

# BREASTFEEDING

## The Best Investment



# WABA '98

**T**hroughout the world, families, communities and nations seek to promote the health and welfare of their children. Unfortunately, economic factors often hinder these efforts through lack of funds for nutritious foods, clean water, and preventive and curative health care.

Breastfeeding requires very little investment and has a tremendous payback for families, employers, communities, health care institutions and governments.

World Breastfeeding Week 1998 aims to initiate actions to protect, promote and support breastfeeding as one of the best investments in the health of a nation. This year's goals are to:

- ✓ Raise public awareness on the economic value of breastfeeding and the high cost of bottle feeding.
- ✓ Provide concrete data on the economic advantages of breastfeeding for public advocacy.
- ✓ Help governments to appreciate the full economic value of breastfeeding and recognise the need to include support for breastfeeding promotion programmes in the national health budget.

## The Economic Benefits of Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding can bring economic benefits to many levels of society:

### For households

- ✓ savings on the unnecessary purchase of breastmilk substitutes and feeding equipment
- ✓ savings on medical care through fewer trips to a physician or hospital for a sick child, medications and time caring for a sick child
- ✓ savings on time in preparation for bottle feeding such as to fetch water, fuel and cleaning utensils
- ✓ savings on cost of birth control methods and menstruation supplies
- ✓ time savings on workdays lost in caring for a sick children

### For employers

- ✓ savings from greater productivity, more loyalty and less absenteeism among workers with young infants

### For nations

- ✓ savings, often in foreign exchange, on the purchase and distribution of commercial breastmilk substitutes
- ✓ savings on health care for preventable acute and chronic illnesses
- ✓ savings in ecological damage avoided by reduced production, distribution and disposal of breastmilk substitutes and containers

*Families from the former Yugoslavia would spend approximately 70% of their income for the purchase of breastmilk substitutes in the first six months if they did not breastfeed. At present only 30% of infants are partially breastfed at 4 months. If this could be increased to 70%, it is calculated that US\$449 million could be saved while 99,000 respiratory infections, 33,000 ear infections, 123 cases of early onset diabetes, 84 cases of childhood cancer, and 152 cases of ovarian cancer could be averted each year. The cost of artificial feeding is thus high even in industrialized countries (1).*