

World Food Day

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The New *Right to Food and Nutrition WATCH* 2009

Who controls the governance of the World Food System

The World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) is pleased to announce the release of the new issue of the *Right to Food and Nutrition WATCH*. This year's edition focuses on the question of "Who controls the governance of the world food system?" – a burning issue in light of the current World Food Crisis. WABA has contributed two items for this year's publication that focus on pertinent Infant and Young Child feeding issues.

The WATCH, available in three languages, is a common endeavor of a Consortium of human rights organizations, social movements and development agencies. The Consortium for the WATCH 2009 is composed by Brot für die Welt, the Interchurch Organization for Development Cooperation (ICCO) and FIAN International as publishers, and World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA), People's Health Movement (PHM), Habitat International Coalition (HIC), World Organisation against Torture (OMCT), DanChurchAid, Rights and Democracy, Plataforma Interamericana de Derechos Humanos Democracia y Desarrollo (PIDHDD), and African Right to Food Network as partners.

For the first time in history, the number of undernourished people in the world has surpassed the tragic figure of 1 billion. The gap between promises and reality is increasing as the international community and national governments are painfully far from realising the World Food Summit targets to halve the proportion of chronically hungry people in the world by the year 2015. It is clear that the global governance of the World Food System needs to be remodelled in order to effectively overcome hunger and its causes.

As an evidence-providing monitoring tool, the WATCH pursues two aims: to put public pressure on policy makers at the national and international level to take the human right to food serious, and to provide a systematic compilation of best practices for the realisation of the right to food, while documenting where violations take place.

In light of this, WABA and its partners believe that improving breastfeeding practices has great potential for helping to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Internationally agreed recommendations for optimal feeding of infants and young child advocate exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life, followed by complementary feeding and continued breastfeeding for up to two years or beyond. Feeding practices which are not in accord with these recommendations (sub-optimal breastfeeding) may be responsible for 12% of deaths in children under 5 years. Almost a quarter of these preventable deaths (23%) are due to lack of continued breastfeeding in the 6-24+ month age group.

Amongst the many stakeholders in malnutrition, there is no well-resourced breastfeeding champion, let alone an advocate for continued breastfeeding beyond 6 months. Diminishing public sector funds have created a funding reliance on Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) for research and programme implementation, but there are no clear private partners stepping forward to invest in breastfeeding. This is in contrast to the resources available through PPPs for research and investment in improved complementary foods, (often with partners who have vested interests.) The creation of public-private partnerships to improve complementary foods risks using government bodies and public resources to

promote commercialisable products (such as Ready to Use Therapeutic Foods) and creating monopolies, particularly where patenting is involved. Support for continued breastfeeding and best use of indigenous food may be a better long-term sustainable investment. Mother's milk is the ultimate indigenous food; locally made, sustainably available, untouched by fluctuations in prices and logistics, and requiring no foreign exchange for importation. Its quality and safety is assured even in countries where food standards are weak and fake or adulterated food products are a concern. Finally continued breastfeeding is an environmentally-friendly way to feed a child, giving the child and the world it has entered, a better start for life.

A Joint Statement on Continued Breastfeeding was produced following the WABA Global Breastfeeding Partners Meeting (GBPM) in October 2008 in response to shared concerns that breastfeeding after 6 months has slipped off government as well as international policy and programme agenda. The statement clearly calls to ensure that protection, promotion and support of continued breastfeeding 6–24+ months is prioritised on the policy, programme and research agenda. The statement also advocates for consideration of the intrinsic value and normalcy of continued breastfeeding for the mother-baby dyad, households, communities, health systems, governments and the wider community seeking achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and health together with well-being for all. WABA strongly believes that efforts must be made to ensure that children get enough and diverse foods to eat and to prevent malnutrition. Nations must first put in place preventive health and nutrition policies, and they should resist commercial interventions in the name of addressing problems of child malnutrition.

The full statement on Protecting, Promoting and Supporting Continued Breastfeeding from 6–24 + Months: Issues, Politics, Policies & Action is available from the WABA website. The statement has also been included in the WATCH 2009 publication.

To download the WATCH please go to http://www.waba.org.my/pdf/watch2009_en.pdf