
How long do we ignore the price of not breastfeeding babies?
DID YOU KNOW...

THAT TRILLIONS OF DOLLARS WILL BE SPENT IN THE NEXT THREE DECADES to combat diseases caused by formula feeding such as diarrhoea, pneumonia, neonatal infections, maternal cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, hypertension and other noncommunicable diseases in adulthood.

THAT THE RISK OF NONCOMMUNICABLE DISEASES CAN BE SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCED by a simple practice – of optimally breastfeeding their babies.

THAT MOTHER’S MILK IS UNIQUE IN HAVING THOUSANDS OF LIVE IMMUNE CELLS AND ENZYMES which protect babies from all kinds of disease. This cannot be matched by any other milk.

THAT IF 90% MOTHERS IN USA OPTIMALLY BREASTFEED THEIR BABIES, the US will save USD 13 billion annually in treating diseases such as necrotising enterocolitis, otitis media, gastroenteritis, lower respiratory tract infections, atopic dermatitis, sudden infant death syndrome, childhood leukaemia, type-1 diabetes, etc. (Bartick MJ et al, 2010)

THAT IF 90% MOTHERS IN AUSTRALIA OPTIMALLY BREASTFEED THEIR BABIES, Australia will save between USD 55.8 to 111.7 million annually on the treatment of gastrointestinal illness, respiratory and ear infections, eczema and neonatal necrotising enterocolitis. (Smith J et al, 2002)

THE NEED TO INVEST IN BABIES

This is a research and advocacy paper initiated by International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN) Asia as part of the World Breastfeeding Costing Initiative. It presents sobering facts and figures to showcase the price countries pay by not supporting the practice of optimal breastfeeding. The report also recommends what can still be done— at policy, funding and implementation levels— to save the high price paid in suffering, in medical expenses and in needless loss of lives of newborns and adults.

WHAT IS OPTIMAL BREASTFEEDING

- MOTHERS breastfeed within one hour of birth.
- BABIES are only breastfed for the first six months of life. No water or food supplements.
- CONTINUED breastfeeding for two years and beyond along with nutritionally adequate and safe complementary food starting after six months.
The WHO champions optimal breastfeeding as one of the most effective ways to ensure fundamental health and development of children. Breastfeeding reduces diarrhoea, pneumonia, and newborn disease and deaths. Breastfeeding also contributes to the reduction of diabetes, cancer, hypertension and other noncommunicable diseases in adulthood.

Yet, breastfeeding is amongst the most under-funded nutrition interventions in the world. Very few countries have developed a policy for improving breastfeeding or even allocate a specific budget for this.

A woman’s capacity to breastfeed is a national asset...

...in it is the DNA for a healthy people. And it is time countries respect, protect, support and promote breastfeeding practices with the same political will and financial vigour with which they champion nation building initiatives such as universalising elementary education, infrastructure development and skill building.

Suboptimal Breastfeeding

The Scenario Today

- 60% babies don’t receive optimal breastfeeding.
- Only 42% of mothers and babies initiate breastfeeding within the first hour of life.
- Only 39% mothers are able to practise exclusive breastfeeding during the first six months of life.

According to WHO breastfeeding can enhance intelligence in childhood and adolescence by 3.5 points.

Formula fed infants have an increased risk of severe lower respiratory infections* and leukaemia** compared to babies exclusively breastfed for at least four months.

The Price of Suboptimal Breastfeeding

- More than 800,000 infant deaths caused by childhood infections of pneumonia, diarrhoea, etc. related to formula or mixed feeding.
- Alarming increase in the use of infant formula despite the health risks such food has for an infant. The global sales of baby food are projected to grow by 37% (USD 11.5 billion) to USD 42.7 billion from 2008 to 2013 (Euromonitor).
- Increase in incidences of diabetes, obesity, cancer, leukaemia, hypertension and other noncommunicable diseases for babies who were not optimally breastfed (WHO).

What Needs to be Done

Based on the Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding adopted by WHO/UNICEF, The Need to Invest in Babies identifies what governments and funders must do to protect, promote and support the practice of breastfeeding:

- Develop policies and plans and coordinate their implementation
- Set up a health and nutrition care system: The Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative + training of health workers
- Provide community services and support to breastfeed
- Promote messages and practices of optimal breastfeeding through media
- Offer maternity protection
- Implement the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes and subsequent World Health Assembly resolutions
- Monitor and evaluate the progress of the initiatives listed above, targeted at achieving the practice of optimal breastfeeding by at least 90% mothers in the country.
How Much To Invest?

**LESSTHAN THE COST OF 2 WARSHIPS!**

Globally, about **USD 17.5 billion** needs to be invested annually to put in place a package of interventions to create an enabling environment for breastfeeding.

This estimate assumes:

- Every woman has a right to protection, access to unbiased information and support for optimal breastfeeding.
- Interventions for creating this enabling environment need to be scaled up 100% and implemented concurrently.
- Women below the poverty line need financial assistance as maternity benefit in lieu of wages, to enable them to keep their infants with them for exclusive breastfeeding.
- Services to be provided by existing personnel from the health services, labour departments, legal departments, social welfare departments, etc., with additional capacity building.

* A US 100,000 ton CVN warship costs approx. USD 10.4 billion

**MAKE YOUR OWN ESTIMATE**

For every country to arrive at its very own cost figure, the WORLD BREASTFEEDING COSTING INITIATIVE provides a ‘financial planning tool’ to assist governments to plan and prioritise actions that will enable all mothers to breastfeed their babies effectively, optimally and healthfully.

This tool is available at:

[www.bpni.org/wbci.html](http://www.bpni.org/wbci.html)

**BREASTFEEDING BUILDS THE HEALTH OF A NATION. IT SAVES LIVES. IT SAVES MONEY.**

Help this knowledge reach policy makers and programme managers so that breastfeeding is restored to its rightful place in the growth of a country.

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