

Positioning Breastfeeding as a 21st Century Agenda in Southeast Asia



A strong policy environment has the power to protect, support, and promote infant and young child nutrition, and ensure that children and the countries they live in develop to their full potential.

In Southeast Asia, despite unprecedented economic growth in the last decade, malnutrition persists at unacceptable levels. Malnutrition generally occurs in the first 1,000 days of a child's life, and the negative effects on physical development and brain function are largely irreversible. These children will never be able to learn or earn as much as well-nourished children later in life, also resulting in stagnated productivity and development of their countries.

Throughout the region, almost 18 million children are stunted as a result of malnutrition according to the 2013 UNICEF Global Database. Less than 50 percent of women initiate breastfeeding within the first hour of birth, and only 30 percent exclusively breastfeed their children in the first six months. Advocacy efforts can raise the priority given to infant and young child feeding and nutrition at regional, national, and subnational levels, and improve the policy and regulatory environment to support implementation of high impact interventions that tackle malnutrition.

With countries joining the global Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement and the presence of strong regional platforms such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the moment is opportune to build regional and national momentum for infant and young child feeding (IYCF) policies. Investing in infant and young child nutrition can also help countries in the region fulfill their obligations in the Convention of the Rights of the Child and meet global nutrition targets set by the World Health Assembly – to reduce stunting in children under five years by 40 percent and increase exclusive breastfeeding rates in the first six months to at least 50 percent by 2025.

IN VIET NAM, THE CONCERTED ADVOCACY EFFORTS OF ALIVE & THRIVE, UNICEF, AND OTHER LOCAL PARTNERS HAVE LED TO IMPORTANT POLICY GAINS:

- Extension of paid maternity leave from four to six months in the Labor Code
- Extension of the ban on marketing of breastmilk substitutes for infants from six to 24 months in the Advertisement Law
- Ban on the advertisement of nutrition products for children under six months as well as feeding bottles and pacifiers
- Inclusion of the ten steps for successful breastfeeding principles in the National Quality Standards and Accreditation System for all public and private hospitals
- Inclusion of globally recommended indicators for infant and young child feeding in the National Surveillance System for policy planning, monitoring, and evaluation

COUNTRIES ENGAGED

- Cambodia
- Indonesia
- Laos
- Myanmar
- Thailand
- Timor Leste
- Viet Nam

STAY CONNECTED WITH ALIVE & THRIVE

E-MAIL:
aliveandthrive@fhi360.org

TWITTER:
[@aliveandthrive](https://twitter.com/aliveandthrive)

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THE POLICY SUCCESSES IN VIET NAM HAVE SPARKED INTEREST THROUGHOUT THE REGION ON THE PROCESS FOR POLICY CHANGE. With funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Irish Aid, Alive & Thrive hosted two regional advocacy meetings to share the lessons learned in 2013 and 2014. Alive & Thrive is also working in partnership with UNICEF and Save the Children over three years (2013–2016) to strengthen infant and young child feeding policies and health systems in seven countries – *Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Timor Leste, and Viet Nam.*

ALIVE & THRIVE IS SUPPORTING DEVELOPMENT OF TAILORED ROADMAPS WITH STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES TO MEET COUNTRY-SPECIFIC POLICY GOALS AND CREATE A STRONGER ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR INFANT AND YOUNG CHILD FEEDING. Using its hallmark multi-component and multi-stakeholder approach, Alive & Thrive will help establish strategic partnerships with government representatives, businesses, and civil society actors; generate a strong evidence base to inform policy activities; develop messages and materials to reach key policy audiences; and build consensus through advocacy events, consultations, and cultivating champions.



ADVOCACY PROCESS OVERVIEW

THE OBJECTIVES ARE TO USE AN EVIDENCE-BASED AND ITERATIVE POLICY PROCESS TO:

- Leverage regional platforms and networks such as ASEAN, the SUN Movement, and the Nutrition Security Coordination Committee to build an enabling regional and national environment for breastfeeding and infant and young child nutrition
- Facilitate the revision, monitoring, and enforcement of national codes regulating the marketing of breastmilk substitutes in all seven countries
- Strengthen national maternity protection policies in Indonesia, Thailand, and Timor Leste
- Support country teams and the SUN Business Coalition to implement workplace programs to support working mothers to breastfeed exclusively for six months and continue to breastfeed for up to 24 months in at least three countries – Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Timor Leste
- Support five country teams – Lao DPR, Myanmar, Thailand, Timor Leste, and Viet Nam – to make policies and practices in health facilities more infant and young child feeding friendly



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