

Breastfeeding in a Globalised World

- for peace and justice



Protecting, promoting and supporting breastfeeding and the best possible complementary feeding for infants and young children is

the collective campaign purpose of the world wide breastfeeding movement as it prepares to celebrate World Breastfeeding Week (WBW) 2003.

Globalisation is a manifold and sometimes even an elusive concept for there is no single definition. It has been defined as the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events many miles away and vice versa. The result of this interconnectedness of globalisation can have both positive and negative impact on breastfeeding.

The current trend of globalisation is predominantly based on structuring a single global economy powered by transnational corporations and financial markets. Increasingly, globalisation is shaping a world where trade agreements, world trade organization priorities and the economic interests of transnational corporations hold sway and are no longer accountable to governments, let alone the needs of mothers and children.

In a globalised world, policy makers face new obstacles in implementing the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes and the relevant subsequent Resolutions of the World Health Assembly. Spreading privatisation of health care and hospitals may well put profits ahead of public health needs and breastfeeding friendly practices. Global deregulation and harmonisation are overriding national policies to regulate the marketing and labelling of infant feeding products and genetically modified ingredients, gradually making their way into infant foods, are claiming the product to be closer to breastmilk than ever before. And in the face of the global HIV epidemic, mothers are expected to

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Holding Corporations Accountable
by Judith Richter

make difficult decisions in order to select infant feeding options that are in the best interest of their children.

Although the agenda of globalisation may set economic goals above health, we can at the same time utilise its tools and structures to create peace and justice and a better world for all. Mothers, parents, women's groups, health care workers, institutions, and environmental networks are indeed resorting to new and creative ways to ensure that the protection for infant and child health that is conferred through breastfeeding remains safe and sound.

Our tools for achieving this are impressive. We have the Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding, endorsed unanimously in 2002 at the World Health Assembly and by the Executive Board of UNICEF. The Strategy gives us a universal framework for action to address a number of challenges facing those working for breastfeeding. The Global Strategy notes that trade agreements and World Trade Organization priorities should not override the needs of mothers and children; and that governments need to continue their commitments to the implementation of the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes and the relevant subsequent Resolutions of the World Health Assembly.

And we can mobilize. Today, as never before, coalitions and individuals can join forces across the globe, voicing concerns, "fighting against war", raising awareness among the general population, and insisting that policy- and decision-makers address issues of concern.

Mothers' groups all over the globe can demonstrate the power and joy of mutual support, knowing that they share this act of love with all mothers around the world. Researchers can insist on independent research that can make a difference in providing reliable information when mothers confront infant feeding decisions in the face of the HIV epidemic. Coalitions can come together to ensure that claims are not made for "new and improved formulas" to mislead parents into believing that artificial feeding confers benefits similar to breastmilk.

In 2003, we need to use the mechanisms available to us through globalisation to bring people together, finding positive ways to address the challenges of globalisation and creating viable solutions. Working together, members of the global breastfeeding movement can have a positive impact on the structures and on individuals - both internationally and within local communities - that influence and enable women to breastfeed and to provide optimal care for their children.

WBW 2003 Goals

Our goals for World Breastfeeding Week 2003 are:

- To recognise the threats and opportunities of globalisation for breastfeeding practices
- To maximise the potential of global communications to educate people on the benefits of breastfeeding and appropriate complementary feeding, and the disadvantages of artificial feeding
- To promote and act on the Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding

- To prevent the weakening of the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes and subsequent relevant WHA resolutions
- To work with potential allies by building alliances with civil society movements fighting for global justice, peace and health for all
- To think globally and act locally with all sectors of the community to protect, promote and support breastfeeding

Challenges

- Trade agreements should not
- X Undermine a nation's Code implementation or national laws regulating infant feeding products and food labelling
- X Weaken a government's ability to develop and enforce national infant feeding policies, in matters such as breastfeeding, indigenous foods, genetically modified food ingredients, labelling of infant foods, and food safety standards
- Privatisation of health and nutrition care services could
- X Divert funds from public health systems, diminishing their capacity to provide high quality services, especially to the poor and needy
- X Decrease the accountability of governments for ensuring health care
- X Decrease the neutrality of UN agencies and organisations that partner with private sector businesses and corporations, in accordance with respect for the Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes and subsequent relevant WHA resolutions.
- X Undermine publicly-funded programmes and initiatives that promote breastfeeding (e.g. BFHI)
- X Increase disparities among the rich and poor, particularly for women in low-income countries and areas
- The global breastfeeding movement must catch up to and monitor the activities of the private sector, which has been introducing components that may not be Codex

approved, such as milk that has undergone genetic modification, acidifiers, and pro-biotic components, into infant formula in recent years, advertising these as improvements. We must call for independent research to determine whether it is wise to test such products on our most vulnerable citizens.

Opportunities

- ✓ Increased worldwide cooperation among members of the breastfeeding movement to address common problems and issues
- ✓ Enhanced understanding of global issues among various civil society organisations working towards global and public justice
- ✓ Improved access to efficient, low-cost communication tools that link people with one another across the globe
- ✓ Potential links and alliances with the People's Health Movement celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Declaration of Alma Ata on health for all.

Tools for Action

Supportive legal instruments, technical documents, strategies, guidelines, and global networks through which breastfeeding advocates can work:

- Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding
- International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes and subsequent relevant WHA resolutions
- World Health Assembly Resolutions on Infant and Young Child Nutrition
- ILO Conventions on maternity protection
- Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination in all forms Against Women
- Millennium Development Goals
- Codex Alimentarius Commission
- Alliance for a Corporate-Free UN
- International Forum on Globalisation



The World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) is a global alliance of networks and organisations, such as IBFAN, LLLI and ILCA, and individuals, to protect, promote and support breastfeeding. WABA acts on the Innocenti Declaration and is in consultative status with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Key writer: Elisabeth Sterken, INFAC Canada/IBFAN North America. WABA, PO Box 1200, Penang 10850, Malaysia • Tel: 604-658 4816 • Fax: 604-657 2655 • E-mail: secr@waba.po.my • Website: www.waba.org.br or www.waba.org.my **SPONSORSHIP:** WABA does not accept sponsorship of any kind from companies producing breastmilk substitutes, related equipment and complementary foods. WABA encourages all participants of World Breastfeeding Week to respect and follow this ethical stance.

WBW2003

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