

6 Mother support and Community Outreach: Community-based support for the pregnant and breastfeeding mother

Community-based support for women is essential for succeeding in optimal breastfeeding practices. Step 10 of BFHI as well as the Global Strategy for IYCF, which includes mother support and peer support, recognizes this need. Mother Support, as defined by the Global Initiative for Mother Support (GIMS) is “any support provided to mothers for the purpose of improving breastfeeding practices for both mother and infant & young child”.

Women need the support of evidence-based public health policies, health providers, employers, friends, family, the community, and particularly of other women and mothers in regards to preparation for breastfeeding which can come during the pregnancy and postpartum and after delivery. Reaching community level to give appropriate support, community volunteers or health workers under the health systems can offer and ensure sustained support to mothers. Their knowledge and skills have to be at the highest quality and they must have required training for giving support. It is necessary to have appropriate counseling in the community for motivation and increasing confidence in breastfeeding and home based complementary feeding. The support to mothers can be provided at the door steps by the women's groups- sometimes they are the mother support group (MSG) who are composed of some successful mothers and others of the same community. Mother support group is a core component of empowerment of the women. With

correct knowledge at community and outreach level, mothers can help themselves by giving exclusive breastfeeding up to six months and continue for two years or beyond and start home based appropriate complementary food by themselves when services and counselling are available by mother support groups and or health worker serving under the health services. Other important area is to consider the people living in remote areas where services are difficult to provide and receive.

Community counselling and services on IYCF are to be focused to new mothers, and various vulnerable groups. There is also need to provide adequate information to improve maternal nutrition without which IYCF action by mothers may be suboptimal as the mother is incapable to produce good quality milk and prepare and feed complementary foods appropriately.

Mother support is often seen as woman to woman (or more commonly known as mother-to-mother) but generally covers providing accurate and timely information to help a woman to build confidence; providing sound recommendations based on up-to-date research; providing compassionate care before, during and after childbirth; practicing empathy and active listening, providing hands-on assistance and practical guidance. It also includes support and counseling by health professionals and health care workers. Various community outreach services can also support women in optimal IYCF.

This indicator examines if there are mother support and community outreach systems in place to protect, promote and support optimal practices. (Table 6)

The indicator gets an average score of 6.27 out of 10, showing that in most countries pregnant women and women who have just given birth have some access to community-based support systems on IYCF. Six countries are coded Green, scoring a perfect 10. It is an interesting fact that these are developing countries who have

understood the need to use cultural and social existing networks to support mothers.

Thirty one countries score between 7-9 and are coded Blue. More than half the countries (45) score between 4-6 and only two countries namely Cape Verde and Libya scores zero, and are coded Red (Figure 15).

It seems all regions are faring average with more in the Yellow color coding. Some countries in Europe, Asia and Africa are doing better and achieved a blue color coding.

