

## Message from

**Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo Hun Sen, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia**

**During the 3<sup>rd</sup> National Nutrition Day, 06 November 2016**

Under the Theme: “Improved Hygiene and Nutrition Make Children Grow”

- My respects to both esteemed Great Supreme Patriarchs, venerable monks
- Your Royal Highness, Excellencies, Lok Chumteav, and all beloved compatriots!

On this auspicious occasion of the **3<sup>rd</sup> National Nutrition Day**, 06 November 2016, I would like to express my sincere delight and strong support for this important national event. The National Nutrition Day has been organized with the aim to educate and promote nationwide public awareness of the importance of nutrition, as well as to encourage people to be involved in the implementation of the Royal Government’s policies and strategies to improve the nutritional status of all people and especially for women and children. Our focus is to reduce the rate of stunting and wasting in children, as they are an indispensable human resource who will assume lead the country into the future.

Nutrition is a cross-cutting issue that requires joint efforts from various sectors, including water supply and sanitation, agriculture, education and health. In this spirit, the National Nutrition Day selects a different topic every year, to encourage cooperation among relevant sectors to promote nutrition. The focused theme for the National Nutrition Day this year is “Improved Hygiene and Nutrition Make Children Grow”. This theme involves different sectors including water supply and sanitation, health and education, with an aim to improve awareness about the the interconnection between nutrition, toilet use, hand-washing with soap and safe drinking water. The ultimate goal is to achieve positive behaviour change. Various studies conducted by national and international specialized institutions show that water supply and hygiene impact greatly on children’s nutrition. It is found that lack of access to safe water supply, unavailability of toilet and lack of the hygienic practice of hand washing with soap are the causes of around 50% of malnutrition in children, especially those with stunting and wasting problems.

Living without proper hygiene is one of the factors contributing to malnutrition, specifically stunting and wasting in children, as well as fatality in some serious cases. Health experts indicated that water consumption and inappropriate hygiene practices, are the main causes of disease outbreaks including diarrhea and intestinal parasites, which have serious adverse impacts on children’s health and nutrition. Therefore, interventions in the field of water supply and hygiene, safe storage and handling of food, as well as the encouragement of breast feeding are very important activities to contribute to the elimination of malnutrition and breaking the cycle of infection. This is especially important during the first 1000 days of life, which is a very critical period for the intellectual, mental and physical development of children.

In response to the inter-connected nature of the water supply, hygiene and nutrition sectors, the Royal Government has set out National Strategy on Rural Water Supply and Hygiene 2011-2025 and National Strategy on Food Security and Nutrition 2014-2018 and developed different legal instruments and measures for multi-sectoral responses to promote nutrition. However,

malnutrition in children has not been significantly reduced and this requires all relevant government institutions, both at the national and sub-national levels, as well as all relevant partners to work together to fight against malnutrition in children and pregnant women. The 2014 Cambodian Demographic and Health Survey shows that: 32% of children under 5 years old suffer from stunting and wasting and 24% are underweight. The study also indicates that 60% of rural families do not have access to a proper toilet; 53% do not have access to standard safe drinking water; while 29% of children's feces are not handled with proper hygiene. These conditions cause additional burdens on children's nutrition, especially in the rural areas.

Taking this opportunity of the **3<sup>rd</sup> National Nutrition Day**, I would like to call for all relevant ministries/institutions, development partners, civil society and the private sector working in the fields of water supply, hygiene and nutrition to continue to join forces in order to work more effectively to reduce the problem of stunting and wasting in children by implementing the following key tasks:

- 1). Continue to adhere strictly to the implementation of the National Strategy on Food Security and Nutrition (2014 – 2018), National Strategy on Rural Water Supply and Hygiene (2011-2025) and National Action Plan for the Zero Hunger Challenge by 2025;
- 2). Encourage more robust cooperation between relevant stakeholders to share technical knowledge and to ensure the delivery of comprehensive cross-sectoral public services with accountability, quality and effectiveness to eliminate the issue of malnutrition;
- 3). Relevant institutions must strengthen and expand awareness raising using all possible means to inform people about the importance and benefits of good hygiene practices, i.e., hand-washing with soap, building and using toilets and providing safe drinking water accompanied by positive behaviour changes for reducing malnutrition in children;
- 4). Continue to implement monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the implementation of the integrated water supply and hygiene and nutrition projects and programs.

Lastly, but not least, I am very hopeful that this 3<sup>rd</sup> National Nutrition Day will contribute to encourage and motivate relevant ministries/institutions, development partners, civil society organizations, the private sector and the general population to pay greater attention to the promotion of nutrition in children, with the aim to improve the health and wellbeing of mothers, infants and children and to ensure harmonization in Cambodian family and society as a whole.

Finally, I would like to wish the two Great Supreme Patriarchs, venerable monks, and all compatriots the four gems of Buddhist blessing: Longevity, Nobility, Health and Strength.

Phnom Penh, 1<sup>st</sup> November 2016

**Prime Minister**

(Signed and Stamped)

**Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo Hun Sen**