

EMBARGOED 12 June 2020

Tracking breastfeeding policies and programmes prompts national action

The World Breastfeeding Trends Initiative (WBTi) – now in its 15th year – shows how countries can increase breastfeeding rates.

A new [report “*Making A Difference* - An Evaluation Report of the World Breastfeeding Trends Initiative \(WBTi\) in Mobilising National Actions on Breastfeeding and IYCF, 2020”](#) demonstrates the power of periodic monitoring of policies and strategies. The report launched by the Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India ([BPNI](#))/International Baby Food Action Network ([IBFAN](#)) South Asia documents how simple and sustainable changes in policy/programmes have resulted in higher rates of exclusive breastfeeding in many countries, offsetting the multiple factors that undermine it.

Despite breastfeeding’s health and economic importance to individuals and nations, globally only 41% of infants of 0-6 months are exclusively breastfed. The World Health Assembly has set target of 50% by 2025 as a part of the [Comprehensive implementation plan on maternal, infant and young child nutrition](#).

The WBTi measures and tracks [“Ten” parameters of policy and programmes](#) based on the framework of the *Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding*. (These include *BFHI, Code, Maternity Protection, Health systems, monitoring, coordination and funding*). In its [global repository](#), 98 countries report on their policy and programmes, which show considerable gaps underlining the need for concerted action to achieve World Health Assembly targets.

According to WHO and UNICEF every pregnant and breastfeeding woman and her baby require an enabling environment in order to begin breastfeeding within an hour of birth, breastfeed exclusively for 6 months and continue breastfeeding along with adequate foods till 2 years or beyond. Use of infant formula is not a safe option especially during Covid19.

Dr. Francesco Branca, Director of WHO’s Department of Nutrition and Food Safety, says, *“The WBTi shows the importance of governments, UN Agencies and donor agencies prioritizing the tracking of breastfeeding policy and services. When policy makers have evidence that modest investments in implementation plans and interventions can reap huge rewards they will be much more likely to change.”*

The WBTi assists countries to assess and analyse gaps, and then calls for action to bridge the gaps. The process includes periodic monitoring every 3-5 years. This evaluation report is based on information provided by 51 countries, which responded

to a tested structured questionnaire during 2019. The WBTi process creates local leadership in the form of a skilled core group of organisations who can advocate for improved breastfeeding policy and services, including maternity protection, IFE etc. **The WBTi reports and analysis has prompted 2/3rds of governments to make commitments to improve and close policy gaps.**

However, the report also showed attention to BFHI is declining. Lack in political will and governance, lack of relevant data, lack of funding for the WBTi assessment from governments, were among the major challenges found.

Speaking on the occasion of the launch of the report, **Dr. Arun Gupta**, global coordinator of this programme said *“Since we all know that – “What gets measured gets done” – periodic monitoring is the key to success for policy change in this area. BFHI is one critical area needing the utmost attention. We are proud to have done this report independently”*

Patti Rundall, Policy Director, Baby Milk Action(UK) and member of the IBFAN’s Global Council, said *“WBTi shows the value of using simple tracking tools to show policy makers what works and what doesn’t. With such a rich source of evidence from so many countries in front of them, it will be much easier to argue that the protection of maternal and child health through breastfeeding deserves to be prioritised.”*

Dr. Mohammad Hamayoun Ludin, Senior Adviser to H.E. Minister of Public Health, Afghanistan; emphasised that *“WBTi has shown progressive trend over the five assessments conducted by the nutrition team at Ministry of Health. There have been specific achievements due to WBTi recommendations like development of IYCF policy and strategy approved by Ministry of Public Health, Government of Afghanistan.”*

Ends

Contacts

Dr. Arun Gupta +919899676306 arun.ibfan@gmail.com

Dr. JP Dadhich +9198739 26751 jpdadhich@gmail.com