

# Alive & Thrive Southeast Asia

2017–2022



Alive & Thrive (A&T) is a global nutrition initiative to save lives, prevent illness, and ensure healthy growth of mothers and children. From 2009–2014, A&T demonstrated that rapid improvements in infant and young child feeding (IYCF) are possible in settings as diverse as Viet Nam, Ethiopia, and Bangladesh. A&T's initial investment in Viet Nam established large-scale advocacy and social and behavior change (SBC) programs that yielded dramatic improvements in exclusive breastfeeding and landmark policy changes.

In 2014, A&T began working in Burkina Faso, India, Nigeria, and in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), expanding its scope to include maternal and adolescent nutrition, and using agriculture and social protection programs as delivery mechanisms for maternal, infant, and young child nutrition (MIYCN). Building on the proven approach demonstrated in Viet Nam, A&T established a strong network of committed champions and partners to replicate improvements in MIYCN policies and programs throughout Southeast Asia.

Now, A&T is continuing to provide strategic guidance and technical assistance at both the regional and national levels, while forging new partnerships throughout the region. This brief highlights the policy advocacy, systems strengthening, and knowledge generation activities that are pivotal in A&T's efforts to improve the nutritional status of mothers and children.

## Context for action

Despite more than a decade of strong economic growth, Southeast Asia's most vulnerable populations have seen little benefit. About 18 million children under five (30 percent) are stunted. The economic cost of not breastfeeding in the region is estimated at \$20 billion annually due to avoidable morbidity, healthcare costs, and preventable cognitive losses that impact early education and adult productivity.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, ASEAN's positive economic outlook makes the region an emerging market for products, services,

and aggressive marketing practices that undermine both breastfeeding and healthy diets.

Now is the time to ensure that growth is more inclusive and that it benefits from the accelerating power of nutrition. A&T's investment in MIYCN is helping countries throughout the region fulfill their obligations in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and meet global targets set by the World

Alive & Thrive is a knowledge partner supporting maternal, infant, and young child nutrition at scale.

### REGIONAL PROGRESS

#### 1. Improvements in exclusive breastfeeding

**19% TO 58%** in Viet Nam  
(2009–2014)

**26% TO 49%** in Myanmar  
(2009–2016)

#### 2. Alignment with the Code

- Stronger national regulations and oversight boards established in Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam

#### 3. Expansion of maternity benefits

- Expanded paid maternity leave in Laos, Myanmar, Philippines, Viet Nam, and Aceh province in Indonesia
- Extended maternity leave cash benefits in Cambodia and Thailand
- Rolled out new workplace lactation models in Laos
- Scaled up existing workplace lactation support models in Thailand and Viet Nam

#### 4. Deeper insights into MIYCN practices

- Formative research for the implementation of national social and behavior change plans in Laos and the Philippines
- Formative research to inform stunting reduction investments in Indonesia

<sup>1</sup> Walters, D. Phan, LTH. Mathisen, R. (in press). *The Cost of Not Breastfeeding: Global results from a new tool.* Health Policy and Planning.



■ ASEAN regional program

Health Assembly (WHA)—to reduce stunting in children under 5 years by 40 percent and increase exclusive breastfeeding rates to at least 50 percent by 2025.

### Strategic interventions

A&T is supporting coordinated action to create an enabling environment for MIYCN through stronger legislation, increased resource allocation, and improved accountability to nutrition outcomes. To achieve collective impact, A&T is working closely with partners at both regional and country levels, providing technical assistance within the following strategies:

**Policy advocacy.** A&T is promoting policies supportive of breastfeeding and stunting reduction. These include stronger national regulations aligned with the Code, improved maternity protection, and national reporting frameworks for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). In order to achieve this advocacy agenda, A&T is working closely with partners to expand reach, integrate key priorities within shared platforms, and build capacity and tools for strategic nutrition policy advocacy. By pairing regional advocacy coalition meetings with technical assistance, A&T is supporting countries to plan and execute high-quality advocacy strategies.

**Systems strengthening.** A&T is improving MIYCN interventions by catalyzing change across systems and building capacity in MIYCN program implementation. From A&T’s in-country consultations and assessments, partners are equipped to develop and execute localized and strategic multi-stakeholder SBC plans, and establish national centers of excellence for breastfeeding.

### ALIVE & THRIVE PARTNERS

- ASEAN economic community and member states
- Parliamentary committees and senators’ offices
- Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement
- Multilaterals – UNICEF, WHO, and World Bank Group
- Philanthropies and business coalitions International and local civil society networks
- Professional pediatric nurses and midwives associations
- Media – public relations agencies and journalism institutes
- Academic institutions – economics, medical, and public health universities

**Knowledge and learning.** A&T is working closely with partners to promote strategic use of data and opportunities for knowledge exchange. By conducting formative assessments and working with country partners to deploy evidence effectively in advocacy and SBC efforts, A&T is improving breastfeeding policies, programs, and practices across the region. A&T’s evidence generation agenda addresses knowledge gaps in terms of normative, scientific, economic, and empiric evidence/arguments both to inform and assess policy change. Activities include several policy impact studies on the effects of stronger maternity protection and Code regulations. Through a close partnership with UNICEF, A&T is continuing to facilitate cross-country learning and momentum for creating an enabling environment for breastfeeding and childcare.

These strategic interventions aim to accelerate progress toward MIYCN and breastfeeding-related WHA and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) targets throughout the ASEAN region. Through coordinated action and collective impact, A&T is continuing to build capacity to strengthen policies, programs, and practices throughout the region for years to come.

Front page photo | Vietienne, Laos. A family portrait. Malyvanh, mother, 36 years old, Seny, father, 41 years old, Naliny (nickname Tubtim), 5 years old, and Maliny (nickname Many) 8 months old.