

## Breastfeeding and Empowerment

### Empowerment means:

- ❖ the ability of people to gain understanding and control over personal, social, economic and political forces to take action to improve their lives;
- ❖ the range of activities from individual self-assertion to collective resistance, protest and mobilisation that challenge power relations;
- ❖ a process to change the direction of forces which marginalise women.



Recognise the obstacles breastfeeding women face.

**HELP REMOVE THEM!**

their infants is indeed a form of coercion. It can take many subtle forms of disuasion, such as literature from baby food companies casting doubt on the quality and quantity of a mother's milk, advertisements falsely portraying man-made baby milks as superior to women's breastmilk, and free samples of baby milk given to mother "in case she does not have enough milk", directly undermining her confidence and ability.

Empowering women will help protect or restore breastfeeding cultures around the world.

WABA joins other women's groups in using *empowerment* to address critical concerns of women: human rights, reproductive health, violence against women, and poverty.

The Women's Conference is an opportunity to reach out to those involved with issues on women and development and discrimination against women. Denying women the right to make an informed choice about how to feed

## HOW Breastfeeding Empowers Women

- 1 Breastfeeding confirms women's power to control their bodies, and challenges the bio-medical model and business interests that promote bottle-feeding.
- 2 Breastfeeding reduces women's dependence on medical professionals and validates the tried and trusted knowledge that mothers and midwives have about infant care and feeding.
- 3 Breastfeeding encourages women's self-reliance by increasing their confidence in their ability to meet the needs of their infants.
- 4 Breastfeeding helps child spacing, reduces the risks of anaemia and provides protection against ovarian and breast cancer, osteoporosis and multiple sclerosis.
- 5 Breastfeeding requires a new definition of women's work - one that more realistically integrates women's productive and reproductive activities, and which values both equally.
- 6 Breastfeeding requires structural changes in society to improve the position and condition of women.
- 7 Breastfeeding challenges the view of the breast as primarily a sex object.
- 8 Breastfeeding encourages solidarity and cooperation among women at the household, community, national and international level.

*Women should not be forced to make a choice between mother-work and other work.*

Penny Van Esterik

