

One Asia Breastfeeding Partners Forum-9
“Maternal and Infant and Young Child Feeding and Nutrition”
28-30 October 2013, Hotel Santi Villa, Luang-prabang, Laos



The Opening/Inauguration

More than eighty participants from 28 countries representing diverse groups including governments, breastfeeding organisations, health providers, peoples’ organisations and movements, international NGOs and individuals met for three days from 28-30 October, 2013, at Luang Prabang, LAO PDR during the One Asia Breastfeeding Partners’ Forum - 9, with the theme, “Food Security, Food Sovereignty in Maternal, Infant and Young Child Nutrition”, and discussed core issues around breastfeeding and infant and young child feeding and its relation with maternal, infant and young child nutrition.

The One Asia Breastfeeding Partners ‘Forum- 9 was hosted/organized by the Ministry of Health, Lao PDR, Lao’s Women Union and IBFAN Asia. The opening ceremony was presided over by Her Excellency Dr.Inlabanh Keobounphanh, Vice Minister of Health, Her Excellency Ms. Khamchanh Phomsengsavanh, Vice President of Lao Women Union, His Excellency Mr. Khamdoua Yiakouanoheuvang, Representing of Vice Governor, Luang-prabang province, Lao PDR, Mr.Subhash Chander Sarker, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Health, Bangladesh, Palau’s UN Ambassador Dr.Caleb Otto, Mr.Marc Vergera, UNICEF Vientiane, Lao PDR, and the Regional Representatives of IBFAN Asia.

Day 1- Sub Theme: Food Politics, Sovereignty, and Conflict of Interest.

Session I: Global Food Politics. The Chairpersons were Kim JaiOk-Korea and Innes Fernandez-Philippines.

The presentation by Patti Rundall, Policy Director, Baby Milk Action, UK on Global Food Politics-what price child health, gave an overview of how the destruction of breastfeeding started over the years and how the companies have grown and contributed to the disaster. The industry’s top strategic priority is to change traditional food cultures, and babies are the perfect entry point for market driven solutions to feeding. Convenience cannot be the only criterion for use of product. There should robust evidence on efficacy, cost, and long-term impact on nutrition, sustainability, and replacement of traditional feeding practices before products are promoted.

The key is independence in choosing appropriate funders and to keep policy formation separate from commercial interests.

Session II: Sub-regional landscape on Maternal Infant and Young Child Nutrition. The session was coordinated by Kim JaiOk-Korea and Innes Fernandez-Philippines. There were presentations from participating countries about nutritional status of children, cost of formula feeding, and exclusive breastfeeding rate, etc. The presentations reflected the poor nutritional status of children, the stagnant breastfeeding rates and enormous spending on infant formula by families, as well as the richness and abundance of micronutrient rich food locally available in the region. It highlighted how the shift away from traditional indigenous food cultures has impoverished the nutritional status of women and children, and looked at the reasons for this shift, including commercial pressures of the food industry, changing agricultural practices and alienation of the people from their lands.

Session III: Perspectives on Stunting in Children-Market sneaking in? was chaired by Alison Linnecar-UK

The presentation by Dr.J.P.Dadhich highlighted the focus on stunting and the most effective intervention to prevent stunting being optimal IYCF. The cause for worry are the “web of association” where industry, academicians, front organisations and international organisations together push a market driven approach which may undermine breastfeeding and appropriate complementary feeding. He gave the examples of the direct nutrition interventions in the recent Lancet Series on Maternal and Child Undernutrition, which focus more on products (RUTF & micronutrients), and the promotion by Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) and Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) of fortified food through market approach. Stunting can be prevented by nutrition specific intervention and also by nutrition sensitive interventions like clean environment.

Session IV was Panel Discussion: Breastfeeding as a human right. It was chaired by Annalies Allain-ICDC, Penang, Malaysia. The panelists were Ina Verzivolli – IBFAN/GIFA, Dr.Homayoun Ludin-Afghanistan, Atty Jenny Ong-Philippines, Atty Faizal Jamal-Singapore, and Zhang Shuyi-China

The presentation by Ina Verzivolli defined Breastfeeding as a human right. It examined the questions of who are the actors involved: rights holders vs. duty bearers and stressed the need for monitoring and accountability for making sure that duty-bearers are doing what they are supposed to do.

The panelist gave their country situation on the issue of breastfeeding as a human right. Atty Jenny Ong apprised all about the short maternity leave (60 days only), Breastfeeding laws also limit mother’s rights to breastfeed anywhere and anytime, and violations are unreported; these are some of the factors that negatively affect the rise in breastfeeding in Philippines. Faizal Jamal from Singapore emphasised on role of parliamentarians in advocating for change. Breastmilk is a natural food and is free but not valued. She advocated using the strategy of making out a case for breastfed babies for healthy adults and more effective and productive workforce and thus a happier population.



The evening saw cultural festivities and performances by artists from Lao-PDR. The dinner for the evening was hosted by Hon'ble Governor of Luang-prabang province, Lao-PDR.

Day 2- Sub Theme: World Breastfeeding Trends Initiative (WBTi) and beyond

Session I: Infotainment-a glam TV show: win the game-“to be or not to be breastfeeding” put up by Philippines and Indonesia delegation.

Session II: World Health Assembly Resolutions and UN International Standards.

The presentation by Dr.Caleb Otto was on “The making of policies, legislations, etc. (do’s and don’ts). He emphasized on developing a plan of action with budgets and time line as the first and foremost step. The plan should be realistic and not based on assumptions. To save and improve the lives of all children, we must pledge to promote, encourage, and advocate good feeding practices by parents and children. We are committed to working in collaboration with intergovernmental, governmental and civil society bodies many of whom, such as UNICEF and leading bilateral development agencies, have been strong promoters of positive multireligious action and we urge them to support us to “develop simple toolkits and roll-out mechanisms that the leaders and congregations of each religion can use to harness their respective beliefs and believers in the implementation of these vital behavioural changes.”

