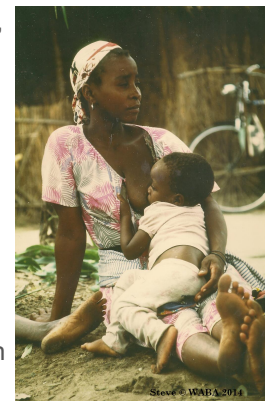


A WALL OF SUPPORT FOR BREASTFEEDING – ACHIEVING THE NEW NORMAL

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-WABA perspectives on the “US versus Breastfeeding” debate-

What do Botswana, Canada, Gambia, Georgia, Ghana, Kenya, Mexico, Mozambique, Namibia, Nepal, Pakistan, Panama, Russian Federation, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Zambia all have in common? They are all countries that took the lead and defended breastfeeding at the 71st World Health Assembly (WHA) in Geneva.



Over the last few days, many of us have been shocked by the viral news of the resistance to the 2018 WHA resolution on infant and young child feeding. According to Mr. Hussein Tarimo, an independent consultant from Tanzania and Steering Committee member of the [World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action \(WABA\)](#) who attended WHA as an observer, “*The US position on the first day of the 71st WHA did not surprise me much because even in 1981, the US was the only country that was against the adoption of the WHA resolution on the [International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes](#)”.* Perhaps we should not be so surprised. After all, there is a \$70 billion worth global market at stake. On the other hand, very few are talking about the great wall of support represented by the eighteen countries that took the lead in defending breastfeeding at the WHA. There were some [gains and some losses](#) in the [final WHA resolution](#).

WABA and its partners advocate for the protection, promotion and support or PPS of breastfeeding. The Code, as it is commonly called, is one key global instrument to control the marketing of breastmilk substitutes, foods and related products. It therefore protects breastfeeding. It does not prevent formula from being available for those babies and mothers who need it for any reason. Sixty-seven countries around the world are already implementing, monitoring and enforcing national legislation that cover all or most of the provisions of the Code. In addition to protection, mothers need a [warm chain of support](#) across the 1000 days from pregnancy until their child’s second birthday. The warm chain of support covers both healthcare, community and workplace interventions such as baby-friendly hospitals, skilled community-based counsellors and parental social protection packages.



Promotion of breastfeeding to garner public support is yet another vital strategy. Between August 1-7, the world celebrates World Breastfeeding Week (WBW) which engages people and organisations at all levels to take action along a theme. This year, the slogan is [Breastfeeding: Foundation of Life](#). The 2018 WHA resolution endorses WBW.

The case for breastfeeding is clear. While there are a few recognised medical situations where infants may need to be formula fed and situations where some parents may choose to provide infant formula, there is a growing body of evidence that no industrially processed substitute comes close to providing the optimal health and development that breastmilk does. The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends breastfeeding exclusively for the first six months of life to achieve optimal growth, development and health. Thereafter, children should be given nutritious complimentary foods and continue breastfeeding up to the age of two or beyond. The 2016 [Lancet](#) Journal series on breastfeeding presented the cumulative evidence that breastfeeding has lifelong positive effects on children and mothers’ health, wellbeing and survival. Exclusive breastfeeding for six months is the safest and healthiest option for children everywhere. Scaling up optimal breastfeeding could prevent 823 000 child deaths and 20 000 maternal deaths from breast cancer each year. Currently, only 40% of children below six months of age are exclusively breastfed.



The environmental and economic costs of not breastfeeding are also huge. Did you know that 4000 litres of water are required to produce one kilogram of infant formula? Or that the 720 000 tonnes of formula sold annually in six Asian countries generate almost 2.9 million tonnes of greenhouse gases? Another shocking figure is the annual economic losses of about USD 302 billion or 0.49% of the world gross national income.

These evidence-based arguments perhaps explain why the eighteen countries mentioned above took the lead against the US resistance and created a wall of support for breastfeeding. A move that they deserve to be congratulated for.

Breastfeeding helps prevent malnutrition in all its forms, enhances food security even in times of crisis and thus helps to bring people and nations out of the hunger and poverty cycle. It is therefore a foundation of life. Protecting, promoting and supporting breastfeeding is vital to a more sustainable world. According to Irma Chavarria Maza, from World Food Programme Guatemala and WABA Steering Committee member who also observed the debates at WHA: “*Governments, UN*

agencies and civil society organisations must work together to create the enabling and supportive environment for breastfeeding, which will also lead to a healthier, more prosperous and more sustainable world.”

World Breastfeeding Week 2018 is just around the corner. Let us all protect, promote and support breastfeeding and achieve the new normal!

World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) Steering Committee
12 July 2018

#holdtheline #WABA #WBW2018 #ebf6 #breastfeeding #normalizebreastfeeding #WarmChain

