Action brief

Friday Nutrition Hangouts: Enhancing peer-to-peer learning through monthly online events

Country:	Lao People's Democratic Republic	**Themes:**	Social Mobilisation, Advocacy and communication	**Sub-themes:**	Engaging Civil Society
Date:	2023				

Overview

Online peer-to-peer learning sessions are a low-investment, high-reward opportunity to build engagement among staff and organizations in the national SUN Civil Society Alliance. Monthly, hour-long sessions can effectively share best practices and new approaches and help build understanding and agreement around advocacy action.

Objectives of the action brief

→ This action brief outlines how monthly online peer-to-peer learning exchanges can be a valuable way to share knowledge and skills among staff across networks, sectors and geography.

→ These regular sessions build opportunities for individuals to give and receive skills and knowledge, create belonging and instil confidence in individuals and organizations, both large and small.

Period covered

This action brief covers 2020 to the present day. Online "hangouts" started during the COVID-19 pandemic to share prevention skills and have expanded to many other nutrition topics during the past three years.

What action was taken?

In the past, most learning and exchange events were held in person and limited by space and budget. Organization staff who were based outside the capital would often have to travel from the provinces. As participant numbers were limited, it was mostly senior staff who were able to attend and learn from others, limiting organizational capacity-building.

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a need to train staff from all organizations in the new COVID-19 protocols and prevention measures so they could pass them on to the communities they served. Initiated by Save The Children and facilitated by the SUN CSA Secretariat in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, weekly one-hour online trainings were organized for staff from SUN CSA member organizations. These SUN CSA Friday hangouts were well attended, and over time they became monthly and expanded to a range of topics of interest to staff.

At each hangout, a guest speaker presents a topic for 10 to 20 minutes, and then questions and discussion fill the rest of the hour. This allows everyone to share their experiences and raise and discuss questions, rather than just listening to a lecture. It quickly became a popular way for all organisations to share knowledge and resources on a topic. A SUN CSA staff WhatsApp group was created to share timely information with all interested staff, including invitations to Hangout sessions. That group chat currently boasts 125 members.

Online events have allowed learning and knowledge exchange to become more accessible to all staff, no matter their position or geography. Learning events have become shorter in duration, allowing staff more time to focus on their work. The low cost and short duration have meant that there could be more of these events on a wider number of topics. Holding them in the Lao language has allowed more staff from all levels to attend and learn, giving space and ownership to more national staff to identify and lead their own spaces.

Participants highlight the importance of learning from each other's expertise. Sessions are regularly led by members of civil society organizations and international non-governmental organizations, with all levels of staff discussing and asking questions that help them practically in their work. These sessions build a spirit of cooperation and sharing within the SUN CSA, giving more frequent opportunities for staff to be involved and to see the benefits of being active in the network. It gives opportunities for organizations with smaller projects to share skills and gain recognition for their expertise.

Thirty-seven online hangout sessions have been held by SUN CSA in the Lao People's Democratic Republic in the past three years.

What would the country do differently?

→ Some challenges initially included teaching people to use ZOOM. This was overcome through time and became of course a vital skill to have.

→ There were some sessions that tried to have an English-speaking presenter with translation, but this made the sessions slower and more complicated to organise, with translation either costing money or having reluctant volunteers. It was identified that Hangouts had more robust discussion and wider engagement when they were in the national language only. Non-local language speakers could attend but needed to provide their own translators.

→ Occasionally some sessions were not well attended. It was recognised that the topics had to be of interest to many staff, and niche topics wouldn't be well attended. Some topics that were interesting but complex used titles that made them more interesting to the wider staff.

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Adaptation and Applicability

→ **Hold only in the national language. Translation costs more, slows discussion and decreases the ownership and engagement by national staff.**

→ **To encourage strong attendance, identify topics with wider appeal and package them make them interesting to more staff.**

→ **Encourage smaller groups and regional staff to present at the sessions. This creates a sense of learning and encourages topics that are specific and relevant to more people. It also builds**

recognition and respect for those who sometimes have less of a voice or influence but who possess a wealth of knowledge.

→ **Make this member-driven and recognize their contributions to the network. Start a Volunteer of the Month award to recognize those who present at a hangout (post on Facebook or give awards at an annual meeting). This encourages others to present their expertise, and it builds a SUN CSA network of volunteers who put in their time and effort.**

Next steps

→ Identify topics and presenters. Set a date. Host a hangout. Adapt and repeat.

Further information

More information on hangouts can be found at the SUN CSA website and Facebook page or by emailing the Secretariat at info@suncsalaos.org.

This Good Practice was developed in collaboration with the SUN Civil Society Network (SUN CSN). For more information about the SUN CSN, please visit their website: https://www.suncivilsociety.com/

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