



NIGHTINGALE Nursing Times

A WINDOW FOR HEALTH IN ACTION

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**CANCER CAN BE
PREVENTED**

WORLD CANCER DAY - 4 FEBRUARY

World Cancer Day is celebrated every year on 4 February. It is led by **Union for International Cancer Control (UICC)** and its member organisations with the support of the World Health Organization. The global campaign aims to raise awareness about cancer prevention and control on a global scale.

DID YOU KNOW THAT ...

30 – 40 % of cancers can be prevented, and one-third of cancers can be cured through early diagnosis and treatment.

Your risk can be significantly reduced through simple measures

- Stopping tobacco use and avoiding exposure to passive smoke
- Limiting alcohol consumption
- Avoiding excessive sun exposure
- Regular physical activity
- Eating healthily
- Maintaining a healthy weight
- Protecting against cancer-causing infections

All infants not receiving timely breastfeeding

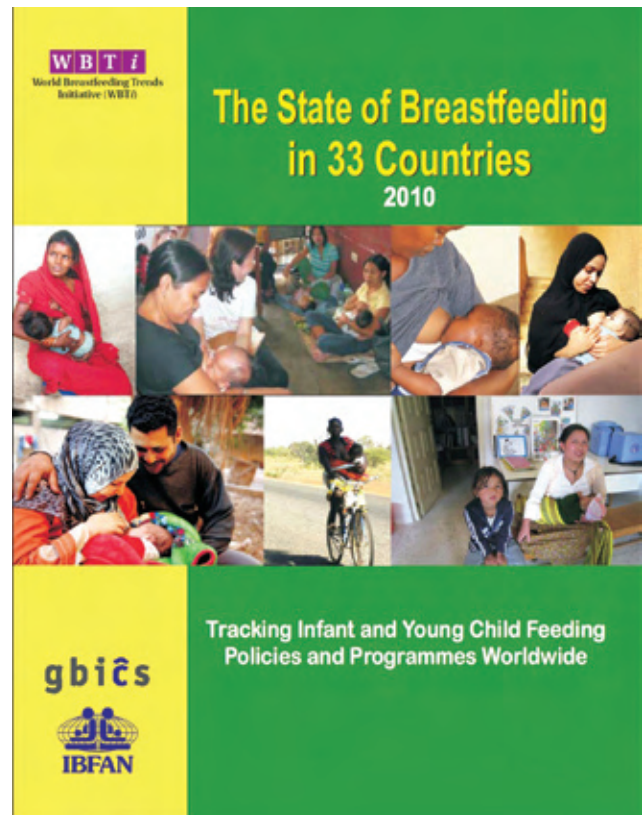
The newly released report, *"The State of Breastfeeding in 33 Countries: 2010, Tracking infant and Young Child Feeding Policies and Programmes Worldwide"* shows how babies are missing out on their foundation of development and basic protection from disease. Millions of newborn babies are still not receiving timely breastfeeding within one hour or exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months and timely and appropriate complementary feeding after six months along with continued breastfeeding, a period that is so critical for survival and brain development.

The report was launched at a function held in New Delhi in December last year by Ms Ann Ollestad, Ambassador of Norway to India. Speaking on the occasion, Ms Ollestad pointed out the importance of optimal feeding of babies and shared strategies how it was made possible in Norway through support systems for women both at work as well as in health system.

Mr. P K Pradhan, Additional Secretary, Health, Government of India said that early initiation and exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months is crucial for health of the child, and under the National Rural Health Mission, promotion of this practice will be done effectively.

National groups in 33 countries assessed the policy and programmes on breastfeeding and infant and young child feeding as part of the World Breastfeeding Trends Initiative (WBTi). The exercise revealed that not a single country among those 33 who have completed this work, have achieved a GREEN rating (Score of 90% plus), and only 9 achieved a BLUE rating, the next level of performance.

The WBTi report clearly shows that policies and programmes are lagging behind in all the 10 areas of action highlighted in the W.H.O.'s *Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding*, especially in relation to support to women when they need it most for feeding their children optimally.



The report is particularly important as the world prepares to rapidly achieve MDG 4 – halving under five-child mortality by 2015.

Optimal breastfeeding has been shown to protect lives irrespective of poverty, lack of sanitation, and other factors including in developing countries where majority of deaths take place.

According to the UN Secretary General's recently launched *Global Strategy for Women's and Children's Health*, in 2015 alone, 21.9 million more infants would be exclusively breastfed for first six monthsⁱⁱⁱ. Most countries have not been able to raise their exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months rates because of weak or un-coordinated action on three of the most important interventions – having a national plan of action with a budget, good health care support facilities, and adequate maternity protection.

Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg of Norway led the launch of a global campaign in 2007 to save the lives of millions of women and children. He said, "...four million newborn who die in their first month may survive the first days and weeks of their lives if they are breastfed, and have access to antibiotics and health personnel..."

The report of 33 countries identifies specific gaps and makes recommendations for each country. For example, in most of the countries, including in the south Asian region where more than 3 million children under 5 die and over 45% are undernourished, there is very weak or uncoordinated action on three of the most important interventions for improving breastfeeding and timely and appropriate complementary feeding - having a national plan of action with a budget, good health care support facilities, and adequate maternity protection.

"The report highlights the fact that economic growth does not necessarily translates into improved infant feeding", says Dr. Arun Gupta, member of the Prime Minister's Council on India's Nutrition Challenges and the Regional Coordinator of International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN) Asia. If you look at the new booming economy block BRIC; Brazil, India, China, while policy makers focus on the expansion of the economy through market growth, in this report mothers, children and child health are the losers, he says.

"Over 78 million births take place in these 33 WBTi countries - more than half of the babies born world over - yet only about 36 million are exclusively breastfed for the first six months. That shows it all. Much more needs to be done to support women with maternity protection to enable them to combine breastfeeding with returning to work." says Dr Gupta who is the creator of

the World Breastfeeding Trends Initiative (WBTi).

Having a national policy and plan of action means nothing without a budget. The first step towards providing support to women; only a few countries have it. Lack of funding for actions on breastfeeding, and infant and young child feeding emerges as a major gap.

According to the Report, only two countries have achieved a reasonable score on maternity protection, an area, which is critical, if women have to optimally feed their infants. Two major factors that emerge from the report and are the constraints: lack of understanding on how to do and lack of financial resources.

According to Dr JP Dadhich, National Coordinator, Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India (BPNI), "Many governments are now taking steps to support breastfeeding. But unless action is taken to stop the misleading commercial promotion of baby feeding products - especially the health and nutrition claims; all these efforts are undermined. Even after three decades baby food companies continue to influence health sector, education sector to undermine optimal infant feeding. Women need consistent truly independent, evidence-based information and support when they need it - if they don't get this its simply not fair to blame them when things go wrong".

Piecemeal approaches do not work, according to a 2010 report from UNICEF that comprehensively assessed programmes in six countries. Action needs to be taken now, or millions of newborns will miss their basic human right i.e. optimal food and protection from diseases. ■

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Editor