

Concept Note

Policy Dialogue: Estimating Costs of IYCF Interventions and National Application

7-8 October 2013

New Delhi India

The WHO-UNICEF Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding calls for environments to enable women to practice Optimal Infant and Young Child Feeding Practices. Breastfeeding, especially exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months and continued breastfeeding for at least two years thereafter with the addition of adequate good quality complementary foods has been identified as the single most effective intervention in child survival. There are several other benefits of breastfeeding including improvement in intelligence and social skills as well as reduced risk of obesity in later years. Yet, breastfeeding rates have remained stagnant and low for the last few decades. The rates are low in both developing and developed countries. There is an immediate need to improve these rates significantly, especially if child survival goals have to be met and the incidence of malnutrition reduced.

Improving breastfeeding rates is a multi-sectoral challenge, that involves group and one-to-one counselling for women, strict enforcement of the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes, the creation of breastfeeding friendly workplaces and communities and mass media promotion. These actions have to be taken concurrently to be effective.

Enhancing breastfeeding rates has rarely featured in national budgets. There are some estimations of costs for improving information sharing and in some cases skilled counselling. Many countries have legislation on maternity benefits and a few have legislated the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes either fully or in part and yet these are not implemented strictly. Several countries have no policies on breastfeeding and infant and young child feeding especially to drive the work and secure funding. All these interventions cost real money and country budgets do not reflect this. Nor does nutrition aid take these interventions into account.

IBFAN Asia took up the exercise of trying to estimate the investment needed for multi-sectoral action to enhance breastfeeding rates. The results were shared at a Special Session on 8th December 2012 at the World Breastfeeding Conference with country representatives, partner and donor agencies as well as UN organisations. (Link of the report) The participants endorsed the exercise of attempting to estimate the costs of scaling up breastfeeding/IYCF interventions and unanimously agreed that the exercise needs to be carried forward towards developing a financial tool to assist in budgeting or tracking utilisation of funds. Such estimation is essential for both countries to successfully plan and implement policies to improve optimal infant feeding practices, as well as for donor agencies to track where their investments in nutrition are actually being used.

IBFAN Asia has further refined the document with several inputs and developed a financial tool which countries can use to estimate the budget required for implementing all or selected actions based on the Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding, to enhance breastfeeding rates. The proposed meeting seeks to finalise the document and the tool.