

Press Release
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The Need to Invest in Babies

Globally an annual investment of **USD 17.5 billion** in interventions to universalize optimal breastfeeding can prevent millions of babies from Infant deaths due to diarrhea and pneumonia, impaired development, as well as reduce the risk for diabetes, hypertension, cancer and cardiac diseases in adult life; suggests a report “*The Need to Invest in Babies – A Global Drive for Financial Investment in Children’s Health and Development through Universalizing Interventions for Optimal Breastfeeding*” by the **International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN)**, an international body non-governmental organization that monitors and tracks the implementation of the World Health Organization’s ***Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding***.

The report notes that of the 135 million babies born every year, unfortunately 83 million babies and their mothers are not enabled to optimally breastfeed as recommended by the World Health Organisation.

The report challenges the current estimate of US\$ 2.9 Billion given by the World Bank in 2010, and provide answers to the questions raised in the UNICEF’s recent global report “Breastfeeding on the Worldwide Agenda” on insufficient funding for scaling up interventions on breastfeeding and infant and young child feeding .Even though breastfeeding has been identified as the most vital intervention to reduce infant deaths and malnutrition in children, it is extremely under-funded. Earlier estimates covered only parts of promotion of breastfeeding and were too low to fund all the necessary interventions of ‘protection’ and ‘support’ to women, which are so critical. This report gives an estimate for all interventions.

The report formally released by **Mr.Montek Singh Aluwhalia**, Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission, Govt. of India, puts a real though minimal cost to universalize all types of interventions for optimal breastfeeding for moms and babies.

The report has been launched simultaneously in Canada, Mexico, Egypt, Columbia, Costa Rica, Guatemala and Nepal.

The IBFAN report calls for an investment of roughly half a billion US \$ to urgently implement the **International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitute** and World Health Assembly resolutions being blatantly violated by the baby food industry undermining optimal breastfeeding and complementary feeding practices. **According to W.H.O’s 2013 report only 37 out of 199 countries reporting (19%) have passed laws reflecting all of the recommendations of the Code.**

The report calls the transfer of a minimum of US \$2 per day for 180 days for lactating women to enable them to remain with their infants during the critical early months without economic

pressure to go back to work. This assistance, which globally comes to USD 12.6 billion annually, is based on World Bank's poverty line. India and UK have already begun such schemes to support women.

To improve health sector support to breastfeeding mothers, the report sees wider use of the well tested WHO/UNICEF Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) as absolutely essential, as most infant deaths are in the first month of life. BFHI requires an injection of around US\$2 billion to drive universal implementation. The BFHI 'Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding' includes ensuring the hospital facility complies with the WHO International Code and does not accept free formula supplies, keeps mothers and babies together in skin to skin contact after birth, provides adequate training of health workers on breastfeeding, and refers mothers to community breastfeeding support when they go home. This would substantially enhance the number of babies who begin breastfeeding within first hour, which today is a mere 42% globally, and who continue exclusively breastfeeding.

Dr Julie P Smith a co author of the report said, "Women produce around 23 billion litres of human milk a year worldwide, a 'health food' for babies and young children that is far better than anything from industry. Breastmilk is so valuable that health services in other countries pay hundreds, even thousands, of dollars a litre for it. No country can afford to waste this valuable human resource. Formula feeding reduces IQ as much as prenatal lead exposure, akin to several months of wasted schooling. But breastfeeding is not free. We must invest more in supporting new mothers in ways that make exclusive breastfeeding practicable for them."

Dr Arun Gupta, coauthor and regional coordinator of IBFAN Asia, says "There are other costs also involved like policy development, coordination and media outreach. Unless you invest in all the interventions required it would be foolish to expect that breastfeeding rates will rise. There is special need to take this health action especially now when the formula market is growing phenomenally. We would be failing the next generation if we don't do so."

A number of studies across the world now show billions can be saved if you invest in breastfeeding. In UK, a study estimates that health care system would save £40 million per year including reductions in the costs of maternal breast cancer by increasing breastfeeding rates.

Dr Kailash Chand, Deputy Chair of the British Medical Association, (BMA) says, "The BMA has long recognised the health benefits of breastfeeding during early infancy and its protective effect against chronic disease in later life. As is the case across the world, breastfeeding rates in the UK are unacceptably low, especially so among disadvantaged women. Mothers may need personal support to establish successful breastfeeding, and there is a clear need for wider society to support parents in the starting and continuing breastfeeding. As this paper shows, in addition to optimizing health and wellbeing, there are clear financial and economic reasons to support breastfeeding."

In the US a study calculates 13 billion dollar savings in health care costs annually if exclusive breastfeeding rates of 0 to 6 months went up to 90%.

While *The Need to Invest in Babies* attempts to quantify the funding required in broad terms, it is accompanied by an excel-based, comprehensive 'financial planning tool' that will assist governments to accurately cost interventions, as well as help them plan and prioritize actions according to national needs.

Dr. Arun Gupta stressed that "enhancing breastfeeding rates is a vital pillar of nation-building" and urged governments to strategically allocate financial resources for breastfeeding policy and programmes.

About Us:

BPNI/IBFAN Asia is a registered, independent, non-profit, national organization that works towards protecting, promoting and supporting breastfeeding and appropriate complementary feeding of infants & young children registered as a society under the Societies Registration Act XXI of 1860, s 23144. BPNI does not accept funds or sponsorship of any kind from the companies producing infant milk substitutes, feeding bottles, related equipments, or infant foods (cereal foods). It serves the Regional Coordinating Office of International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN) for Asia, which is a network of groups working to promote optimal infant and young child nutrition in over 25 countries. <http://www.bpni.org/>

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Notes for the editor:

- Breastfeeding On The Worldwide Agenda, Findings from a landscape analysis on political commitment for programmes to protect, promote and support breastfeeding: Report 2013
http://www.unicef.org/eapro/breastfeeding_on_worldwide_agenda.pdf
- Country implementation of the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes: Status report 2011
http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/85621/1/9789241505987_eng.pdf
- Scaling Up Nutrition: What Will It Cost? report 2010
<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/HEALTHNUTRITIONANDPOPULATION/Resources/Peer-Reviewed-Publications/ScalingUpNutrition.pdf>

Quotes: The Need To Invest In Babies

“It’s an excellent report. This is a very important area. I am completely persuaded by health benefits of systematic promotion of optimal exclusive breastfeeding. It’s very good for children’s health and also for mother’s health. That is enough reason to take action. We need campaigns aimed at all sections of society including the elite section to effectively promote breastfeeding.”
–**Sh.Montek Singh Ahluwalia,Dy.Chairman, Planning Commission of India**

“Ministry of Women and Child Development is committed to ensure that breastfeeding is the most important priority in ICDS. And I promise to stand by it.”-**Ms.Nita Chowdhury,Secretary, Ministry of Women and Child Development ,Government of India**

“This tool is very important and we should begin to value and use it to make a difference. We need to measure our programs, hold them accountable and document it. The political will has to come from somewhere. Let’s reach the unreached in a different way we can. ”-**Dr. (Ms)Syeda Hameed,Member Planning Commission**