

Media Brief

19 countries take off in Asia to join the World Breastfeeding Trends Initiative (WBTi)

Civil society and governments join hands across the globe to improve breastfeeding rates

In what would be the largest ever-public programme of its kind, 19 countries in Asia (South Asia - 8, southeast Asia - 6, and east Asia - 5) have initiated action to assess policy and programmes that support women for breastfeeding in August 2008. Eleven more from Africa and another 10-15 from Latin America will be joining the World Breastfeeding Trends Initiative (WBTi) www.worldbreastfeedingtrends.org in September. Over 60 more countries from other part of the world will become members of the initiative by 2009, to create one of the largest databases for information on policy and programmes that support breastfeeding women.

The World Breastfeeding Trends Initiative (WBTi) is the brainchild of IBFAN Asia (www.ibfanasia.org), and is being implemented as an integral part of the project "**Global Breastfeeding Initiative for Child Survival (GBiCS)**", in partnership with Norad in line with Norway's flagship programme, the '**Global Campaign for the Health Millennium Development Goals**' launched in September 2007. The initiative is also receiving support from Sida through a "Global Proposal for Coordinated Action of IBFAN (www.ibfan.org) And WABA (www.waba.org.my) : Protecting, Promoting and Supporting Breastfeeding through Human Rights and Gender Equality".

The WBTi measures the rates of practice of optimal Infant and Young Child Feeding, as well as the progress of nations on the ten indicators included as part of the *Global Strategy on Infant and Young Child Feeding* (www.ibfanasia.org/docs/gsiycf.pdf). The GSIYCF, ratified at the World Health Assembly FILL IN YEAR, and subsequently adopted by UNICEF, is an essential component of any strategy for meeting the rights of the child. The WBTi will serve as a lens to find out gaps in policy and programmes at national level and help nations initiate action to bridge these gaps.

The solution, according to World Health Organisation is as simple as it is natural. According to studies, early initiation of breastfeeding, within an hour after birth could bring the neonatal mortality down by 22 percent. A January 2008 series on Maternal and Child Undernutrition that was published in medical journal Lancet said nearly 77 per cent (1.06 million) child deaths attributable to suboptimal breastfeeding are due to non-exclusive breastfeeding during 0-6 months of life. Breastfeeding promotion alone contributes to 11.6 per cent reduction in IMR if coverage of promotion is 99 per cent through one-to-one and group counseling, and can avert 21.9 million Disability Adjusted Life Years at 3 years.

With such staggering statistics lined up, the each country needs to give breastfeeding an impetus. The solution is simple: promote breastfeeding by committing money and resources. It is where World Breastfeeding Trends Initiative (WBTi) comes in.

Thus far, the initiative has succeeded in not just involving, but creating a level of enthusiasm seldom seen before, amongst several IBFAN and other civil society groups as well as governments across Asia.

According to Arun Gupta, the regional coordinator of IBFAN Asia, with the aggressive promotion of breastmilk substitutes and through surrogate advertisements, breastfeeding rates continue to be low in whole of Asia. Surprisingly, not much is committed, rather nutrition interventions of other nature like micronutrient malnutrition attract everybody because of business involved and breastfeeding is not on priority.

Radha Holla, Campaign coordinator of IBFAN Asia says "Baby foods for children under the age of two, should clearly be not allowed to be promoted in consonance with the World Health Organisation

recommendation of breastfeeding till 2 years” And part from this women in poor conditions need maternity benefits, much as those in organised sector need maternity leave. Baby care facilities crèches should be crated at work places. These are some of the solutions needed to protect breastfeeding, which cannot be seen, as women will do any way, they live in the world full of challenges.

Solutions are surely simple; promote breastfeeding by committing money and resources said Dr Dadhich, coordinating this programme.

Notes for Editors

About IBFAN

The International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN) is the 1998 Right Livelihood Award Recipient. It consists of more than 200 public interest groups working around the world to save lives of infants and young children by working together to bring lasting changes in infant feeding practices at all levels. IBFAN aims to promote the health and well being of infants and young children and their mothers through protection, promotion and support of optimal infant and young child feeding practices. IBFAN works for the universal and full implementation of *'International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes'* and subsequent relevant *World Health Assembly (WHA) resolutions*.

IBFAN Asia(www.ibfanasia.org) consists of 25 countries with 3 sub regions, South Asia, East Asia and Southeast Asia; each sub region being coordinated by the sub regional representative and overall coordination is done regional coordinating office in Delhi.

IBFAN Asia 2008-2012 plan includes two major projects: World Breastfeeding Trends Initiative (WBTi), www.worldbreastfeedingtrends.org and World Breastfeeding Movement (WBM), www.worldbreastfeedingmovement.org .

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Group of Participants in South Asia



Group of Participants in Southeast and East Asia