



CLIMBING HIGHER: A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO ADDRESS CHILD MALNUTRITION IN VIET NAM'S HIGHLANDS

1. Background

Despite ongoing efforts, undernutrition remains a significant challenge in Viet Nam's mountainous areas, where food insecurity and limited caregiver knowledge and skills contribute to persistently high rates of child malnutrition. According to World Vision in Viet Nam's Annual Nutrition Measurement Survey, conducted in June 2024, 22.2% of children under five were found to be underweight, and 7.8% were wasted across 16 Area Programmes (APs).

Since 2014, the Positive Deviance/Hearth (PDH) model has been implemented in a number of these mountainous areas. While PDH has demonstrated impact, several barriers have limited its effectiveness when implemented in isolation:

- psychological barriers and low confidence among caregivers to adopt new behaviours
- limited family support, influenced by traditional beliefs and unequal division of household responsibilities
- economic constraints hindering participation in savings and livelihood initiatives
- lack of agricultural resources for some families.

To address these challenges more holistically, an innovative, integrated approach was introduced, referred to as PDH+. Key elements include:

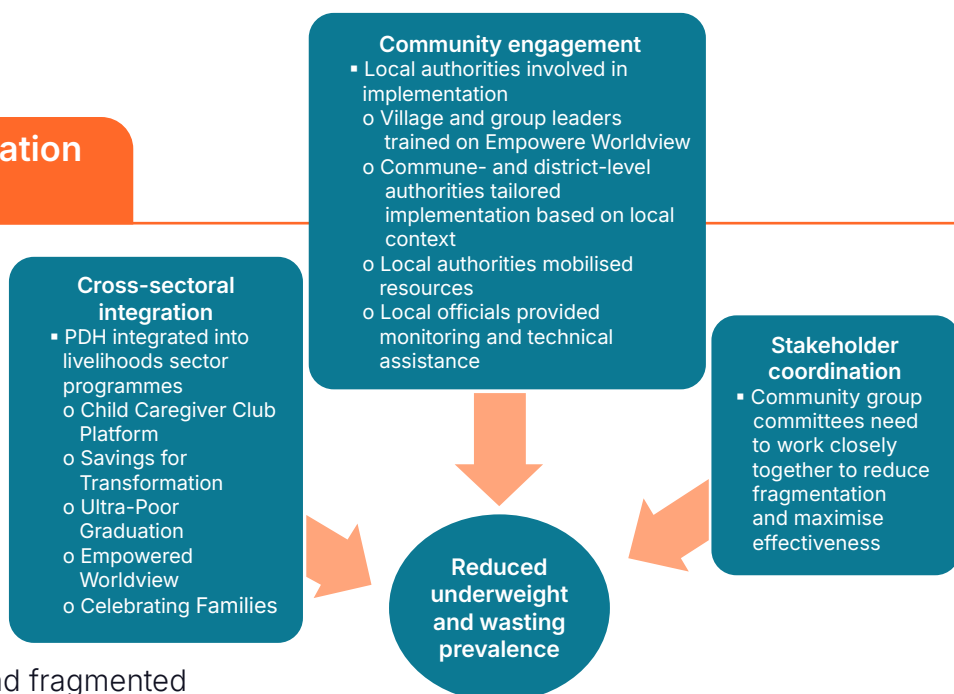
1. Integration of PDH with World Vision's livelihoods technical programme, enabling children and caregivers to participate in Ultra-Poor Graduation and Savings for Transformation groups (see Figure
2. Prioritising PDH households for participation in the Child Caregiver Club Platform to ensure regular follow-up post PDH graduation.
3. Training caregivers using the Celebrating Families and Empowered Worldview models to build self-efficacy and access to resources.

This comprehensive approach seeks to strengthen the enabling environment for improved child nutrition by addressing both behavioural and structural barriers.

2. PDH+ innovation implementation and results

The PDH+ innovation has been implemented since 2023 in two mountainous areas: Nam Giang and Minh Long, with Nam Tra My added in FY24. By the end of FY24, 366 children had been enrolled in the programme. The cost of implementation ranges from 8,000 to 10,000 VND per meal per child (equivalent of USD 0.32–0.40).

Despite promising progress, key challenges include low caregiver participation in livelihood activities and fragmented coordination between sectors and interventions.



3. Results

- **Minh Long AP:** Graduation rate increased from 28.1% to 44.3%, representing a 16.2 percentage point increase, after the integration of PDH+.
- **Nam Tra My AP:** Implementing PDH for the first time, with the addition of the integration component, achieved a 61.3% graduation rate, which is much higher than the national graduation rate of 14.7%.
- **Nam Giang AP:** Graduation rate rose from 27.7% in FY23 to 44.7%, a 17 percentage point increase, following the implementation of PDH+.

4. Lessons learnt

1. **Cross-sector collaboration and local capacity building** are essential to ensure the technical integrity and effectiveness of the PDH model. Key strategies include:
 - Working closely with livelihoods technical officers to support household food security
 - Developing annual integrated plans that align PDH with livelihood interventions
 - Prioritising short-term crops and livestock to address immediate nutritional needs and food insecurity.
 - Strengthening linkages with other sectors, including Child Protection and Participation, Livelihoods, Faith and Development, and Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene.
2. **Engaging local partners** – including village leaders, commune- and district-level authorities, and community-based organisations – is vital for:
 - resource mobilisation
 - effective coordination and integration of programme components and activities
 - ongoing monitoring and technical support
 - sharing of successful practices to support advocacy and scale-up.

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