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BMA, UK

Sarah Amin  
WABA, Malaysia

**CONFERENCE SECRETARIAT**

BPNI. SU-74, First Floor Pitampura, Delhi-  
110034. India

Tel: +91-11-27343608, 42683059

Tel/Fax: +91-11-27343606

Email: [wbc2012@ibfanasia.org](mailto:wbc2012@ibfanasia.org)

[www.worldbreastfeedingconference.org](http://www.worldbreastfeedingconference.org)

**Press Release****Are our babies falling through the gaps?**

**New Delhi, 6 Dec 12:** International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN), an international body that monitors and tracks the implementation of the WHO's Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding, has compiled a report titled, "Are Our Babies Falling Through the Gaps: The State of Policies and Programme Implementation of the Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding in 51 Countries." IBFAN is the recipient of 1998 Right to Livelihood Award (popularly known as the alternative Noble prize).

The report was formally released today by the Union Minister of External Affairs, **Sh. Salman Khurshid** and Union Minister of State (I/C) of Women and Child Development **Smt Krishna Tirath**.

**Minister Sh. Salman Khurshid** said "...and the theme how wonderful the theme Mom Made and not Man Made, and Lets protect every feeding mother. I think that there couldn't have been anything more topical, more urgent, more pressing and something on which I believe, except for some people who have commercial interests, I can't imagine anyone, anyone disagreeing. We could certainly add to the quality and caliber of democracy by saying that here is an issue on which even the most contentious societies, most societies that disagree on many other things will not disagree on this one thing and if we do disagree, god forbid when the next generation goes out what they will do to us."

Appreciating the role of IBFAN in coming out with the 51 country report Minister **Smt. Krishna Tirath** said "Taking stock of policies and programmes, the theme for world breastfeeding week was every apt and timely preceding this world conference. It is time for all of us to act and look back and set the stage for change."

The report reveals glaring gaps in the policy and programmes of the 51 countries that it studied. 2/3rd of the world's children are born in the 51 countries in which this study was done by the World Breastfeeding Trends Initiative (WBTi), a breakthrough innovative web based tool from IBFAN to measure inputs for increasing infant and young child feeding practices (IYCF). WBTi includes assessment, action, advocacy, giving universal access to this information and leads to color coding and objective scoring to make it easily understandable to policy makers.

According to the Report, only 34 million (of the 83 million children born in these countries every year) were exclusively breastfed during the first 6 months as recommended by the WHO and UNICEF. Similarly, UNICEF's 2012 report says that of the 136 million babies born each year globally, 78 million could not follow WHO's recommendation to begin breastfeeding within one hour of life and 92 million babies are not able to practice exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months. In other words two out of every three mother-baby dyads are forced to accept artificial feeding.

Most of these babies belong to either poor income groups or un-reached populations. **Dr. Chessa Lutter, the Regional Adviser of Pan American Health Organization (PAHO)** said "...because breastfeeding promotion provides the greatest short-term benefits for children living in poor environments, investments in breastfeeding protection and promotion will also improve global health equity".

The report clearly indicates that the majority of infants are at higher risk of obesity, of contracting diarrhea, infections and non-communicable diseases, as they are fed formula and other milks. The report reveals policy gaps in all countries in almost all areas required to support women for breastfeeding.

**Where does India Stand?**

The WBTi report tracks and ranks countries. It scores each indicator on a scale of 10 and provides a color code red, yellow, blue and green in ascending order of performance to reflect the achievement on each indicator. The objective score is given to countries on a scale of 100 revealing their policy and programme status.

Going by the score, India ranks 31st among the 51 countries. However, change seems to be on the way with the district Lalitpur project demonstrating that increasing rates of optimal feeding is possible. According to the Minister of Women and Child Development, the Government of India is expanding the reach of its newly launched maternity protection scheme to cover the entire country so that poor women can be provided with cash benefits.

Neighboring nations, Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Bhutan have made significant changes over these years and improved their ranking.

