

TERMS OF REFERENCE

TITLE – International Consultant to develop the National MIYCN guidelines

CONTRACT MODALITY Individual Consultancy

DUTY STATION Vientiane, Lao (Remotely)

DURATION OF CONTRACT 4 Months

Purpose of Assignment

Lao PDR continues to face high burden of child undernutrition, particularly during the critical first 1,000 days of life. Despite progress over the past decade, malnutrition remains a leading underlying factor contributing to child morbidity, mortality and poor cognitive development.

The Lao Social Indicator Survey III (LSIS III, 2023) highlights persistent gaps in infant and young child feeding practices in Lao PDR. Nationally, 42 per cent of newborns are breastfed within one hour of birth, and 45 per cent of infants aged 0–5 months are exclusively breastfed. Continued breastfeeding declines sharply, with only 36 per cent of children aged 12–23 months still receiving breastmilk.

Complementary feeding practices remain particularly weak: among children aged 6–23 months, only 49 per cent meet minimum meal frequency, 44 per cent achieve minimum dietary diversity, and just 32 per cent receive a minimum acceptable diet that meets both diversity and frequency standards. Marked disparities persist by geography, ethnicity, maternal education and household wealth, with children in rural and ethnic minority communities consistently less likely to meet recommended IYCF practices.

These findings underscore the need to update and strengthen national Maternal, Infant and Young Child Nutrition (MIYCN) guidelines to improve the quality, consistency and equity of nutrition counselling and service delivery across Lao PDR.

The Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (GoL), through the Ministry of Health (MoH), has demonstrated a strong commitment to improving nutrition outcomes through key policy frameworks, including the National Nutrition Policy (2008), the National Nutrition Strategy (NNS), and the National Plan of Action on Nutrition (NPAN).

MIYCN guidance in Lao PDR has traditionally been incorporated within broader policies, strategies, and operational tools rather than consolidated in a single, comprehensive guideline. Existing Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) guidance, developed in 2012, requires updating to reflect the latest WHO and UNICEF recommendations, emerging global evidence, and the current national policy and programme context.

The 2020 Micronutrient Supplementation and Deworming Guidelines also require revision following the recent introduction of Multiple Micronutrient Supplements (MMS) for pregnant women. At present, Lao PDR does not have dedicated national maternal nutrition guidelines.

Recent policy reviews and programme assessments have identified gaps in the dissemination, operationalization, and implementation of recommended IYCF practices, particularly at subnational levels.

These analyses have also highlighted the need for updated, practical, and context-specific guidance to strengthen the capacity of health workers, programme managers, and implementing partners to deliver an integrated package of Maternal, Infant and Young Child Nutrition services.

Such guidance should be aligned with global standards and national priorities and support delivery through key service platforms, including antenatal care (ANC) services and Growth Monitoring and Promotion (GMP) platforms, commonly referred to as "Well Child Clinic."

In response to these needs, UNICEF seeks to engage a qualified consultant to support MOH in the development of National Maternal Nutrition Guidelines and the revision and updating of the Infant and Young Child Nutrition (IYCN) Guidelines for Lao PDR, ensuring alignment with current evidence, international recommendations, and national programme priorities.

Scope of Work

The purpose of this consultancy is to provide technical leadership and coordination for the development of two interconnected national guidelines for Lao PDR: the Maternal Nutrition Guidelines and the Infant and Young Child Nutrition (IYCN) Guidelines. The consultant will ensure that both guidelines are aligned with the latest WHO and UNICEF recommendations, reflect current national policies, strategies, and evidence, and are adapted to the Lao context, including its ethnic, geographic, and socio-cultural diversity.

The updated guidelines will provide clear, practical, and actionable guidance for the delivery of integrated nutrition services at facility, community, and outreach levels. They will also strengthen linkages with multisectoral nutrition actions and existing health system platforms.

Under the overall supervision of the UNICEF Lao PDR Nutrition Specialist and in close collaboration with the Ministry of Health (Department of Hygiene and Health Promotion (DHHP), Nutrition Centre, and other relevant departments), the consultant will undertake the following tasks:

1 - Desk Review and Situation Analysis

- Review relevant national policies, strategies, guidelines, and operational tools related to maternal, infant, and young child nutrition, including micronutrient supplementation, deworming, antenatal care (ANC), and other related areas.
- Review key evidence and policy documents, including national surveys, recent nutrition policy briefs, programme assessments, and nutrition policy landscape analyses.
- Review relevant global normative guidance and recommendations related to maternal nutrition, infant and young child feeding, and micronutrient interventions.
- Prepare a concise gap analysis identifying priority areas, content gaps, and recommendations to inform the development and revision of the guidelines.

