



Tho Nguyen / Alive & Thrive

## Alive & Thrive Viet Nam Program Brief

Alive & Thrive (A&T) is a global nutrition initiative to save lives, prevent illness, and ensure healthy growth of mothers and children. In its first phase (2009 –2014), A&T demonstrated that rapid improvements in infant and young child feeding (IYCF) are possible in settings as diverse as Ethiopia, Bangladesh, and Viet Nam. Building on the proven approach demonstrated in Viet Nam, A&T has established a strong network of committed champions and partners to replicate improvements in maternal, infant and young child nutrition (MIYCN) policies and programs throughout Southeast Asia. A&T, managed by FHI

Solutions, is funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Government of Ireland and other donors.

A&T's initial investment in Viet Nam established large-scale advocacy and social and behavior change programs that yielded landmark policy changes and dramatic improvements in exclusive breastfeeding. Unfortunately, due to an increasing percentage of caesarean births and improper maternal and newborn care services in health facilities resulting in unnecessary separation, the initiation of breastfeeding has stagnated.

### **MILESTONE ACHIEVEMENTS**

A&T's close collaboration with partners in Viet Nam have fostered political support for the funding of breastfeeding programs and strengthened the capacity of health systems to deliver high-quality early essential newborn care

services to mothers and infants within an enabling policy environment. The concerted advocacy efforts and technical support from A&T and partners have led to important policy and program gains:

- The Ministry of Health (MOH) in Viet Nam officially endorsed the Centers of Excellence for Breastfeeding (COE) assessment criteria and designation mechanism through [Decision 3451/QD-BYT](#) in August 2019. As of December 2021, among 70 hospitals enrolled, 30 hospitals met the requirements and were designated as a COE.
- Three human milk banks (HMB) and related services were established in Viet Nam to provide life-saving access to breastmilk for infants in need. Four years after the first human milk bank, in the absence of global guidelines, MOH officially endorsed the national technical guideline for human milk bank through [Decision 2394/QD-BYT](#) in May 2020.
- The National Assembly approved an allocation of at least US\$6 billion to the first phase (2021-2025) of the new National Targeted Program for Ethnic Minority Development for 2021-2030 period, which includes a substantial nutrition component.
- Viet Nam adopted [Decree 145](#) in December 2020 which supports mothers to continue breastfeeding. Endorsed by the Prime Minister, the decree mandates 60-minute paid breastfeeding breaks and lactation rooms in companies with over 1,000 female employees. MOH also endorsed Decision 5175/QD-BYT in November 2021 providing technical guideline on establishing workplace lactation rooms.

The Centers of Excellence for Breastfeeding initiative, supported by the Government of Ireland through the Alive & Thrive initiative, improves the quality of maternal and infant care and promotes implementation of the [Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding](#) in health facilities across Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Viet Nam. The innovative model includes an assessment, monitoring, and communication toolkit to facilitate early and exclusive breastfeeding. COE designation helps families decide where to give birth.

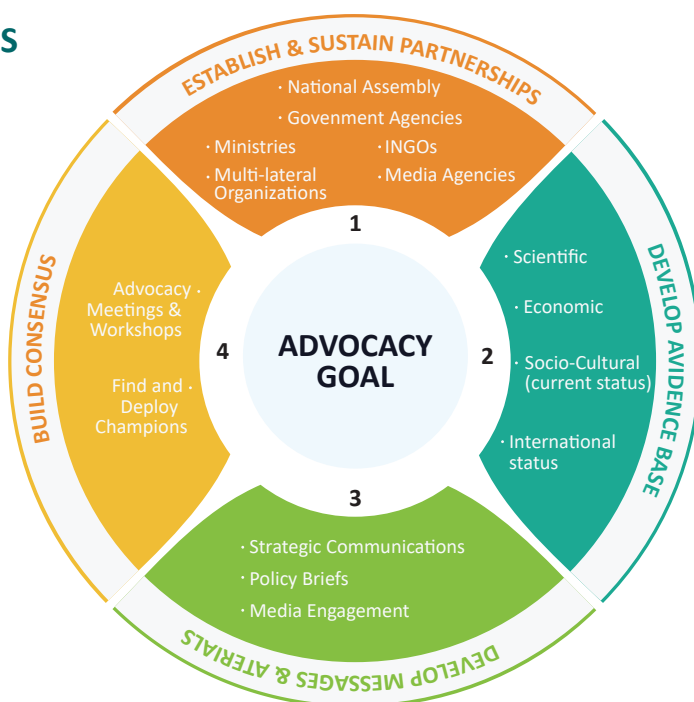


A post-partum mother interviewed about early essential newborn care practices at Dong Giang hospital - A Center of Excellence for Breastfeeding in ethnic minority area of Viet Nam.

## A SYSTEMATIC APPROACH ENSURES SUCCESS

Using its hallmark multi-component and multi-stakeholder approach, A&T and partners have worked to (1) establish strategic partnerships with government representatives, businesses, and civil society actors; (2) generate a strong evidence base to inform policy and program activities; (3) develop messages and materials to reach key policy audiences; and (4) build consensus through advocacy events, consultations and cultivating champions.

The use of this comprehensive, methodical, and iterative four-pronged strategy by A&T and a coalition of partners at the national and sub-national levels has proven to be highly effective.



