



Greed of companies continues to attack breastfeeding- The government looks the other way !!

New Delhi. 21 May 2022. The World Breastfeeding Protection Day, May 21 when the World Health Assembly adopted a historic resolution to implement the *International code of marketing of breast milk substitutes* and urged all member states to go beyond it as WHA adopted several resolutions later to strengthen the level of protection to breastfeeding women from the onslaught of commercial interests of baby feeding industry.

India has [strong law](#) as a follow-up to the international Code, the *Infant Milk Substitutes Feeding Bottles, and Infant Foods (Regulation of Production, Supply and Distribution) Act 1992, and Amendment Act 2003* It bans all kinds of promotion of baby foods and feeding bottles for the children under the age two. However , 30 years later companies do everything possible to make money out of people by creating a need through pervasive marketing.

This report showcases 11 violations by few concerned citizens. Companies are using new methods of marketing through influencers on social media and e-marketing sites.

Hospitals where women come to give birth to their babies are seen to be directly impacted as rates of early breastfeeding within one hour of birth have not improved at all within the last five years. According to NFHS-5 2021, just about 41% women are able to breastfeed within an hour of birth even as 89% give birth in a health facility. Unnecessary use of infant formula continues. It seems more so in cesarean births, which are increasing exponentially. Women are not even asked if their baby should be given this harmful product and [calling to stop it](#).

“The competitor, -breastfeeding mothers, do not have a voice or money to match this \$55 Billion baby food industry” said Dr. Arun Gupta, a pediatrician and founder of Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India (BPNI). He added that the baby food industry attacks them furiously, aggressively and violently leading to abusive marketing of their products, while speaking on the launch of BPNI’s report, “Under Attack” .

“In 2014 the Dairy Reporter [published](#) the claim of a whistleblower that Danone was bribing doctors in India and BPNI had approached the Government of India to investigate these complaints. But no action was taken then. Danone is a repeat offender, if action had been taken this violation of bribing doctors would not have repeated. We expect better from the Government of India” said Ms. Nupur Bidla, a social scientist, the author of the report and national coordinator of the BPNI.

The WHO recently launched 3 reports on this issue, all noting the aggression of companies and weaker action by the governments. The first one in February 2022, [“How the marketing of](#)

[formula milk influences our decisions on infant feeding](#)” exposes the aggressive marketing practices used by the formula milk industry, valued at more than US\$ 55 billion. It highlights how marketing impacts women and families. The second in April, [“Scope and Impact Of Digital Marketing Strategies For Promoting Breastmilk Substitutes \(2022\)”](#) examines in depth the scope, techniques and impact of digital marketing strategies for the promotion of breast-milk substitutes. The use of digital platforms by breast-milk substitutes manufacturers and distributors to promote their products is rolling. The more recent third report on [“Marketing of breast-milk substitutes: national implementation of the international code, status report \(WHO, 2022\)”](#) further highlights that the monitoring system needs to be strengthened at country level.

“This report shows very clearly that formula milk marketing remains unacceptably pervasive, misleading and aggressive,” said Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General. “Regulations on exploitative marketing must be urgently adopted and enforced to protect children’s health.”

“The promotion of commercial milk formulas should have been terminated decades ago,” said Dr Francesco Branca, Director of the WHO Nutrition and Food Safety department. “The fact that formula milk companies are now employing even more powerful and insidious marketing techniques to drive up their sales is inexcusable and must be stopped.”

The irony is the government of India looks the other way. In spite of the Parliament having passed this law for protecting mothers and children from this kind of marketing, there is not even a systematic monitoring system in place and the complaints to the government keep rolling from one department to the other, the report Under Attack alleges. The government of India even fails to ask for any investigation into the complaints of alleged violations, especially the ones which are deeply concerning such as giving cash bribes and benefits to doctors.

The infringement of IMS Act is a cognizable offence.

The report further alleges that the Prime Minister’s office or the Cabinet Secretariat has not responded to the calls to fix the business rules for MOHFW as the law relates mostly to health sector issues and the concerned department.

BPNI is calling for at least an investigation into the alleged violations.
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You can download the Under Attack report here: <https://bit.ly/3lOsvRP>

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