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I-CAN POLICY BRIEF: STRENGTHENING THE INTEGRATION OF CLIMATE AND NUTRITION POLICIES IN CAMBODIA

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SUMMARY

Cambodia faces urgent challenges at the intersection of climate change and nutrition: rising climate risks threaten food systems and nutrition outcomes, particularly for vulnerable rural communities. This policy brief presents findings from a 2025 light-touch assessment involving 32 policies and key stakeholder interviews. The results reveal limited integration of climate and nutrition agendas due to institutional fragmentation, weak coordination, inadequate financing, and insufficient data systems. However, promising opportunities are emerging through community-based models and a growing number of high-level policies that demonstrate strong cross-sectoral alignment, measurable targets, and inclusive implementation frameworks. As momentum builds, strategic investments in institutional coordination, financing, monitoring and learning, and stakeholder engagement are essential to accelerate integrated, climate-resilient, and nutrition-sensitive development across Cambodia.

INTRODUCTION

Cambodia is a predominantly agrarian country, with agriculture employing approximately 36% of the labour force and contributing to 22% of national gross domestic product^[1]. Cambodia is among the world's most climate-vulnerable nations: it was ranked 36th most vulnerable and 33rd least ready to adapt to climate change in the 2019 Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative index due to rising temperatures (+0.18 °C/decade since the 1960s) and increasingly intense floods and droughts that directly undermine food and nutrition security^[2].

These climate shocks have direct consequences on people's nutrition. Systematic reviews across low- and middle-income contexts, including Bangladesh, India, and Cambodia, show that flooding and drought increase child wasting, underweight, and long-term stunting by undermining food supply, childcare, and disease management^[3].

Cambodia's climate-nutrition nexus is characterised by: i) high exposure to climate hazards including floods, droughts, and heat stress, amplifying food system fragility^[4]; ii) disrupted agricultural production and food availability, leading to dietary imbalances^[5]; iii) elevated infection risks, especially waterborne diseases, which contribute to malnutrition^[6]; and iv) intersecting vulnerabilities, including rural poverty, sanitation gaps, and low adaptive capacity, which necessitate multisectoral policy responses^[7].



Recognising these challenges in Cambodia and elsewhere, the Initiative for Climate Action and Nutrition (I-CAN) was launched in 2022 by the Government of Egypt during COP27, in partnership with the World Health Organisation (WHO), Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), and the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement. I-CAN is a global initiative that aims to accelerate transformative action at the intersection of climate and nutrition. By 2030, I-CAN envisions a world in which climate and nutrition agendas are fully integrated in policy, financing, research, and implementation. The initiative focuses on five strategic pillars, the first of which is to support national-level integration by strengthening policy coherence in countries facing both climate vulnerability and high burdens of malnutrition. Specifically, I-CAN targets four key outcomes by 2030:

Policy coherence: Greater integration of climate and nutrition across national policies, including NDCs, National Adaptation Plans, National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans, national nutrition plans, food-based dietary guidelines, and public food procurement standards.

Scaled-up action: Accelerated implementation of climate and nutrition interventions.

Increased financing: Mobilisation of new and existing resources for integrated climate and nutrition agendas.

Cross-sectoral integration: Enhanced alignment of research, advocacy, and policy to advance both nutrition and environmental goals.

^[1] World Bank 2021a; Tong et al. 2021

^[2] World Bank 2021b; Ministry of Health, Cambodia 2019

^[3] Agabiirwe et al. 2022

^[4] Davies et al. 2015

^[5] Ngin et al. 2024

^[6] McIver et al. 2016

^[7] Karpati et al. 2020

METHODS

This light touch policy analysis was commissioned to support I-CAN by evaluating how nutrition and climate are integrated within Cambodia's climate and nutrition policies with the aim of ultimately identifying the most promising opportunities for integration. To achieve this, an assessment was undertaken in May and June 2025 to determine the climate and nutrition policy and stakeholder landscape in Cambodia. A light-touch policy landscaping analysis drew from the content of 32 policies (active, formerly active, and at the draft stage), all analysed using the same methods. The policies reviewed cover the thematic categories of nutrition and health, climate and environment, food systems and agriculture, and general development. This policy landscaping was complemented by key informant interviews (KIIs) held with 19 Cambodian nutrition and climate stakeholders, including government actors, development partners, and academics. The level of nutrition and climate integration of each policy was then evaluated using the 2023 I-CAN Baseline Assessment criteria:

