



August 6, 2011

THE NATIONAL FOOD SECURITY BILL

No food security for infants

Where are “Infants” in the food security Bill?

The Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India (BPNI) today reacted strongly to the draft Bill Food Security to be introduced into the Parliament, especially as of the 26 million babies born every year; 20 million do not realize their right to food.

“We are Surprised that the Bill does not take account the existence of “Infants” – the first 12 months of life of human beings. Even more surprising is the fact that the earlier ‘NAC’s drafts did get something like maternity entitlements which disappeared in the government draft,” said Dr. Arun Gupta, Central Coordinator, BPNI and member of the Prime Ministers’ Council on India’s Nutrition Challenges.

The food of babies 0-6 months old is mothers’ milk, and the only way their food security can be realized is by providing women with the support that enables them to breastfeed their infants. This includes providing all women optimal skilled counseling on breastfeeding as a service, and maternity entitlements which include adequate financial assistance as wage compensation, for at least for 6 months, providing well managed crèches in the community and at all workplaces with as many paid nursing breaks as the woman needs to optimally feed the baby.

“We are surprised,” says Dr JP Dadhich, national coordinator of BPNI. The earlier NAC draft at least recognized the food security of infants by including some provisions related to maternity entitlements. This has disappeared in the draft by the EGoM to the Cabinet. By merely considering grain as food, the EGOM has totally rejected any right of infants to food security.

Further, after 6months of age, in addition to the mother’s milk infants need good, balanced food in increasing quantities and diversity each month. Rather than ensuring that households can meet this need sustainably, BPNI is appalled to see that the draft food Bill proposes to provide “ready to eat meals” to children of 0-6 years which is contradictory to the earlier Indian law of ensuring proper exclusive breastfeeding for 0-6 month, and continued breastfeeding for 6-24 month with additional home made foods.

BPNI demands that to ensure proper breastfeeding of infants government should create a dedicated budget of at least 700 Crores per annum, and about 400 Crores as one time cost of training and capacity building for effectively promoting optimal breastfeeding and infant and young child feeding. This is the recommendation of an expert group that met recently to develop a plan of action and budget on breastfeeding and infant and young child feeding. Apart from this budget for Crèches and maternity entitlements is also required.

Government of India should implement a clear plan of action to enhance the number of infants whose food rights are fulfilled.

BPNI, therefore, demands that all women get financial entitlements without any conditionality as is currently put in IGMSY scheme; equivalent to at least minimum wages for six months, the period of breastfeeding, in addition to any maternity entitlement given for pregnancy and birth.

BPNI further demands that the Food Bill should ensure that infants have proper care facilities in the community and at workplaces, when their mothers have to go out to earn.

The theme of this year's World Breastfeeding Week is "Talk to me" which underlines the importance of appropriate communication to enhance breastfeeding. BPNI calls upon the policy makers that they should **talk to Women** about food security for their infants before finalising the Food Bill.

For questions

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