



**World Alliance for  
Breastfeeding Action**

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## **International Women's Day Press Statement**

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### **EQUAL RIGHTS, EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES: PROGRESS FOR ALL**

All human beings have human rights, and that includes women and girls. Achieving equal opportunities and rights for women and girls is an important goal for WABA (the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action) in its campaign to protect, promote and support breastfeeding around the world. Gender disparities in economic power sharing, unequal access to land, capital, resources and labour markets, as well as harmful traditional and customary practices such as early marriages, still constrain women's economic and social empowerment and exacerbate the feminisation of poverty. Women are denied equal rights when they are paid less than men for the same or comparable work; passed over for promotions, training opportunities, or high paying occupations; subjected to sexual harassment; and penalised for taking time off to care for their children and families.

Furthermore, despite efforts made at country level, and despite progress in national legislation, gender discrimination still exists in the family, social, cultural, political and economic spheres. **WABA calls for policy changes to modify the social roles imposed on women and men, with the goal of encouraging more equal sharing of family responsibilities between men and women.**

A key obstacle to equal opportunities at work is the difference in the roles that society imposes on each gender, with the main responsibility for care of children and the home falling on women. In addition, most women's careers are interrupted for reproduction. Workplace policies—words that generally express a commitment to equal opportunity and workplace diversity—cannot guarantee women access to their entitlements (such as paid maternity leave) in the absence of enabling conditions, a proactive management agenda that applies these policies in a real sense. An equitable workplace culture that benefits all employees would include encouraging women to apply for senior positions, actively supporting family friendly policies for both male and female workers, and accommodating requests for part time or job sharing arrangements. Men should be encouraged to take paternity or parental leave, and both

parents should be able to share the responsibility of caring for their children on an equal basis. Such equitable measures would help both women and men to balance work and family life, with significant consequences for increasing the female employment rate and ensuring healthier families.

According to international conventions, breastfeeding is a right of every woman and is essential to fulfill every child's right to adequate food and the highest attainable standard of health. Worldwide, one impact of gender discrimination is that women carry a disproportionate share of caring responsibilities, particularly child care. Breastfeeding<sup>1</sup> is significant caring work that is unique to women. The economic contribution which women make by breastfeeding typically goes unnoticed; the tons of milk delivered by a nation's mothers to its young children are not counted in the Gross Domestic Product. **According to WABA, gender-equitable division of labour would recognise the unique care work done by lactating women and would accommodate it by assuring that enabling conditions are ensured for women to combine breastfeeding and work and for fathers/partners to take responsibility for a larger share of other child care duties.** This would be a way to recognise breastfeeding and support it in the context of gender equality and just development.

**WABA shares the common position of women's advocates that reproductive work, feeding of children and caring for family (socially and economically) should be properly valued and adequately supported by society.** Specific support can come in the form of laws, social equity measures like paid maternity leave; family and community support and very important, a positive attitude.

*For more information, kindly contact:*

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<sup>1</sup> Breastfeeding provides an unmatched source of nutrition for young children, not only for healthy growth and development but also for better survival of infants. Feeding and nurturing children contributes to a nation's healthy workforce for the future.