

# SUN CSA VIET NAM: WORKING FOR EQUITABLE, RESILIENT AND SUSTAINABLE FOOD AND HEALTH SYSTEMS

In Viet Nam, like in other countries around the world, maternal, infant, and young child nutrition (MIYCN) affect families, communities, and the economy. Impacts include higher health system costs to preventable illnesses, lost productivity due to developmental issues; and higher household expenditure for families who choose breastmilk substitutes over breastfeeding. Recognizing that accelerated global actions are needed to address these problems, the World Health Assembly Resolution (WHA) in 2012 set ambitious nutrition targets to be reached by countries by 2025. To this end, Viet Nam has been doing well, and especially when compared to its Southeast Asian neighbors. For example, stunting prevalence among children under five years old is at 19.6%, an all-time low and lower than the average in Asia (21.8%). Viet Nam is also 'on course' to reach the exclusive breastfeeding target, with 45.4% of infants exclusively breastfed in the first six months of life<sup>1</sup>.

Central to these achievements has been Viet Nam's commitment to the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement and the formation of the Scaling Up Nutrition Civil Society Alliance (SUN CSA) Viet Nam chapter.

The Government of Viet Nam joined the SUN Movement in 2014, demonstrating high-level ownership and commitment to deliver effective and sustainable solutions to the country's persistently high rates of malnutrition. SUN CSA Viet Nam is a subset of the SUN Movement and was launched in Hanoi in 2019. This coalition aims to mobilize civil society organizations, local and international; work with Government and other stakeholders to amplify nutrition as a development priority; and sustain commitments and actions. The alliance also presents an opportunity to bring civil society organizations (CSO) together and support them to participate in key nutrition policy processes

and engage with policy makers at national and subnational levels.

Throughout 2020-2021, SUN CSA Viet Nam continued to make significant impact towards addressing MIYCN and working to better the lives of women, children and their families across the country.

## Committed financial investment to support nutrition and child development for ethnic minority communities

In June 2020, Viet Nam's National Assembly voted unanimously to approve an allocation of at least USD \$6 billion towards a new National Targeted Program for Ethnic Minority Development (2021-2025), which includes a substantial nutrition component. SUN CSA was instrumental in this achievement, and successfully convened an advocacy alliance with the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF, and the World Bank to make recommendations.



*The National Assembly approved the National Targeted Program with over 93% vote. Prior to the voting session, the SUN CSA representative attended the meeting with Members of Parliament and emphasized the need for financial investment for nutrition interventions.*

The program adopted six of the alliance's eight recommendations and endorsed high-level targets, setting the goal to ensure that at least 90%

<sup>1</sup>Global Nutrition Report 2020, Viet Nam General Nutrition Survey 2019-2020

of pregnant women receive antenatal care and give birth with skilled attendants, as well as setting the stunting target to under 27% by 2025 and under 25% by 2030.

#### SUN CSA recommendations to the National Targeted Program for Ethnic Minorities Development

1. Enhancing synergies with other investments;
2. Strengthening village health worker networks;
3. Expanding the Centers of Excellence for Breastfeeding model to health facilities in target areas;
4. Leveraging community groups for social behavior communications on MIYCN;
5. Reviewing and refocusing the component of the program targeting the elderly;
6. Removing the school milk program (as it is not an evidence-based intervention);
7. Implementing nutrition sensitive agriculture interventions to address undernutrition; and
8. Increasing access to donor human milk in ethnic minority provinces.

*\*The first six were included in the the approved Program.*

Undernutrition is particularly widespread among ethnic minority children in Viet Nam, with stunting rates among the highest in the world. One in three children of ethnic minorities in Vietnam suffer from stunting, while one in five are underweight . We presented data to National Assembly and through media channels to reach drafting committee board. World Bank, UNICEF also echoed our advocacy messages in their policy paper.



*Nutrition is an important focus of the USD 6 billion State fund for ethnic minority development (2021-2025)*

Prior to this, SUN CSA Viet Nam provided important technical assistance to the National Assembly's Committee on Ethnic Minorities Affairs in 2019. Looking forward, SUN CSA Viet Nam will continue to assist the Committee in monitoring its program framework.

#### Mandatory regulations on workplace lactation support

Viet Nam adopted Government Decree 145 in December 2020 to support working mothers to continue breastfeeding. Endorsed by the Prime Minister, the decree mandated lactation rooms in companies with over 1,000 female employees. Nearly 40%<sup>2</sup> of female workers in Viet Nam's formal sector are covered by this decree.

