

ACTION ALERT...IBFAN ASIA-PACIFIC!

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Emerging trends in the region...

An alarming trend is emerging on the issues of infant and young child feeding in the Asia-Pacific region that needs urgent action:

The issue of amending the National Codes either to weaken or strengthen it in the light of changing times of the millennium campaign on exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months, that is bound for misinterpretation marketing trend of baby foods wherein they advertise and sell products as mixed milk and cereals called supplements for 1,2,3 year olds.

1. Revisions of IRR (Implementing rules and regulations) in Philippines:

Here is an example in Philippines wherein the law was passed in 1986 and took effect in 1987, for more than a year now that the Philippine Code to regulate the marketing of breastmilk substitutes, breastmilk supplements and related products has been undergoing revisions with its IRR-implementing rules and regulations. The Department/Ministry of Health formed the Task Force on Milk Code where IBFAN Philippines, Arugaan is an active member together with other government agencies, medical societies, academia and Nestle who claimed to represent the Philippine Food Manufacturers Association. The other milk companies disclaimed Nestle representation. In the past, the Department of Health conducted separate consultative sessions with baby food companies. This time because of their presence, the debate on the Code's provisions became tedious and prolonged. Nestle and the other baby food companies always threatened a legal suit if the Department of Health attempt to include young child in the scope provision, which is not part of the Philippine Code.

The Department of Health had passed a national policy called National Plan of action on Infant and Young Child Feeding 2005-2010. A consultative workshop with stakeholders involved in breastfeeding program was conducted before it was signed by the Secretary of Health. The dilemma is to amend the Philippine Code in order to include the young child in its scope. Many lawyers have differing legal interpretations and ready to fight it out in court but the government's scarce resources or political posture in relation to milk industry is daunting.

2. New marketing tactics:

Another new marketing tactic of baby food companies is changing the 'Cerelac' label as food supplements and changes its name as Infant Cereals mixed with milk and introduced for six

months while 'Nido' milk which used to be for older children and adults became a milk product for one, two, three year olds with added new 'probiotic' and 'prebiotic'.

We need to challenge the new ingredients of the new featurized probiotic and prebiotic. Exchanges of updated information must be shared. The Department of Health – Bureau of Food and Drug Administration has requested Arugaan's (IBFAN Philippines) stand on this new ingredient because *Nestle* milk product has requested permission to advertise and sell to Thailand but processed and repackaged in the Philippines.

Now, the baby food advertisement is targeting not the infants but the one year olds and above. In fact, *Nestle* in the Philippines claimed that they are for banning advertisement for one year olds. IBFAN Philippines Arugaan retorted that all along the Philippine Code definition on infants covers 0-12 months old. Thus, *Nestle* has been violating it for many years. In the past they refused to acknowledge it because they were advertising follow-on milk 'Neslac' for six months. Now, they shift to milk for one year olds.

Public relations and image posturing must be analyzed because it is the most applied art of *Nestle's* subtle manipulation in marketing expansion.

3. Political and economic investments /New trends in public private partnership

Nestle's new trend is to support potential presidential political candidate based on political analysis. In the Philippines a notable young senator married to a famous movie-TV actress is being supported financially through a cooperative school canteen project nationally. It is by way of reaching out to teachers union and students. According to union teachers /officers *Nestle* built modern school and university canteens and definitely its logo splashed all over as well as its products: water, chocolates, coffee, milk and noodles. Political and economic interests have been invested.

In the past Philippine elections, *Nestle* contributed political campaign funds to the past and present presidents that gifted them the Secretary of Health position and Secretary of Trade (the retired Nestle President). The Nestle man who became Secretary of Health immediately issued an Administrative Order in year 2000 that weakens the Philippine Code IRR allowing the milk companies' involvement in the production of all breastfeeding materials and education. It adversely affected the breastfeeding rates. Also, he demoted/ transferred strong breastfeeding advocates in the government health department to other positions or projects.

The former head of Fabella Hospital known as the Asia's pioneering breastfeeding training hospital, the then Medical Director Ricardo Gonzales is now Nestle consultant according to the Nestle vice president lawyer Mabini Antonio. The Nestle head announced it at the Task Force Milk Code session in Sept. 2004 held at the Department of Health.

Optimal infant feeding practices : Count for two years and beyond!

The issue of the campaign on exclusive breastfeeding for six months is very important in view of the fact that around the world data showed it has the lowest practice. The slogan campaign on exclusive breastfeeding for six months had been wrongly perceived by many health professionals and mothers that breastfeeding should be only until six months. The word exclusive is not understood and the continued and sustained breastfeeding for two years and beyond is not being promoted alongside in the campaign. Thus, the breastfeeding toddler and young children group are forsaken. Also, the word continued breastfeeding for two years and /or beyond is interchangeably printed in many documents of UNICEF and WHO Geneva.

As IBFAN position, let us always complete the whole phrase in the IYCF campaign:

“Exclusive breastfeeding for six months and continue breastfeeding for two years and more”, then the introduction of complementary feeding after six months of age will follow through as the next message...

IBFAN commends the WHO Manila because their brochures carry the above slogan.

Lesson learned:

1. Vigilance and thorough analysis and exchanges of experiences regionally so that we are ahead in strides and leaps not in small steps in protecting breastfeeding rights. Involve lawyers and public participation in the campaign.

2. IBFAN national groups should persevere in its position in safeguarding Code's strong provisions. Sharing of experiences, expertise and well researched information and updates from other IBFAN groups such as Alison Linnecar from GIFA in Geneva and Betty Sterken from INFACT Canada were truly helpful. Their timely sharing of information on *Enterobacter sakazakii* contaminants and the Codex process were very valuable. IBFAN Philippines Arugaan and its volunteer lawyers helped the Department of Health in their position paper. Otherwise the Nestle lawyer-vice president was always offering their services. Representatives from IBFAN Philippines Arugaan never fail to be absent from the frequent consultative sessions on the Code otherwise Nestle was very influential in weakening the National Code provisions.

IBFAN Asia Pacific

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