



WABA POSITION STATEMENT INFANT FEEDING AND GLOBALIZATION

Globalization, per se, allows all peoples to physically, legally, culturally and psychologically engage with each other in one world. Commercial 'Globalization' is the worldwide transformation of the economy by a continuous reduction of barriers to commerce and marketing. These processes have been developing over centuries but have accelerated over the past decades as a result of new communication and transport technologies and geopolitical developments, and by ideology inspired by 'economism'⁽¹⁾ and 'marketism'⁽²⁾.

Globalization is based on beliefs which can negatively affect people's health and well being. A recent example is the milk contamination scandal in China which had worldwide repercussions, far beyond the 60,000 babies in China that have suffered directly. It has destroyed Sanlu and caused Fonterra to be damaged forever thus wiping out confidence in New Zealand's dairy. And a most poignant illustration of globalization is the present financial failures in the US, Europe and elsewhere, which have negative repercussions on people everywhere.

The doctrine that privatization, liberalization and deregulation of assets will achieve the greatest economic growth and will subsequently be reflected in improved welfare and wellbeing regards globalization only as an economic process of production, exchange and consumption of resources. It ignores cultural, ecological, geographical, political, ethical and psychological aspects of diversity. One result that has been observed is that regulatory bodies seem to be shifting their focus from protecting consumers to protecting commercial interests.

While global outputs of goods and services have increased, as measured in percentage of GDP, poverty and marginalization have increased as well, even in the richest countries. Economic power and wealth have tended to be concentrated in the hands of a small minority. Distribution of goods is not central to economic models of this sort. Growing uniformity is destroying cultural diversity. Uniformity in agricultural production threatens the basic right to food and food sovereignty. Hunger is more widespread and even famine is now a daily fact in several parts of the world. The growing cash economy forces even small farmers to push prices upward and encourages their planting of cash crops to the detriment of food sufficiency.

Commercial globalization is now found as a programme of political parties and policies of governments, who are bowing to the interests of transnational corporations which, through mergers and acquisitions, are becoming fewer and larger. Certain sectors of the world economy are now dominated by one or two corporations alone. The pursuit of domination and higher profits can and has lead to disregard of people, financial crises, massive unemployment and the questionable policy of using of public funds to bail out banks, financial institutions, and corporations. This results in a change in power relations; governments are increasingly subsidizing the rich and powerful, not the poor and unempowered.

A political environment which promotes deregulation or re-regulation that reduces costs and increases capacity to produce is a desirable prerequisite for corporations to profit. Regulations favoring consumer interests may be seen as anathema for profit making.

Breastfeeding has no profit motive: it is about babies, about mothers, about people.

1) Breastfeeding does not produce a financial profit for any corporation, and therefore is ignored or actively undermined by the commercial sector. Society does not as yet value the fact that women produce millions of litres of milk for the survival and health of our next generation. If valued in economic terms, possibly trillions of dollars in improved health, nutrition, development and productivity are breastfeeding's gift to the world. This is ignored in the commercial globalization framework. Whereas a number of governments have adopted measures to encourage breastfeeding (e.g., blueprints for action, training lactation consultants, BFHI, labeling provisions, some restrictions on marketing of baby foods and infant feeding products), none have given it the financial and political support needed.

2) The UN has given corporations an increasing voice in decisions on development policies and activities that impact on health issues. The private-public partnerships endorsed by UN bodies can undermine optimal infant feeding. One evident outcome for private companies in such PPPs dealing with infant feeding and health is the ability to bypass international or government imposed regulations, allowing unfettered promotion of commercial products that displace breastfeeding.

3) Commercial globalization has eliminated jobs. New factories in the more than 2,000 export processing zones (EPZ) around the world employ a majority of women and particularly young women, but most labor legislation, including maternity leave provisions, is not applicable in those EPZs. Women's rights and decisions in infant feeding are reduced if not eliminated.

4) Globalization has led to the impoverishment of the already poor, forcing mothers to leave their homes in search of paid employment, mostly in the unprotected non-formal work sector, while maintaining the same demands on them at home, and without social support to replace the community solidarity networks and links that have been broken. Poverty and migration means greater stress on families, women less able to care for their babies, less time and money to prepare food, less confidence in their ability to breastfeed and less time to process and use locally available foods. The result is stunting. The solution most often advocated is commercial infant formula and complementary foods, rather than support for mothers and families to practice successful optimal feeding.

5) The pressure to capture emerging markets and profits from these commercial foods can and has denied women their right to full unbiased information and their right to follow optimal infant feeding practices, thus facilitating an increasingly harmful global and societal withdrawal of support for breastfeeding. In sum, globalization of commercial markets:

- promotes formula-feeding instead of breastfeeding as a maternal (and paternal) entitlement;
- permits hospitals and healthworkers to be absolved from the responsibility to “prevent harm”, and protect mothers from commercial pressures, to provide mothers and all patients with up-to-date unbiased evidence-based information, and to assist every mother to breastfeed her child;
- transfers accountability for infant and young child morbidity and mortality due to formula feeding from governments to mothers, based on the rationale of protection of private interests rather than public health.

Our responsibility is to encourage governments and other policy entities to defend mothers’ rights and to protect, promote and support breastfeeding, in order to contribute to improved nutrition, to a better world for babies and mothers, and to the future of humankind. We must voice criticism of the economic globalization agenda pursued by most governments. Breastfeeding protection and promotion is part of the struggle for ‘a better world for all’.

“WABA opposes the existing commercial globalization agenda, as pursued by governments and corporations, because:

- a) it creates unemployment, insecurity, poverty, hunger and destitution;*
- b) it robs governments of the role and tools to promote the health and wellbeing of their people;*
- c) it destroys the livelihoods of billions of poor people;*
- d) it forces many young women to seek employment under harsh conditions, deprived of labor law protection and thus prevents many mothers from breastfeeding;*
- e) it contributes to malnutrition by spreading poverty;*
- f) it allows the undermining of public and private efforts to support breastfeeding;*
- g) it reduces governments’ independence and ability to offer affordable health services and support for breastfeeding;*
- h) it contributes to inequity and perpetuates women’s lack of equal opportunities”.*

⁽¹⁾ Economism: The belief that the economic mode of production absolutely determines a society's political, social and intellectual life. Economism means reducing every value to its cash equivalent and using GNP growth as the sole measure of how well we are doing.

⁽²⁾ Marketism: The belief that left to its own devices, the market will create beneficial outcomes for all. Free marketism is based on the Adam Smith model of economics, in which the invisible hand of competition in a free marketplace will result in maximum prosperity, freedom, and happiness for everyone.

The World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) is a global network of individuals & organisations concerned with the protection, promotion & support of breastfeeding worldwide. WABA action is based on the Innocent Declaration, the Ten Links for Nurturing the Future and the WHO/UNICEF Global Strategy for Infant & Young Child Feeding.). Its core partners are International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN), La Leche League International (LLL), International Lactation Consultant Association (ILCA), Wellstart International and Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine (ABM). WABA is in consultative status with UNICEF & an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC). WABA is incorporated in Malaysia as World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action Bhd (847762-P), a non-profit company limited by guarantee.

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