"The policy makers and managers need to understand the relevance of appropriate Infant and Young Child Feeding Practices during Disasters." said **Dr.J.P.Dadhich, National Coordinator, IBFAN ASIA**

**Glaring Gaps Globally:**

The 5 countries that scored the highest are Sri Lanka, Maldives, Kenya, Malawi, and Nicaragua. The 5 countries that scored the least are Cape Verde, Taiwan, Indonesia, Mexico, and Egypt. The gaps which are extremely significant and are found in almost all the countries, are as follows:

- Lack of budgets and inter-sectoral coordination for implementing policy and programmes
- Weak implementation of international code for marketing of breast milk substitutes and the baby food industry is exploiting this to their full potential
- Women in the unorganized and informal sector are neglected on maternity protection
- Women lack full information and support on IYCF
- HIV and infant feeding is not integrated in IYCF policies
- Infant feeding during emergencies in their disaster policies or programmes are almost nonexistent.

According to **Dr. Nicholas K. Alpuj, Director, UNICEF Programmes** “Breastfeeding is a rights issue, a practical food security issue, and an investment with short and long-term benefits and returns. It is an issue related to gender equality and supportive environments and working conditions for women and mothers. The current global political attention on child survival, nutrition and preventing stunting provides us with a unique moment in history to work together to advance the breast-feeding agenda - children's lives depend on this critical window of opportunity. We cannot fail”

“A wealth of knowledge and guidance exists to tackle the many forms of malnutrition. For example, improvement of exclusive breastfeeding practices, adequate and timely complementary feeding and continued breastfeeding for up to two years or beyond can save the lives of 1.5 million children aged under five every year,” says **Dr. Francesco Branca, Director of Nutrition for Health and Development, WHO.**

According to **Marta Trejos, Regional Coordinator IBFAN Latin America** and Caribbean “WBTi is a powerful tool to orient IYCF national policies and programmes to bring together in action governments, health professionals civil society organizations and academia to act together to improve mothers and children health, development and nutrition.”

#### **The Baby Food Industry: A Friend or Enemy?**

The companies are using new tactics to reach out to people directly or indirectly by setting up various kinds of educational institutions under the umbrella of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), which is actually an indirect marketing strategy to promote their products.

According to **Patti Rundall, Policy Director, Baby Milk Action, United Kingdom**, “... Many of the most irresponsible baby companies see malnutrition as a profitable business and the perfect cover for their 'top strategic priority' which has always been to change traditional food patterns and cultures, extend bottle-feeding for years on end and encourage everyone to snack on 'slightly better for you' junk foods all day long.”

“Nothing short of legislation to implement the International Code of Marketing of Breast milk Substitutes (Code) and subsequent World Health Assembly resolutions can work. There should be no compromise on this front” said **Joyce Chanetsa, from Swaziland, Regional Coordinator of IBFAN Africa.**

“...nutrition, medicine, ecological balance, sustainable economy and magical love and bonding are five petals of breastfeeding...” said **Anwar Fazal, Chairperson Emeritus of World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA)** emphasizing how breastfeeding cannot only nurture a child but a healthy society.

According to **Dr. Arun Gupta, Regional Coordinator IBFAN Asia, and Member Prime Minister's Council on India's Nutrition Challenges**, “The baby food industry or its front organisations supported or floated by them should be considered as a part of the industry and partnerships with them are a fundamentally flawed concept. They should not be part of any policy making, and should be regulated not the regulators.”

Having a nationally coordinated policy and budgeted plans is what the global strategy called for a decade back, and many countries lack action on this crucial area. “The solutions are not complex or rocket science, it's plain and simple; there are gaps that we need to bridge,” said **Dr Rajiv Tandon of Save the Children, India.**

We can learn from countries like Brazil, Bangladesh, Cambodia and Lalitpur in Uttar Pradesh who have shown progress on increasing exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months rates.

*For Further Information Contact:*

*Nupur Bidla/ 9958163610/ nupur@bpni.org, nupurbidla@gmail.com*

