INTRODUCTION

Do you care about people, the planet, prosperity and peace? Join the many who believe in sustainable development - people who currently live in a way that does not harm the generations to come. This year’s World Breastfeeding Week focuses on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that governments around the world have agreed to achieve by 2030.¹ The SDGs build on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and cover a range of issues on ecology, economy and equity. The new SDGs aspire to tackle the root causes of poverty and offer a vision of development that works for all people, everywhere. World Breastfeeding Week 2016 marks a new start for us to work together and show how we can achieve sustainable development through the protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding.

New evidence presented in the UK medical journal, the Lancet, confirms that optimal breastfeeding could save 823,000 child lives and add $302 billion to the global economy annually.² Breastfeeding lays the foundation for good health for all children both in the short and long term, and also benefits mothers. However, global breastfeeding rates have remained stagnant for the past two decades. Less than 40% of infants under six months of age are exclusively breastfed. In actual fact, women face many barriers to breastfeeding. They may receive inaccurate information from health providers, lack lactation support from male partners within the household, have no access to skilled breastfeeding counselling, face aggressive marketing of breastmilk substitutes or be forced to return to work soon after giving birth. These barriers make it exceedingly difficult for women to breastfeed exclusively for six months (with no additional liquids or food) and to continue breastfeeding for two years or longer, as recommended by the World Health Organization.³ We know what needs to be done to support and enable mothers to breastfeed optimally, but we need to be more proactive and engage more people to make this a reality. Linking breastfeeding with the SDGs helps us to do this.

Objectives of WABA | World Breastfeeding Week 2016

To inform people about the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and how their achievement can be facilitated by improved breastfeeding and Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF).

To firmly anchor breastfeeding as a key component of sustainable development.

Why is this important?

3 G AVANISE

To galvanise a variety of actions at all levels on breastfeeding and IYCF in the new era of the SDGs.

4 ENGAGE

To engage and collaborate with a wider range of actors around the promotion, protection and support of breastfeeding.

References

1. Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. WHA resolution 70/1. 2015

How to read the action folder

The action folder explains how breastfeeding is linked to each of the SDGs individually (see insert) and along four thematic areas. The thematic areas are interlinked SDGs, which represent the strongest links to breastfeeding. You will find the relevant SDGs at the top of each page. Each thematic area starts with a short imaginary scenario which illustrates the link between breastfeeding and the thematic SDG area. This is followed by some useful facts and figures that you may use for your advocacy campaign. Finally, there are some examples of actions that you may take up at whatever level you are working on. At the end of the action folder, you will find a section on ways of working to achieve the SDGs through sustainable partnerships and the rule of law. We hope you will enjoy reading the action folder and find it useful for your work.

www.worldbreastfeedingweek.org
In an isolated land where famine is common, mothers are known to breastfeed their children until they become toddlers. These mothers know that breastfeeding is sustenance and food security for their young children. When famine strikes and hunger comes with a vengeance, they see that young children who are not breastfed are vulnerable, and are often the first to die. In low-income areas particularly, mothers commonly stop breastfeeding only when they feel that their child is big and strong enough to no longer need that protection. Discouraging mothers from continuing to breastfeed through the 2nd year of their child’s life has a potential short term as well as lifelong consequences. Food security includes an invisible component—protection for an unknown future through breastfeeding. Breastmilk is an affordable form of nutrition and as such an important way of reducing the effects of poverty.

Undernutrition, including sub-optimal breastfeeding, underlies 45% of all deaths of children under 5 annually. The most prevalent form of malnutrition, nutritional stunting (low height for age), is already prevalent at birth and continues to increase sharply until 24 months of age. This window of opportunity for reducing stunting is the 1000 days from conception until 2 years of age.

Early investments in prevention of low birth weight, prevention of stunting, and early initiation of and exclusive breastfeeding, contribute to reducing the risk of later obesity and chronic diseases.

Not breastfeeding is associated with economic losses of about $302 billion annually or 0.49% of world gross national income.

Families worldwide spend an estimated $54 billion annually purchasing milk formula.

Adults who were breastfed as children were found to have higher incomes than those who were not breastfed.

To think about:
What role does breastfeeding have in promoting good nutrition and food security in your community?