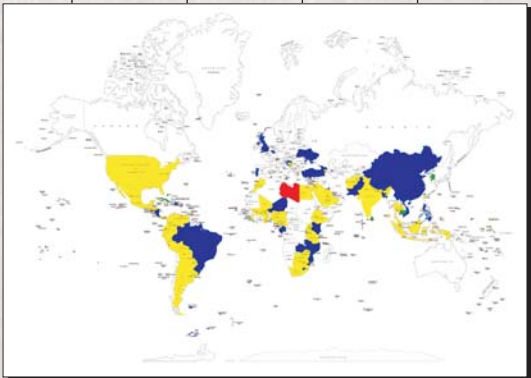
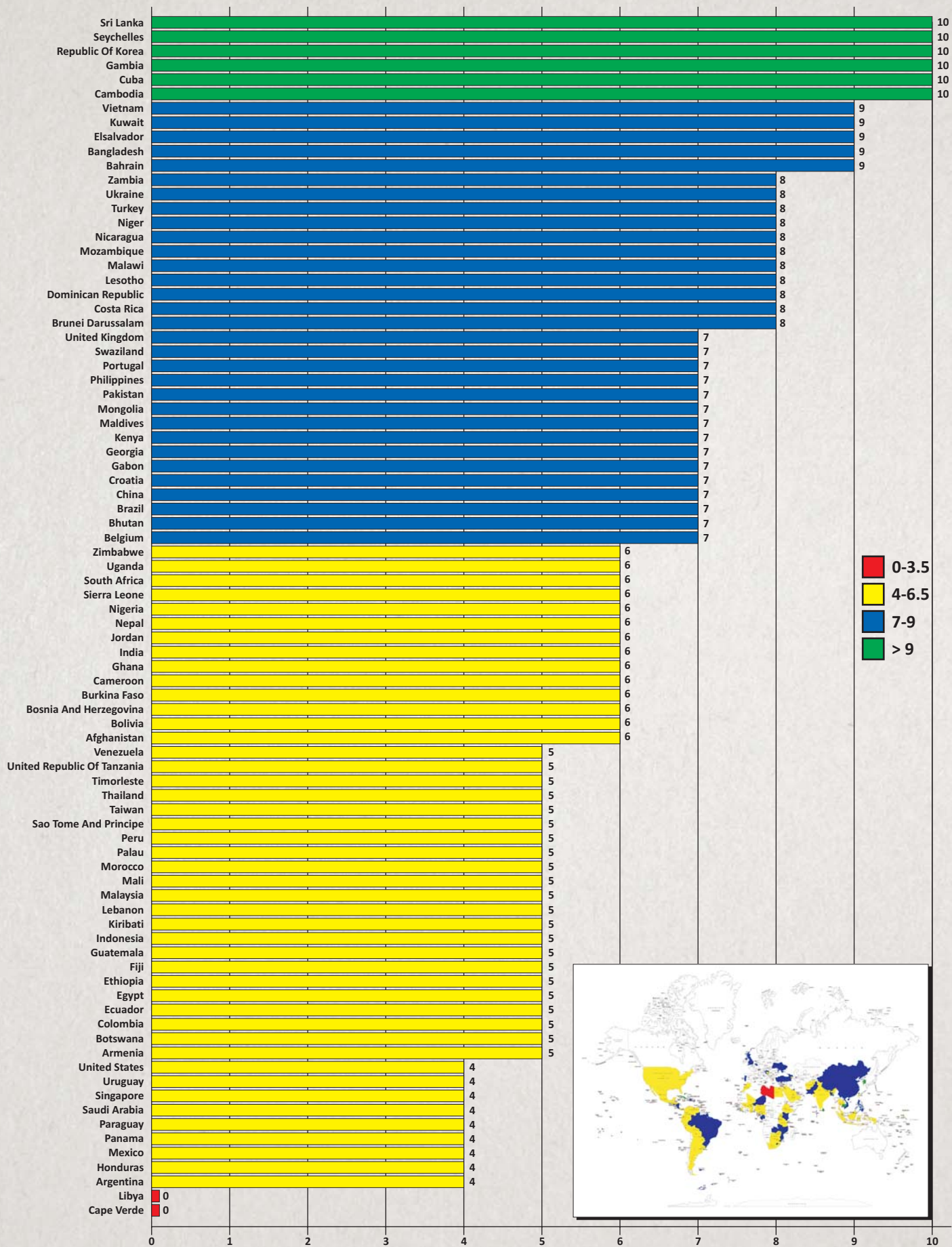
Table 6: Key question and subset questionnaire for indicator on mother support and community outreach and scoring criteria

Key question: Are there mother support and community outreach systems in place to protect, promote and support optimal infant and young child feeding

**Guidelines for scoring
Criteria**

	Scoring ✓ Check that apply		
	Yes	To some degree	No
6.1) All pregnant women have access to community-based ante-natal and post-natal support systems with counseling services on infant and young child feeding.	2	1	0
6.2) All women receive support for infant and young child feeding at birth for breastfeeding initiation.	2	1	0
6.3) All women have access to counseling support for Infant and young child feeding counseling and support services have national coverage.	2	1	0
6.4) Community-based counseling through Mother Support Groups (MSG) and support services for the pregnant and breastfeeding woman are integrated into an overall infant and young child health and development policy IYCF/Health/Nutrition Policy.	2	1	0
6.5) Community-based volunteers and health workers are trained in counseling skills for infant and young child feeding.	2	1	0
Total Score:	-----/10		

Figure 15: The state of mother support and community outreach in 84 countries on a scale of 0-10



Analysis and Conclusion

Analysis of the subset of questions (Figure 16) reveals that although 35 countries report having community-based support integrated in the child health and development strategy, just 26 countries report that all pregnant and lactating women have access to such services. Similarly only 17 countries report that their community-based workers possess the skills and knowledge to counsel on breastfeeding/IYCF.

Analysis shows that some of the

countries are giving adequate training in information and counseling skills to the community workers, however overall community support to women to practice optimal IYCF is inadequate. All women need access to skilled counseling, and daycare services at work-sites. Countries need to enhance their counseling capacity of community workers, making available community based support to mothers and giving her access to right information and counseling as and when desired for enhancing optimal IYCF practices.

Figure 16: Status of subset questions for indicator on mother support and community outreach in 84 countries

