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Breastfeeding mitigates the health impacts of indoor and outdoor air pollution

The most publicised measure to achieve targets to reduce global warming aims to reduce the burden of disease caused by air-borne particles and to reduce greenhouse gases that cause global warming. Replacing solid fuel cooking stoves and fuel for transport by renewable and sustainable 'clean' energy would address the health and environmental problems caused by indoor and outdoor air pollution.

Breastfeeding is a practical measure which has been shown to protect babies during their first months of life against the harmful effect of outdoor air pollution caused by neurotoxic particles and nitrogen dioxide. Prenatal exposures affect motor capacity and mental development, but neither the particle matter nor the nitrogen dioxide exert a harmful effect on babies breastfed for at least 4 months : See 'Breastfeeding protects against environmental pollution':

<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2015/05/150522083414.htm>

However, it is critical to address the causes of air pollution, indoor as well as outdoor, and again breastfeeding, in contrast to formula feeding, is doubly beneficial.

- Breastfeeding contributes to reducing outdoor air pollution because no transport is needed and no traffic fumes are emitted ;
- Breastfeeding alleviates indoor air pollution because no fuel is needed either for heating water to reconstitute formula or to wash feeding utensils.

These appear to be small quantities, but when multiplied by the millions of babies who are formula fed for up to two years, they can indeed have a significant impact.

IBFAN calls for funding and support for national assessments to provide country-level data on these health and environmental impacts.