References
**SURVIVAL, HEALTH, AND WELLBEING**

**IMAGINE THIS SCENARIO**

Anna is born in a poor urban area. Anna’s mother had seen milk powder widely advertised, but she and Anna’s aunts always believed that mother’s milk is best. As weeks go by, Anna is active and develops well. Her immunisations are completed on time and she has had no illness, so her mother is able to work. The community nurse is trained in breastfeeding support and praises Anna’s mother, reminding her that breastfeeding also helps to protect mothers from diseases like breast cancer. At times, there is little money for food but Anna has had a nutrition cushion as she breastfed into her second year and eats family foods. The years pass and Anna goes to school. The teacher notices how quickly Anna learns, and informs her mother. Anna’s mother knows her milk helped Anna’s brain and eyes to develop well, and that having little illness meant Anna’s energy was used to grow and learn. Anna is still young but her future is bright because she had a good start from her mother’s milk, and that gift will be important throughout her life. Breastmilk can help children out of poverty by helping them to attain higher levels of education and income for a better future.

**FACTS AND FIGURES**

- The financial cost of a program to implement the WHO/UNICEF Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding in 214 countries is estimated at $130 per live birth. “Investment in effective services to increase and sustain breastfeeding rates is likely to provide a return within a few years, possibly as little as one year.”
- On average, babies who are breastfed have a 2.6 point higher intelligence quotient than non-breastfed babies, with larger differences for longer durations of breastfeeding.
- Breastfeeding provides the foundation for lifelong health and wellbeing. Children and mothers who do not breastfeed are at greater risk for many conditions including acute and chronic illness for children, and breast and ovarian cancer for mothers.
- 823,000 children die annually due to sub-optimal infant feeding practices.
- 20,000 deaths due to breast cancer could be averted if mothers breastfed optimally.

**REFERENCES**


**TO THINK ABOUT:**

What does breastfeeding look like in your community? How many hospitals or maternity facilities are Baby-Friendly?

**REFERENCES**

Breastmilk is a “natural, renewable food” that is environmentally safe and produced and delivered to the consumer without pollution, packaging, or waste. Formula production and use generate greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions which accelerate global warming, with catastrophic results. It is the most vulnerable populations that are worst affected by stronger and more frequent typhoons, hurricanes and cyclones. Amidst the devastation caused by natural disasters, artificial feeding is extra risky as lack of clean water and infrastructure make it difficult to ensure safe and efficient preparation of baby food without adequate refrigeration and clean boiled water; while breastfeeding safeguards children’s health and provides comfort to them and their mothers, who may have lost everything. Breastfeeding counsellors can work with families to alleviate their suffering, helping to support traumatised mothers to find the confidence to maintain breastfeeding or to relactate.

IMAGINE THIS SCENARIO

In any journey, it is the first step that counts. Breastfeeding is the first practical step we can take to protect not only the health of babies and mothers but also the health of our planet — right from the start, by providing green and sustainable nourishment to babies. Artificial feeding contributes to global warming which is causing climate change, with catastrophic results. It is the most vulnerable populations that are worst affected by stronger and more frequent typhoons, hurricanes and cyclones. Amidst the devastation caused by natural disasters, artificial feeding is extra risky as lack of clean water and infrastructure make it difficult to ensure safe and efficient preparation of baby food without adequate refrigeration and clean boiled water; while breastfeeding safeguards children’s health and provides comfort to them and their mothers, who may have lost everything. Breastfeeding counsellors can work with families to alleviate their suffering, helping to support traumatised mothers to find the confidence to maintain breastfeeding or to relactate.

FACTS AND FIGURES

Breastmilk is a “natural, renewable food” that is environmentally safe and produced and delivered to the consumer without pollution, packaging, or waste. Formula production and use generate greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions which accelerate global warming, and also produce pollution and toxic emissions from garbage disposal. Although not yet quantifiable in monetary terms, there are environmental costs associated with not breastfeeding babies.

720,450 tonnes of milk formula sold annually in 6 Asian countries generated almost 2.9 million tonnes of GHG. This is equivalent to nearly 7000 million miles driven by an average passenger vehicle or 1.03 million tonnes of waste sent to landfill sites.

It is estimated that more than 4000 L of water are needed to produce 1 kg of breastmilk substitute powder.

Breastfeeding means less GHG, environmental degradation and pollution.

Breastfeeding helps the transition to a low-carbon economy from one based on fossil fuels. No electricity is needed to produce breastmilk and it requires no fuel for transport, thus reducing emissions of carbon dioxide, the principal greenhouse gas.

REFERENCES

Mother's milk is an essential food resource which needs to be protected. About 830 million women, mainly in developing countries, lack social protection in their job situation. Women are often forced to accept poorly paid, low-quality jobs. When mothers return to work they have less time to care for their children. Breastfeeding may decline, children are ill more often, and school attainment stagnates. Productivity declines as employees need more time off for the care of their non-breastfed children. Family finances are worsened by higher food and medical expenses. Yet, around the world, governments are emphasising women's participation in the labour force as a solution for economic growth, gender equality, and poverty reduction. Women's unpaid caring activities in the household are important to the health, development and well-being of all family members, and must be recognised in economic and social development strategies. To narrow the gender gap at work, women need support to combine their productive and reproductive roles including breastfeeding, such as paid maternity leave, paid breastfeeding breaks, flexible working arrangements and lactation rooms.