SUN CSA Viet Nam supported the passage of Decree 145 in a number of ways, in particular collaborating and leveraging stakeholders' comparative advantages to create a unified voice. The alliance worked with the General Confederation of Labor, surveying female workers and business representatives to provide a cost-benefit analysis of workplace lactation to the policy-drafting committee in a policy whitepaper. It also used social media to encourage more than 10,000 women to sign a petition in favor of workplace lactation.



*The Ministry of Labor, Invalid and Social Affairs and Viet Nam General Confederation of Labor, in collaboration with development partners, held consultation workshops on mandatory workplace lactation support regulations.*

In 2020, the alliance also assisted 11 factories in increasing workers' knowledge of maternity care and breastfeeding, improving counselling skills on the topics for trade union officers, as well as establishing and operating 21 lactation rooms at 11 factories in Hai Phong province which is the industry hub of Viet Nam, thanks to financial support from the SUN Movement Pooled Fund.

#### BMS Code violation monitoring and reporting

Evidence from the region has shown that breastmilk substitutes (BMS) companies are using the COVID-19 crisis as an opportunity to promote their products through donations, online advertising, and inaccurate health claims. In Viet Nam, SUN CSA

<sup>2</sup>Based on General Statistic Office of Viet Nam (2019), there are 837 companies with more than 1,000 female workers, accounting for 10% of total companies in Viet Nam. Around 2.6 million female workers are employed, accounting for 38% of total female labor force in formal sector.



Vietnam adopted the Law on Advertisement in 2012 and Decree 100 in 2014 to protect, promote, and support breastfeeding by regulating the marketing and promotion of feeding products for young children, bottles, teats, and pacifiers.

has worked with the national Nutrition Working Group to report such violations to relevant ministries and state agencies, including the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Information and Communications, and the Central Committee of Propaganda. Several violations on social media have been removed.

Vietnam is among 42 countries with national legislation classified as moderately aligned with the Code (with a score of 73 out of 100 points). Vietnam's legislation on the Code is the third highest in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region, behind the Philippines, which is substantially aligned with the Code (score of 85) and Myanmar, which is moderately aligned with the Code (score of 74).



Technical consultation workshop for the National Nutrition Strategy 2021 to 2030

### Technical assistance for the development of a National Nutrition Strategy

SUN CSA in collaboration with UN agencies has been providing support to the National Institute of Nutrition for the development of the National

Nutrition Strategy 2021-2030 to ensure it focuses more on equitable, resilient, and sustainable food and health systems that supports the Sustainable Development Goals. In March 2021, SUN CSA and the National Institute of Nutrition co-hosted a hybrid (virtual and in-person) technical consultation workshop, with over 600 participants from Provincial Department of Health and Center of Disease Control, of 63 provinces across the country attending. The workshop facilitated discussions on the challenges and solutions for nutrition improvements and potential strategy development. The alliance continues its technical support for the Government partners to finalize and approve the strategy in 2021 and its dissemination to the subnational levels.

### Way forward

Building on these achievements throughout the past year, SUN CSA Viet Nam will leverage the comparative advantages of its members to continue its efforts to improve maternal, infant and young child nutrition across the country, and strive towards the Global Nutrition Targets set for 2025 and Sustainable Development Goals for 2030. In June 2021, SUN CSA Viet Nam submitted their commitments to the Nutrition for Growth Summit (N4G) to demonstrate the network's pledge to improve the nutritional status of women, men, girls and boys across the country. Based on resources and capacity, the network members will focus on the development of functional monitoring systems to track progress in ending all forms of malnutrition among vulnerable population groups (ethnic minority communities, children, adolescents). The alliance also committed to support the Government of Viet Nam to strengthen the capacity of monitoring and enforcement of the national Code, preventing harmful marketing of unhealthy foods and drinks for children, such as breastmilk substitutes and ultraprocessed foods and sugar sweetened beverages. Besides, the 2021-2023 workplan of the alliance also includes support to the implementation of the National Nutrition Strategy in at least four provinces that SUN CSA members are present.

2021 – 2023 are also the windows of opportunity for the alliance to consolidate its young organization and to grow, through engaging more local civil society organizations, supporting and building the capacity of all alliance members so they are empowered to initiate activities and drive changes.

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#### For more information:

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