



March 31, 2023

Cambodia SUN Network's Joint Statement on the Extension of Maternity Leave in Cambodia

On behalf of the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Donor Network, representing five donors, the SUN Civil Society Alliance, representing 53 national and international civil society organizations, and the SUN United Nations Network, representing four agencies, congratulations to the Council for Agriculture and Rural Development, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Labor and Vocational Training on the successful consultation workshop "Improving infant and young child feeding and maternity leave for working women in Cambodia" held on Tuesday, January 31 2023.

The consultation workshop highlighted the rise of women in the Cambodian workforce, with approximately 70% of females aged 15 and above participating in the labor force.

WHO and UNICEF globally, and the Cambodian Ministry of Health recommend that infants should be exclusively breastfed for the first six months of life. The SUN stakeholders/network are concerned by declining rates over the last decade of early initiation of breastfeeding (from 66% to 54%) and exclusive breastfeeding (from 74% to 52%) according to the recent Cambodia Demographic Health Survey (CDHS 2021-22).

While many factors can impact these rates, and further data should be collected in relation, dedicated policy measures and interventions are needed to reverse these trends. These include ensuring quality essential newborn care, adequate Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF), counselling, implementation of Sub Decree 133, and supporting an enabling environment for mothers. Similarly, stronger maternity entitlement laws and policies by the Royal Government of Cambodia could bring about many benefits that impact nutrition positively, especially for working mothers.

As SUN partners, we encourage the Royal Government of Cambodia to extend paid maternity leave in the country from the current 13 weeks to 26 weeks (180 days) in line with international recommendations. We also encourage the introduction of paternity leave in Cambodia.

Key benefits of extended paid maternity leave include:

- **Improvements in mothers' health and well-being** through more rest and recovery after birth, which can reduce risk of poor maternal health including post-partum symptoms and psychological distress.
- **Improved rates of early breastfeeding initiation, exclusive breastfeeding, and breastfeeding duration.** A review of low and middle-income countries found that an additional month's increase in the legislated duration of paid maternity leave was associated with a 13% relative reduction in infant deaths, a 7.4% increase in the prevalence of early initiation of breastfeeding, a 5.9% increase in the prevalence of exclusive breastfeeding, and a 2.2-month

increase in breastfeeding duration.¹ Any expansion of maternity leave entitlements in Cambodia stands to result in significant benefits to the life and health of mothers and children, which is critical to human development in the country.

- **Reduced risk of malnutrition** through supporting parents' ability to provide adequate Infant and Young Child Feeding and nurturing care, consequently reducing future economic losses due to malnutrition.
- **Promotion of healthy bonding between parents and children**, which is shown to improve healthy child development.
- **Benefits for employers**, including the retention of experienced staff, attracting skilled staff, and improved staff morale and productivity alongside reduced turnover, staff absenteeism and sickness rates.
- **Further encouragement for women to return to the workforce after birth**, supporting the growth of the Cambodian economy with gender equity.
- **Promotion of female empowerment and gender equality** as a result of the increased decision-making power of women in the household and retention in the workforce.
- **Boosting future economic growth and enhancing human development** which is critical towards the country's achievement of the SDGs and Vision 2030 and 2050 goals of becoming an upper-middle income country by 2030 and high income by 2050.

Prime Minister Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo Hun Sen released a statement to the media in May 2018 calling for a policy on paid paternity leave to further strengthen the role of fathers in caring for their children. As families are the foundation of society, it is essential that policies like paid maternity and paternity leave are in place to protect the family unit. There is no better time than now.

Cambodia stands to lose an estimated US\$326.8 million annually (equivalent to around 2% of % GNI) due to inadequate breastfeeding (through combined health system, mortality, and cognitive losses). An expansion of maternity leave to 180 days in the formal sector is estimated to cost less than a quarter of the economic cost of not breastfeeding.