To think about:
What support do women receive for breastfeeding once they return to work in your community?

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**FACTS AND FIGURES**

- Maternal employment results in decreased breastfeeding rates with all the known health consequences.  
  
- Every additional month of paid maternity leave decreases the infant mortality rates by 13%.  
  
- Only 53% of countries meet the ILO 14 week minimum standard for maternity leave.

- Maternity leave policies are effective in increasing exclusive breastfeeding rates.

- Lactation rooms and paid breastfeeding breaks can increase breastfeeding at 6 months.

**REFERENCES**


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**ACTIONS**

1. Find out your country's policy for maternity protection. Also, find out where you live, the type of leave and workplace facilities local employers are providing.

2. Advocate at all levels and between sectors for the needs and rights of maternity protection of workers in both the formal and informal sectors.

3. Encourage politicians and officials in your country to assess the status of their current maternity and parental protection entitlements and to identify gaps in provision, using existing tools such as the World Breastfeeding Trends Initiative (WBTI).

   See: [http://worldbreastfeedingtrends.org/](http://worldbreastfeedingtrends.org/)

4. Promote paid parental protection policies that are gender equitable, encompassing the care triad and which support co-parenting and breastfeeding.

5. Talk to some local employers about how they could make their workplaces support breastfeeding. Promote transformation of workplaces to become 'family friendly'.

   This should include:

   a. Provision of accessible crèches which facilitate and support breastfeeding.

   b. Spaces in or near workplaces with the necessary facilities, privacy and hygiene for mothers to comfortably and safely breastfeed or express and store milk.

   c. Flexible working arrangements, breastfeeding breaks or reduced working hours, and teleworking.

   d. Safe and hygienic environments for all workers, and especially for pregnant and lactating mothers, which do not incur employment or wage disadvantages.
It takes a village to raise a child. It is a call to each of us to play our part in building an ideal village. We need laws that are fair and to which we all have access. We also need to find new and better ways of working together. SDG 16 aims to promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies. We are all responsible collectively for our children and the future they will inherit. Children embody the future of humanity. Every child has potential, which can only be fulfilled if rights are respected and responsibilities are fulfilled. The Convention on the Rights of the Child protects the rights of children. Women also have rights against being disadvantaged or treated differently to men, in society or in the workplace. There is much to do to build our longer for village. To improve breastfeeding rates, we need to overcome many challenges: inadequate government policies, lack of information and advice, lack of community support and aggressive sales of breastmilk substitutes. We need a global partnership to overcome them. SDG 17 reminds us that 'Many hands make light work... We have to work together in order to achieve the village we want. World Breastfeeding Week links change-makers at community, country and regional level to call for global action. We must expand our alliance and work alongside others beyond the present breastfeeding movement, and together achieve sustainable development and human rights. We can only survive as a species by recognising this balance and interdependence.

WORKING FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Share the evidence on the value of breastfeeding widely, particularly among those with power and influence. Results of breastfeeding programmes is also crucial to build the evidence.

Promote a positive attitude to breastfeeding. The more breastfeeding is talked about, the more effective our messages will be.

Advocate for breastfeeding programmes to be included in all health programmes and scaled up.

Enforce the law, including the International Code for Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes as the promotion of these products undermines breastfeeding and the best first food. Infants are unable to make a choice and governments have a duty to protect them.

International conventions set agreed global norms. Work in partnership at the community, national and higher levels to demand that the conventions for children’s and women’s rights, such as maternity protection, are reflected in the laws of every country and that these are enforced.

Actions

1. Understand the evidence for the importance of breastfeeding, and the interventions that are needed to increase breastfeeding rates.

2. Learn about the relevant international conventions and the laws, regulations and government policy in your country.

3. Identify potential allies, and work with them. Create a compelling common case for change. Select 3 to 5 priorities, and develop a common set of actions.

4. Be alert to conflicts of interest when choosing allies and supporters.

5. Galvanise your campaign with people who have multiple skills.

6. Allocate time and resources, including money. Plan well and remain accountable.

Acknowledgements


SPONSORSHIP: WABA does not accept sponsorship of any kind from companies producing breastmilk substitutes, related equipment and/or complementary foods that displace breastfeeding. WABA encourages all participants of World Breastfeeding Week to respect and follow this ethical stance.

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