



JOINT PRESS RELEASE

World Breastfeeding Week 2021: A Shared Responsibility *Let's invest in breastfeeding for a healthier, more sustainable Cambodia*

August 1st, 2021: The Scaling Up Nutrition Civil Society Alliance in Cambodia's members (Helen Keller, Alive & Thrive, and World Vision International (WVI)-Cambodia), in partnership with the National Nutrition Program, GIZ, MUSUFO, USAID, RTI and UNICEF, would like to announce the annual celebration of World Breastfeeding Week in Cambodia for 2021, under the theme '[Protecting breastfeeding: A shared responsibility](#)'. World Breastfeeding Week is celebrated in more than 120 countries around the globe to raise awareness about the importance of breastfeeding for the survival, health, and well-being of mothers and children, and for the benefit of society at large. Although individual breastfeeding behavior is important, this year's [World Breastfeeding Week](#) calls upon families, communities, governments, and the whole of society to invest in and support breastfeeding for a healthier and more sustainable world.

Though World Breastfeeding Week takes place from August 1st to 7th, efforts to protect, promote, and support breastfeeding in Cambodia continue year-round. In line with restrictions aimed at preventing the spread of COVID-19, this year's celebration will take place mainly online, including dissemination of videos, live talk shows, and quizzes across social media. In addition to pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers, these celebrations will target fathers, grandparents, caregivers, health workers, community leaders and other relevant members of the community who can share experiences and celebrate the power and joy of breastfeeding.

From 2000 to 2010, Cambodia's exclusive breastfeeding rate – the proportion of babies fed only with breastmilk from birth to six months of age in line with WHO recommendations – increased dramatically, from 11% to 74%. Since 2001, the Ministry of Health's National Nutrition Program, in collaboration with key nutrition partners at that time (WHO, UNICEF, Helen Keller), has led celebrations of the annual and global World Breastfeeding Week. Following the remarkable progress, World Breastfeeding Week celebrations in Cambodia ceased in 2010, based on the assumption that the public was already aware of the importance of breastfeeding. However, [new data](#) from 2014 revealed that the exclusive breastfeeding rate had fallen and that the use of formula milk was on the rise, endangering child health and survival and costing families and the economy. As a result, World Breastfeeding Week was revitalized in Cambodia by the National Nutrition Program, Helen Keller, FHI360, UNICEF, WVI-Cambodia, Save the Children, and other partners starting in 2015. The COVID-19 pandemic has further emphasized the need to continue supporting and investing in breastfeeding. Separation of mothers and babies, disruptions to health services including breastfeeding counseling and support, and unethical marketing of formula milk to the public during the pandemic has had a potentially negative impact on breastfeeding practices. The need to invest in and support breastfeeding has never been greater.

Globally, nearly 600,000 children and 100,000 mothers die each year due to poor breastfeeding rates.¹ By improving breastfeeding rates, more than 1,000 deaths and 5 million cases of diarrhea among children under two could be prevented in [Cambodia](#) each year, along with 255 maternal deaths due to breast and ovarian cancer and Type II diabetes. Scaling up breastfeeding would also save Cambodia's health system 5 million US dollars per year and save Cambodian families over 107 million US dollars per year due to the cost of purchasing formula milk for non-breastfed babies. The Ministry of Health, along with other partners, calls for a whole of society approach to create an environment that enables breastfeeding and supports breastfeeding mothers.

Unethical marketing and promotion of formula milk is a major barrier to improving breastfeeding rates. That's why during this year's World Breastfeeding Week, to compliment the current monitoring system, the SUN CSA Cambodia is launching a new online system¹ for reporting the violations against Sub-Decree 133 on the Marketing of Products for Infant and Young Child Feeding², which will be led by WVI-Cambodia. This online reporting system will allow health professionals, civil society organizations, and the public to report the violations in a simple and easy way. This online system will also allow Government officials to receive additional quality information and monitor the trends and patterns in implementation of Sub-degree 133. This is an effort to prevent illegal promotion and marketing of infant and young child feeding products, through advertisements, displays, discounts, prizes, or gifts, providing samples, distributing information materials, along with other promotional tactics.

World Breastfeeding Week 2021 under the theme "*Protecting Breastfeeding: A Shared Responsibility*" will bring together all relevant stakeholders at the national and sub-national levels to truly engage breastfeeding mothers and their community of supporters (fathers, grandparents, other family members) and the whole society to remind them about the importance of protecting, promoting, and supporting breastfeeding to ensure a healthier, more prosperous Cambodia.

- To understand more about sub-decree 133 and Joint Prakas on Marketing of Product for Infant and Young Child Feeding: <https://bit.ly/3zS8Q8e>
- Roles and responsibilities of Health Facilities in line with sub-decree 133: <https://bit.ly/3icCFuv>
- Online System for reporting violations of sub-decree 133: <https://bit.ly/violationsub133>
- How to report violations online: <https://bit.ly/violationsub133>

¹ Walters D, Phan L, Mathisen R. The Cost of Not Breastfeeding: Global Results from a New Tool. *Health Policy and Planning*. 2019 June 24. Available from <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapol/czz050>

Note to Editors:

Helen Keller International is a global health organization dedicated to eliminating preventable vision loss, malnutrition, and diseases of poverty. Co-founded by Helen Keller — and guided by her fierce optimism and belief in human potential — the organization delivers life-changing health solutions to vulnerable families in places where the need is great but access to care is limited. In the U.S., Africa, and Asia, Helen Keller’s proven, science-based programs empower people to create opportunities in their own lives and build lasting change. Helen Keller overcame tremendous obstacles to her health and wellbeing – and helped millions of others to do the same. Guided by her remarkable legacy, Helen Keller partners with host governments, development partners, civil society organizations and communities that are striving to overcome longstanding cycles of poverty.

For more information: [Helen Keller International - Continuing Her Work \(hki.org\)](http://hki.org)

World Vision International is a Christian relief, development and advocacy organisation dedicated to working with children, families and communities to overcome poverty and injustice. World Vision serves all people, regardless of religion, race, ethnicity or gender. World Vision commenced work in Cambodia in 1970. Working closely with Government ministries, local partners and community groups, we collaborate with communities to improve the lives of Cambodian children, especially most vulnerable children, in three key areas; integrated nutrition, education, and child protection and participation. World Vision works across 15 provinces and Phnom Penh City. World Vision implements long-term Area Programmes in nine provinces and Phnom Penh (these are Banteay Meanchey, Battambang, Kampong Chhnang, Kampong Speu, Kandal, Kampong Thom, Preah Vihear, Siem Reap, Takeo). Grant funded projects extend coverage to include Kep, Kampong Cham, Preah Sihanouk, Prey Veng, Pursat and Svay Rieng.

For more information: <https://www.wvi.org/publications/cambodia>

Alive & Thrive 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 Ethiopia, Bangladesh, and Viet Nam. In 2014, A&T began working in Burkina Faso, India, Nigeria, and throughout the Southeast Asia region, 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). Currently, Alive & Thrive is leveraging its robust network and knowledge base to strengthen systems and build capacity in these and other countries across Africa and Asia, and disseminate innovations, tools, and lessons worldwide. Alive & Thrive is managed by FHI 360 with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Government of Ireland and other donors.

For more information: <https://www.aliveandthrive.org/en>

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