

Action brief

Youth Nutrition Champions, Cambodia: The story of Bormey Chhun

Country: Cambodia

Topics: Social Mobilization,
Advocacy and
Communication

Sub-topics: Engaging the Youth

Date: May 2023



Overview



It is important to meaningfully engage youth at all levels, including those living in the most rural and urban areas and those from Indigenous backgrounds. It is

critical that all stakeholders develop plans for making their projects and programmes accessible for youth so they can join and engage.



Objectives of the action brief

This brief highlights good practices in youth engagement through the Youth Nutrition Champions project, which sought to:

→ Raise awareness among youth on food security and nutrition

→ Encourage and motivate youth to support the promotion of healthy diets, food security and nutrition

→ Encourage youth to participate in policymaking on issues related to food security and nutrition and to promote these kinds of youth engagement activities



Period covered

The Youth Nutrition Champions Project was designed and implemented by the SUN Civil Society Network (CSN) Youth Leader for Nutrition, Bormey Chhun, from 2019

through to 2022. The project was heavily impacted by the global COVID-19 pandemic, which led to a shift in focus from in-person to online activities.



What action was taken?

Chhun was appointed to lead the Youth Nutrition Champions project. Knowing that collaboration was key to success, she advertised role openings within her team for ten members to join as Project Engagement Coordinators. The ten university students who were selected were trained and empowered to handle various youth engagement activities.

These Project Engagement Coordinators received training from various government institutions, SUN CSA members in Cambodia, local organizations, and the United Nations Network. Examples of training include:

- Food security and nutrition training provided by the National Nutrition Programmes, the Ministry of Planning (Farming), the Council of Agricultural and Rural Development, and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
- Advocacy training delivered in conjunction with the SUN Movement Secretariat

- Deep dives into food security and nutrition training delivered by SUN CSA members
- Food safety training

November 2021 saw an increase in interest from youth wanting to participate. Fifty Youth Nutrition Champions were recruited on a voluntary basis, and four of them secured an allowance from the German Agency for International Cooperation to enact youth activities.

As part of the project to raise awareness among youth on food security and nutrition, the following were achieved:

- Youth were mobilized in youth forums, peer-to-peer learning opportunities and youth camps.
- The 50 Youth Nutrition Champions who received training on food security, nutrition, breastfeeding and safety at the beginning of their tenure were able to engage with



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other young people in their communities to share the knowledge they had gained. In just one year, a total of 2,000 young people were reached through various efforts, including the Youth Nutrition Champion who invited fellow university students to share learnings and materials on nutrition.

- Six youth forums were held, with at least 200 people attending each forum. The forums were held at universities in various cities and provinces. For each forum in a province, up to five schools were invited. The Cambodian SUN Government Focal Point gave a welcome speech at one of the forums. Youth focal points from various sectors (women's affairs, education, agriculture and others) were invited to participate as panellists and to share how they have used the platforms in their municipalities to work with rural youth. The youth in attendance asked questions about these activities and how they could be more engaged. Learning sessions were held on healthy diets, food safety and more. A series of interactive games was designed, and healthy and nutritious dinners were provided to those participating in the forums. A vegetable booth featured a mascot handing out real vegetables and encouraging participants to take pictures to share and encourage others to include varied vegetables in their diets.
- The Youth Nutrition Champions organized a residential youth camp at which young campers were given recipes for healthy meals and then divided into groups to implement what they had learned in a cooking competition.

Instrumental factors leading to the success of the project were:

- A strong relationship with the SUN CSA Cambodia. Chhun was working at Hellen Keller International, the former chair of the CSA, during her tenure as a Youth Leader for Nutrition and was able to leverage its pre-established relationship with the Government.
- The well-functioning Multi-Stakeholder Platform in Cambodia, chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister, and the regular Food Security and Nutrition Forum meetings, chaired by His Excellency Sok Silo, the SUN Government Focal Point and Secretary General of the Council for Agriculture and Rural Development. Silo, who is responsible for setting priorities and making key decisions related to food security and nutrition, helped the Youth Nutrition Champions with their advocacy.
- Government support on the initiative. The Deputy Prime Minister presented the Youth Nutrition Champions with a letter of recognition sharing the need to establish the youth group in each province. These relationships led to strong advocacy to involve youth at various decision-making meetings for food security and nutrition policies. Through this ongoing advocacy, provincial working groups were established and youth nutrition was integrated as a component in the National Food Security and Nutrition Strategy (2019–2023).
- Buy-in from the Government of Cambodia to engage youth, as most of the population falls within the age range.
- Funds awarded by the SUN Pooled Fund.





What would the country do differently?

1. Make programmes more inclusive to different youth groups. Initially, connecting with young people in rural areas was not seen as a challenge. Information on the programme was advertised through social media, but the team did not realize that those in rural areas were unable to connect to these sources. Nutrition, malnutrition and food security issues impact everybody, so it is important to establish a way to connect with youth in rural areas so everyone can be involved. In the future, it would be key to connect more with local organizations, groups or networks that work directly with youth groups in rural areas and have established strong relationships.
2. Establish more independence from other stakeholders so as not to be restricted by different agendas.
3. Sustainability is key. A significant amount of funds is required to implement these activities in the long term, and work should be done to generate more funds and resource mobilization.



Adaptation and applicability

Key advice:

- **Have a team of youth advisers from many institutions, including the government, United Nations agencies, civil society and local organizations. Such a team would make it easier to plan events and engage a wider group of youth with differing areas of expertise. This will lead to the improved promotion of activities and a stronger, more collaborative design.**
- **Engage the private sector to see where additional funding can be secured, being careful to ensure that they do not conflict with advocacy aims or the marketing of breast-milk substitutes.**
- **Design activities that are inclusive of youth in rural areas. Go beyond social media and reach out to local non-governmental organizations and networks.**



Further information



<https://www.facebook.com/YNCCambodia/>



<https://scalingupnutrition.org/news/youth-nutrition-champions-make-their-voices-heard-cambodia>



https://www.suncivilsociety.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Outcome-Story_Cambodia-Final.pdf (P2)



<https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national-post-depth/nutrition-champion-chhun-bormey-educating-kids>



<https://rcocambodia.medium.com/youth-use-your-superpowers-to-transform-cambodias-food-systems-d43971654cfb>



Next steps

- Establish a National Youth Coordinator in the country. Allocate better resources and garner continued support from the Government.

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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