8-month-old daughter

This story shows Kalia's vision as a participant in ChildFund's CINIA Project. Her story demonstrates the short-term benefits of learning about the importance of mother and child nutrition. It also highlights how important it is that all mothers and fathers are knowledgeable regarding these topics, because if children are healthy, they will develop to their full potential and be set up for a healthy and happy adulthood. As the saying goes, "The children of today are the adults of tomorrow."

Mother and child nutrition, especially feeding infants exclusively on breastmilk between birth and six months of age, is a critical issue. It is also something that almost every mother is capable of doing and can be done at very little cost. Breastmilk is the perfect resource for growing babies. Participants in the training held by the CINIA project team have shown great interest in the training topics and have implemented what they have learned in their everyday lives in order to ensure that their babies will grow into healthy children. They have also held trainings for other people in their communities, thereby ensuring this information becomes embedded in their community's 'shared knowledge', and that future generations will also learn these lessons and follow these practices to help build healthier communities.