## Establishing and sustaining strategic partnerships

Sustaining partnerships with traditional partners – including MOH, provincial Department of Health, Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs, General Confederation of Labor, WHO, UNICEF, the World Bank – remains a priority for A&T, allowing the initiative to drive policy change and program improvement. A&T also developed a strategic partnership with the National Assembly’s Council for Ethnic Minority Affairs to advocate for the National Targeted Program for Ethnic Minority Development.

Beyond that, recognizing that a strong, inclusive civil society contributes to good governance, A&T has been engaged in the strengthening of the

Scaling Up Nutrition Civil Society Alliance networks (SUN CSA) in the region. In October 2019, A&T played an active role in the formation of the CSA in Viet Nam and implementation of a coordinated workplan. A&T was elected Chair of the SUN CSA Viet Nam for a two-year term 2021-2023.

A&T has also strengthened partnerships with multi-sectoral, non-health partners and advanced the dialogue on maternity protection policy, specifically on workplace breastfeeding support. The initiative engaged UN Women, ILO, CARE, GIZ, as well as relevant government agencies to discuss workplace breastfeeding support regulations that empower a working women’s right to breastfeed.

## Developing and enhancing the evidence base

A&T’s technical support helps generate the data necessary to identify and address issues that affect Workplace lactation programs increase breastfeeding rates and improve the health, nutrition, and wellbeing of mothers, children, and society. A cost-benefit analysis of workplace lactation programs, based on a survey of female workers and business representatives, was instrumental in Viet Nam’s decision to adopt Decree 145.

The COE initiative also leverages data collected from phone surveys of mothers to improve performance within participating hospitals. Mothers are asked about their experience with childbirth services, including exposure to breastmilk substitute marketing.

Armed with this data, COE hospital leaders can act to improve compliance within the health facility. In 2020, A&T updated the COE mothers’ experience

survey system to accommodate all 1,620 hospitals across 63 provinces and handed over management of the survey to MOH for nationwide scale-up. COE model was published in the Global Breastfeeding Collective’s [compendium](#) of skilled breastfeeding counselling case studies for global replication.

With A&T support, monitoring systems at HMBs now provide data that support improvement of the quality and safety of donor human milk per approved standards of procedures.

Since 2017, A&T has shared its data-driven learning through the publication of 20 peer-reviewed articles that use data and evidence from Viet Nam in leading international journals. These knowledge products support both policy advocacy and improved program implementation, accounting for the different information needs of opinion leaders and key stakeholders.

## Creating compelling messages and materials

A&T has shared human interest stories and a variety of materials to support program efforts. A [policy whitepaper](#) and media products supported advocacy for Decree 145 mentioned above (see Milestones). Learning from the COE initiative has

been shared in briefs, videos, posters and stories. [Briefs](#) on HMB have highlighted lessons learned in Viet Nam and to advocate to ASEAN member states in support of making HMB services available to vulnerable infants.

On World Food Day 2020, A&T launched the “Circle of Love” campaign, which highlighted the message that community support enables breastfeeding.

It centered on the idea that together everyone has a role to play in supporting breastfeeding and protecting children’s access to safe, nutritious food. The campaign featured a Tiktok dance challenge which generated more than 630,000 engagements with mothers, families, employers, colleagues, health staff, and communities.

### Building consensus and cultivating champions

A&T maintained constant engagement with partners and stakeholders in Viet Nam through consultation, workshops, and meetings that allow decision-makers at national, sub-national and facility levels to review evidence and decide future actions. Media engagement is also a focus of A&T to generate visibility for breastfeeding issues, which can be further amplified with social media. In collaboration with the breastfeeding mothers’ group Betibuti and social media influencers, A&T ran a social media campaign to promote breastfeeding support at work. More than 10,000



*Social media influencer Quang Dang, along with other celebrities, highlighted the message that breastfeeding is not a one-women job, but the responsibility of the whole society on World Food Day 2020.*

mothers and families expressed their agreement on the need for lactation rooms in the workplace.

A&T also supports Da Nang Hospital for Women and Children to champion early essential newborn care practices, breastfeeding, and human milk banking. A&T provided support to the hospital to establish and build the capacity of a Learning and Research Center, which has conducted EENC coaching and facility assessments and facilitated learning visits for hospitals in Viet Nam and other parts of the world.

## PAVING THE WAY FORWARD

Between 2022 and 2025, A&T will continue to coordinate SUN CSA to provide technical assistance and monitor the implementation of the nutrition project under the National Targeted Program for Ethnic Minorities Development in 39 provinces of SUN CSA members' project sites.

Using the foundations of success laid over the last four years, A&T continues to use and develop a strategic multi-pronged approach that ensures all babies have the best start in life. In 2022, A&T will employ this strategy to support launch the fourth and fifth HMBs of Viet Nam at the National Children Hospital and Hung Vuong Hospital.

A&T estimates that up to one in four babies will be born in a COE, if all 70 enrolled hospitals achieve COE

accreditation. By incorporating COE in the monitoring framework of the National Program on the 1000 first days, A&T has been mobilizing resources from the provincial budgets and SUN CSA Viet Nam to ensure 50 percent of health facilities in the country are designated COE by 2025 and to ensure the equitable delivery of health services.

