



Launch of the global Breastfeeding Initiative for Child Survival: IBFAN marks its 30th anniversary

IBFAN is seizing the opportunity of its 30th anniversary to launch the **global Breastfeeding Initiative for Child Survival**. This is an international effort based on the power of people, firmly rooted in their communities, to mobilise public opinion to work with governments and press the baby food industry for changes in order to reduce rates of infant and maternal mortality.

In the past 30 years, the International Baby Food Action Network, IBFAN, has grown from a small group of founding NGOs to a worldwide network. IBFAN is using the strength and resilience of its 200 groups in 95 countries to exert pressure on national authorities to fulfil their legal obligations under international agreements and human rights treaties.

IBFAN was founded on 12 October 1979, the night that the Joint WHO/UNICEF Meeting on Infant and Young Child Feeding ended (1). The Meeting recommended an international code of marketing of infant formula and other products used as breastmilk substitutes. The six founding NGOs (2) created IBFAN in order to *"offer our fullest cooperation to WHO and UNICEF in this process to draft an international code, (...) believing that restraints should apply to any activity that seeks to increase sales directly or indirectly, and that includes any advertising, because it seeks to promote sales"*.

Dr. Anwar Fazal, the President of the International Organization of Consumer Unions, said that IBFAN was founded to *"provide an international framework for the continuation of the work and allow us to continue our vigilance and provide the focus for citizen participation"*. To avoid cumbersome bureaucratic procedures, IBFAN was conceived as a network of citizens' groups with a horizontal structure. In the words of Annelies Allain, Director of the International Code Documentation Centre: *"In this way the network could live up to its name as action oriented, capable of responding rapidly to the crisis in infant feeding caused by aggressive marketing and promotion of breastmilk substitutes"*.

Thirty years later, the need for IBFAN to instigate action is more urgent than ever. All over the world, the effects of the financial, economic and environmental crises are putting vulnerable babies at risk. Countries that were on track to attain the health-related Millennium Development Goals (3) are now back-sliding, while emergencies all over the world highlight the fragility of infant lives.

The scientific evidence base shows that optimal breastfeeding practices save millions of infant lives every year and prevent countless millions of children from lasting damage to health caused by malnutrition and disease (5). Yet, despite all this evidence, the baby milk companies continue to push their products using unsubstantiated claims, as shown in the recent article on breaking the law in Vietnam (6).

As the Deputy Director of UNICEF stated in 1984: *"People's movements, like IBFAN, are the most promising countervailing forces there are. They are the advocates of values, advocates of protection of the vulnerable, of small children"*. Since 2005, IBFAN has been using its experience in advocacy and monitoring to conduct the World Breastfeeding Trends initiative. The WBTi kick-started an exciting participatory process at country level to assess the state of breastfeeding, identify gaps and propose

action. National Reports already issued include India, China, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Uganda, Zambia, Ghana, Mozambique, Maldives, Ecuador, Dominican Republic, Bolivia, Costa Rica, Brazil, Uruguay, Korea and Mexico. All show that despite some progress, much remains to be done.

To inject new momentum into the existing efforts, IBFAN is launching **the global Breastfeeding Initiative for Child Survival (gBICS)**. It builds on the WBTi assessments and calls for a team of builders to construct a solid **"house for breastfeeding"** in every country of the world.(7)

By using the model of a house or dwelling, the gBICS aims to demonstrate the need for a series of elements to be in place, so that the construction stands firm. Dr. Arun Gupta, Coordinator of the IBFAN group in India that spearheads the WBTi, explains: *"The building team of NGOs and national authorities will use the WBTi as a magnifying glass to determine the rooms of the house that need to be built. There are three levels of the house: the protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding."* The roof that shelters the house is the set of comprehensive national policies and programmes that protect every child's right to survival and the highest attainable standard of health.

Notes for Editors

1. The Joint WHO/UNICEF Meeting on Infant and Young Child Feeding ended on October 12 1979. Its recommendations included also that there should be job security for employed mothers and paid maternity leave of not less than three months after delivery.
2. The six founding NGOs were NGOs representing citizens groups active in this area both in developed and developing countries: International Organization of Consumers Unions (IOCU); Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR); Infant Formula Action Coalition (INFAC); OXFAM; War on Want; Déclaration de Berne.
3. Particularly Goals 4, reduce child mortality and 5, improve maternal health. The 2008 report of Countdown to 2015 (UNICEF) increased the number of priority countries from 60 to 68, due to new data showing a worsening of key indicators.
4. Optimal breastfeeding practices are early initiation, within one hour of birth; followed by exclusive breastfeeding for six months and continued breastfeeding with the addition of nutritionally adequate and safe complementary foods for up to two years and beyond.
5. The Lancet Series on Maternal and Child Undernutrition 3. See What works? Interventions for maternal and child undernutrition and survival. January 17, 2008
6. Ben Stocking Multinationals break Vietnam law in formula sales, AP: <http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory?id=8618779>
7. Please see attached description of the symbolic **"gBICS house"**.
8. The house is grounded in the human rights framework and its foundations are the WHO/UNICEF Global Strategy on Infant and Young Child Feeding.