2 - Drafting the National Guidelines

- Collaborate closely with the national guideline development task force established by the Ministry of Health and gather inputs from relevant technical stakeholders.
- Develop draft Maternal Nutrition Guidelines and revise the existing IYCN Guidelines, incorporating current evidence and global recommendations.

- Ensure the guidelines address, at a minimum:
 - o Preconception nutrition;
 - o Nutrition during pregnancy and the postpartum period;
 - o Breastfeeding and infant feeding practices;
 - o Complementary feeding;
 - o Micronutrient supplementation and deworming;
 - o Nutritional assessment and growth monitoring;
 - o Social and behaviour change communication (SBCC);
 - o Nutrition in emergencies; and
 - o Equity and inclusion considerations.
- Ensure consistency with national terminology, health system structures, and service delivery approaches.
- Ensure alignment with existing health, nutrition, RMNCAH, and multisectoral nutrition strategies, guidelines, and service delivery platforms.

3 - Validation and Finalization of the National Guidelines

- Facilitate technical consultations and stakeholder review processes involving relevant MoH departments, UNICEF, WHO, development partners, academic institutions, civil society organizations, and implementing partners.
- Present draft guidelines and facilitate discussions during technical review meetings and validation workshops.
- Incorporate feedback received through consultations and validation processes.
- Finalize the Maternal Nutrition Guidelines and revised IYCN Guidelines in English.
- Prepare and submit final guideline documents, together with a summary of stakeholder feedback and key revisions made, to UNICEF and the Ministry of Health.

Work Assignment Overview	Deliverables/ Outputs	Delivery deadline	Planned Travel
Desk Review and Situation Analysis	Inception report, including workplan, methodology, and timeline;	31 st December 2026	
	Desk review and gap analysis report;		
Update of IYCN Guidelines	Draft updated IYCN Guidelines	31 st January 2027	3 weeks in Vientiane
	Powerpoint presentation for stakeholders meeting		
Development of Maternal Nutrition Guidelines	Draft Maternal Nutrition Guidelines	28 th February 2027	
	Powerpoint presentation for stakeholders meeting		

Validation and Finalization of the National Guidelines	Final National Maternal and IYCN Guidelines	30 th March 2027	
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Payment Schedule:

Payment will be made on submission and acceptance of deliverables. UNICEF reserves the right to withhold payment in case the deliverables submitted are not up to the required standard or in case of delays in submitting the deliverables on the part of the consultant.

Important Notes

- Individuals engaged under a consultancy or individual contract will not be considered “staff members” under the Staff Regulations and Rules of the United Nations and UNICEF’s policies and procedures and will not be entitled to benefits provided therein (such as leave entitlements and medical insurance coverage). Their conditions of service will be governed by their contract and the General Conditions of Contracts for the Services of Consultants and Individual Contractors. Consultants and individual contractors are responsible for determining their tax liabilities and for the payment of any taxes and/or duties, in accordance with local or other applicable laws.
- Contracts are conditional upon the selected candidate's willingness to comply with any current or future vaccination requirements that may be established by UNICEF, where applicable. Failure to comply with applicable vaccination requirements, where required and without an approved medical exemption by UNICEF, may result in the withdrawal of the consultancy offer or termination of the contract in accordance with the General Terms and Conditions of Contract.
- UNICEF offers reasonable accommodation for consultants with disabilities. This may include, for example, accessible software, travel assistance for missions or personal attendants. We encourage you to disclose your disability during your application in case you need reasonable accommodation during the selection process and afterwards in your assignment.

QUALIFICATIONS / SPECIALIZED KNOWLEDGE / EXPERIENCE/ COMPETENCIES (CORE/TECHNICAL/FUNCTIONAL) / LANGUAGE SKILLS REQUIRED FOR THE ASSIGNMENT

Minimum Requirements:

Education:

- Advanced university degree in nutrition, public health, medicine, or a related field

Work Experience:

- At least 10 years of professional experience in maternal, infant and young child nutrition, including guideline development or revision;
- Demonstrated experience working with governments and UN agencies, preferably in Southeast Asia or similar contexts;
- Accuracy and professionalism in document production and editing;

Language Requirements:

- Excellent English skills, Lao language desirable

Knowledge/Expertise/Skills:

- Strong knowledge of WHO/UNICEF MIYCN guidance;
 - Proven facilitation, writing, and coordination skills;
 - Excellent oral and written skills; excellent drafting, formulation, reporting skills;
 - Ability to work in a multidisciplinary team and have the initiative to work independently to meet deadlines
 - Self-motivated, ability to work with minimum supervision
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