Level 1: No intentional connectedness between climate and nutrition

Level 2: Some intention to connect climate and nutrition

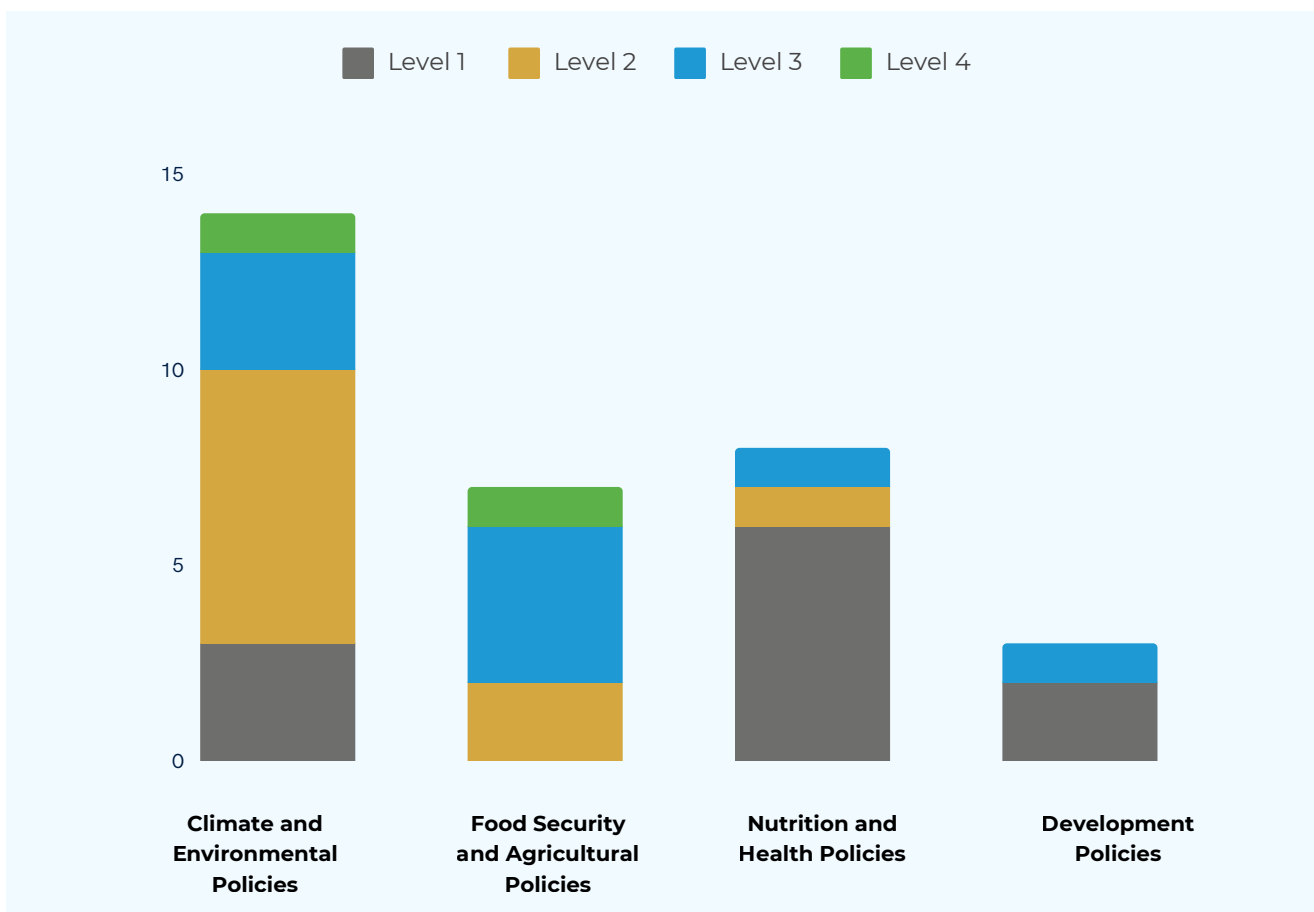
Level 3: Intention to mobilise resources to connect climate and nutrition

Level 4: Commitment to mobilising resources and with distinct plans to take action to connect climate and nutrition

KEY RESULTS

Out of the 32 policies reviewed, 12 (38%) were categorised as Level 1, and another 9 policies (28%) were placed at Level 2. Similarly, 9 policies (28%) reached Level 3, and only 2 policies (6%) achieved Level 4. Below is an illustration of the number of policies within the four relevant themes and their integration level classification.

Classification Distribution by Policy Theme



Key result 1. Limited Policy Integration of Climate and Nutrition

While Cambodia has made strides with national strategies like the Food Systems Roadmap and its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), the integration of climate and nutrition within these frameworks remains vague and underdeveloped. Existing documents reference food systems broadly but lack explicit, actionable strategies connecting climate adaptation, mitigation, and nutrition improvement. Without a strong, integrated national policy framework, efforts will remain fragmented and miss the opportunity to systematically tackle food security, climate vulnerability, and malnutrition in an aligned and unified manner.

Key result 2. Institutional Fragmentation and Weak Coordination

Fragmented institutional arrangements hamper climate-nutrition integration. Multiple ministries, including the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Ministry of Environment, and others, operate in silos. Nutrition, a cross-cutting issue, falls between health, agriculture, and social protection, but lacks a designated lead agency. This has led to uncoordinated and incoherent policy and implementation efforts. Respondents highlighted poor cross-sectoral collaboration, with limited communication channels and no central political champion to drive integration. This structural fragmentation reduces the effectiveness and coherence of national strategies aimed at linking climate resilience with improved nutrition outcomes. The Cambodian Council for Agricultural and Rural Development (CARD) coordinates and oversees policies related to agriculture, rural development, and food security and is a key body that can help fill this gap, but it has not yet adequately integrated climate change considerations into its cross-ministerial coordination efforts.