Recognising these benefits and potential return on investment, other countries in the region have upgraded their maternity leave policies. In Vietnam, the length of maternity leave has increased from 16 to 26 weeks and, the rate of exclusive breastfeeding has increased from 22% to 45% since, with the largest improvements seen among urban areas. Other countries in the region have also started to extend paid maternity leave.

The SUN network partners stand ready to support the Royal Government of Cambodia should it decide to amend the legislation on maternity leave outlined in Article 182-183 of Cambodia's Labor Law, 1997 to be in line with global standards. Recommended revisions would include:

- Extending of maternity leave from 90 days to 180 days with full pay.
- Introducing paid parental leave for the partners of women who have given birth.
- Strengthening provisions to ensure adequate labor protection for those on maternity/paternity leave (e.g. preventing employment discrimination and minimising the risk of dismissal linked to parental leave).

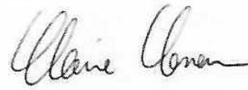
¹ Chai Y, Nandi A & Heymann J. Does extending the duration of legislated paid maternity leave improve breastfeeding practices? Evidence from 38 low-income and middle-income countries. *BMJ Glob Health*. 2018 Nov 1;3(5).

Presently, maternity leave laws and policies apply only to the formal sector. Efforts must be made to further formalize the economy to improve coverage as the informal sector makes up 77 percent of the female workforce.

Expanded maternity and paternity leave will directly contribute to long-term economic growth and human development - a milestone investment in the future of Cambodia.



Mr. Jost Kadel, Deputy Head of Mission and Head of The Germany Development Cooperation, The German Embassy and Chair of Donor Network.
Date:



Ms. Claire CONAN, WFP Representative and Country Director and Chair of UN Nutrition Network.
Date: 6/4/2023



Ms. Eri Kai, Nutrition Specialist and the Chair of SUN CSA Network
Date: March 31, 2023

Copy to:

- Samdech Akka Moha Ponhea Chakrei Heng Samrin, President of the National Assembly.
- Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo Hun Sen, Prime Minister, Kingdom of Cambodia.
- Samdech Krolahom Sar Kheng, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior.
- H.E Dr. Yim Chhay Ly, Deputy Prime Minister, Chair of the Council for Agriculture and Rural Development (CARD) and Chair of the Technical Working Group for Food Security and Nutrition.
- H.E. Dr. Aun Pornmoniroth, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economy and Finance.
- H.E Prof Mam Bunheng, Minister of Health.
- H.E Dr. Ith Samheng, Minister of Labor and Vocational Training.
- H.E. Dr. Ing Kanthaphavi, Minister of Women's Affairs.
- H.E Khieu Kanharith, Minister of Information.
- H.E Dr. Prak Sophonneary, Secretary of State, The Ministry of Health.
- H.E. Kan Morn, Secretary of State, The Ministry of Labor and Vocational Training.
- H.E Phan Oun, the Delegate of the Royal Government of Cambodia in charge as Director General of CCF Directorate-General, Ministry of Commerce.
- H.E Sok Silo, Secretary General, the Council for Agriculture and Rural Development.
- H.E Nong Thourk, Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Information.
- H.E Dim Theng, Deputy Director General, CCF of Ministry of Commerce.



- H.E Chen Seng Heang, Deputy Director General, Ministry of Industry, Science, Technology, and Innovation.
- H.E Mam Borath, Director, Nutrition Improvement, Ministry of Planning.
- Dr. Kim Rattana, Director of National Maternal and Child Health Centre.
- Dr. Chea Mary, Manager of the National Nutrition Program.
- Ms. Sara Park, Country Program Manager, International Labour Organization.
- SUN Business Network.
- Media Nutrition Champion Network.
- Youth Nutrition Champion Network.

For information, please contact:

Dr. Farid Selmi, Project Director
Multisectoral Food and Nutrition Security Project
the Germany Development Agency Deutsche Gesellschafts für International Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)
Phone: 077 55 54 11
Email: farid.selmi@giz.de

Hou Kroeun, Country Director
Helen Keller International-Cambodia
Phone: 095 43 24 25
Email: hkroeun@hki.org