Key result 3. Inadequate Financing

Limited and inconsistent financing is a critical barrier to integrated climate-nutrition action. Budgets at both national and sub-national levels prioritise infrastructure and short-term

development goals, such as the new \$2 billion Techo airport^[8], leaving climate adaptation and nutrition underfunded. Sectors like fisheries—which are both nutritionally important and climate-sensitive—receive minimal budgetary support. Many integration efforts rely heavily on donor funding, raising concerns about long-term sustainability, especially as some international donors begin to scale back support. Without dedicated domestic investment, national ownership of integrated programming remains weak, and progress risks being piecemeal or donor-driven rather than embedded in government systems.

Key result 4. Gaps in Data and Monitoring Systems

Reliable, disaggregated data on the intersection of climate change and nutrition is sparse in Cambodia. There is a lack of real-time climate and agricultural advisory services for farmers and fishers, which limits their ability to make informed, adaptive decisions. Communities are often unaware of available disaster preparedness resources, such as those led by the National Committee for Disaster Management (NCDM). This information gap undermines both preparedness and response, especially in the context of climate-induced shocks that affect food security and nutrition. Furthermore, research on nutrition–climate linkages (particularly in critical sectors like fisheries) remains limited, constraining the development of evidence-based policies.

Key result 5. Opportunities in Community-Based and Cross-Sectoral Models

Village Model Farms, Community Fisheries (CFIs), and Community Fish Refuges (CFRs) exemplify integrated, bottom-up approaches that bridge climate and nutrition goals. These community-based platforms can improve access to diverse foods, offer climate-adaptive livelihoods, and enhance local governance. Strengthening the role of sub-national actors through the National Committee for Sub-National Democratic Development (NCDD) and providing them with technical resources, data, and funding is essential to replicate and scale these models. Localisation can help ensure that integration efforts are context-specific, sustainable, and equity-driven.

^[8] Cheang 2025

Key result 6. Momentum Growing in Select High-Level Policies

The most integrated (Level 4) policies in Cambodia demonstrate progress toward integrated action on climate and nutrition, marked by strong collaborative partnerships, clear cross-sector alignment, and ambitious, measurable targets. Coordination efforts (particularly those led by CARD) engage a broad coalition of government, development partners, NGOs, and research institutions, enhancing coherence and implementation capacity. These policies also emphasise nutrition-sensitive approaches, such as promoting nutrient-rich, locally available foods like fish, and explicitly link health outcomes to climate resilience. Ambitious goals for reducing stunting and wasting are supported by robust monitoring frameworks and alignment with core national strategies. Importantly, Level 4 policies mainstream gender, equity, and inclusion, prioritise climate risk mitigation alongside public health, and leverage strategic communication to drive behaviour change and community engagement. Together, these features signal a meaningful shift toward holistic, multisectoral responses that are well-positioned to advance Cambodia's climate–nutrition agenda.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Institutional Coordination.** Alignment across sectors and policies was a key strength of Level 4 policies. However, persistent challenges remain, including weak local capacity, limited community awareness, poor policy integration, fragmented institutional coordination, and a lack of strategic vision. To strengthen institutional coordination, extend CARD's mandate to explicitly include nutrition and climate change, develop a clear policy and institutional framework for climate–nutrition integration, and establish District Technical Working Groups on Food, Nutrition, and Climate Change.
- **Financing.** Financing remains a critical challenge, as only a few national policies include dedicated budgets, reflecting broader issues of inadequate funding and resource allocation. This lack of financial support contributes to the weak integration of climate change and nutrition across policies. The Royal Government of Cambodia should allocate a portion of the national budget to support climate–nutrition integration, facilitate private-sector access to finance, and provide targeted funding for scaling up climate-smart, nutrition-sensitive agriculture and sustainable water systems.



- **Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning.** Despite increasing implementation efforts, many programs lack robust evidence of effective climate–nutrition integration due to weak monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) systems. To strengthen MEL, we recommend documenting best practices in climate and nutrition integration, regularly measuring progress toward targets every 3–5 years, and establishing a centralised database on nutrition and climate change under the National Institute of Statistics.
- **Stakeholder Engagement.** Stakeholder engagement remains limited, highlighting the need to strengthen coordination mechanisms and cross-sector dialogue. To advance this, empower sub-national actors through the NCDD by providing them with technical resources, data, and funding. Additionally, engaging high-level national leaders (such as the Prime Minister, the First Lady, or the King) can help elevate the visibility and political commitment to climate–nutrition integration.

CONCLUSION

Integrating climate and nutrition policies in Cambodia offers a tangible opportunity to improve population health in the medium term through both enhanced food security and diet quality and reduced vulnerability to climate shocks. Even modest investments in nutrition-sensitive, climate-resilient interventions, such as fisheries, climate-smart agriculture, and community-based programs, can reduce malnutrition, enhance dietary diversity, and strengthen resilience to climate shocks. By aligning policies and financing across sectors, the government can achieve more sustainable health outcomes for its citizens, making the most of limited resources while addressing both immediate and long-term development challenges.

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