Session III: World Breastfeeding Trends Initiative (WBTi) an overview. The session was chaired by Dr.J.P.Dadhich-India, Ines Fernandez-Philippines, and Kim JaiOk-Korea

The presenter Beena Bhatt gave a complete overview of the WBTi. She dealt on the objectives of WBTi and how it works. She briefed the participants on all the status/action taken so far in having introduced WBTi in 83 countries and 53 countries having completed the assessment.

Session IV: Sub Regional Presentations on WBTi. The session was chaired by Dr.J.P.Dadhich-India, Ines Fernandez-Philippines, and Kim JaiOk-Korea

There were presentations from participating countries on the weak indicator from the last WBTi assessment. The presentations reflected the gaps in the indicator, recommendations and the plan of action developed to overcome the gaps.

Session V: Investment in IYCF programmes. What are the costs of a national IYCF programme?

This was a group exercise. Alessandro Iellamo of Philippines highlighted the salient features of the costing exercise and financial tool WBCi. This was followed by a video demonstration of the tool. Radha Holla also gave a brief summary on the *The Need to Invest in Babies* – a paper developed by IBFAN and BPNI, which projects a minimal financial estimate of globally scaling up interventions to protect, promote and support breastfeeding.

The group work involved developing a plan of action and practice on the use of financial tool. The participants were divided into groups as per region (SEA, SA, EA, and Lao-PDR group). The group work was coordinated by Alessandro Iellamo-Philippines and Radha Holla-India. This was followed by group presentation on the plan developed, the usefulness of the tool and scope of improvement.

Session VI: Beyond International Code: Newer tactics to advertise and promote infant milk substitutes and infant foods. The session was chaired by Dr.Arun Gupta-India.

The presenter Patti Rundall-UK spoke about all forms of violations and marketing gimmicks used by the baby food companies to undermine breastfeeding. She presented survey findings wherein **60%** of mothers said they had seen infant formula advertising outside the health care system and **31%** said the adverts implied that infant formula is ‘as good as’ or ‘better than’ breastmilk. She also described how the baby food industry works through its front organizations and continues to violate the spirit of the International Code.

Day 3: Sub-Theme: Future Plans

Session I: Blame the Mom Syndrome.

It was an interactive presentation by Dr.Roseli Uttami-Indonesia along with Nia Umar-Indonesia. It emphasized the lack of right information about breastfeeding and the unethical and aggressive formula promotion undermining breastfeeding. If women can provide the golden standard of infant feeding, they would have better quality of life and protection of health throughout the lifespan. Breastfed babies are healthier throughout life. Successful breastfeeding is dependent upon support from the family, community, health facility, and work place; rather than ensuring this, the practice is to blame the mother for not breastfeeding optimally.

Session II: Current controversies in child malnutrition. The chairperson for the session was Dr.Vokyung Song-Republic of Korea.

The first presenter Dr.S.K.Roy-Bangladesh talked about the current controversies around the Lancet series on Maternal and Child Nutrition (2013).

The article Evidence Based Interventions for Improving Maternal and Child Nutrition: What can be done and at What Cost? has identified ten 'most effective' interventions and concludes that "if these ten nutrition interventions were scaled up to 90% coverage, mortality in children younger than 5 years could be reduced by 15%, with a 35% reduction in diarrhea-specific mortality, a 29% reduction in pneumonia-specific mortality. It further says, "The analysis suggested that the interventions with the largest potential affect on mortality in children younger than 5 years are management of SAM, preventive zinc supplementation, and promotion of breastfeeding. But other interventions for disease prevention and management were not modeled though some of them have been found significantly effective like feeding practices in diarrhea etc.

The second presenter Dr.Prakash Shrestha-Nepal summarized and presented the Cochrane Review on Management of SAM & MAM (2013).

The review on "Ready to use therapeutic food for home based treatment of Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) in children from six months to five years of age" concluded that RUTF or flour porridge can be used to treat SAM children at home depending on availability affordability & practicability.

The review on "Specially formulated foods for treating children with Moderate Acute Malnutrition (MAM) in low and middle income countries" concluded that

Provision of foods in addition to standard care or simple counseling improves a number of key outcomes in children with Moderate Acute Malnutrition. Different types of foods may be equally effective in short-term nutritional rehabilitation of children with MAM.

Session III: Environment and Climate Change & Genetically Modified Organisms. The session was chaired by Dr.Caleb Otto-Palau UN Ambassador.

The first presenter Alison Linnecar-UK spoke on Contamination in MIYCF. She warned us on the fact that the natural resources of our planet are being threatened. Breastfeeding is a renewable natural resource and formula feeding is unsustainable. The **carbon footprint** of formula feeding is placing a heavy burden on the planet and preventing its people from living healthily, now and in the future.

The second presenter Dr.Tess Perez talked about testing of GMO Golden Rice on Breastfeeding Moms & Babies and its Biodiversity. Scientists used genes of maize to produce the Golden Rice, more yellow and richer in Vit. A. There still are no clear studies that Golden Rice is safe for human consumption and will not affect the indigenous rice varieties. Moreover, the country is rich in leafy, green vegetables, which is an assurance of adequate supply of Vit. A, and thus does not need Golden Rice. On World Environment Day, more than a hundred members of *Green Moms*, a nationwide coalition of mothers advocating for organic foods and breastfeeding practice, staged a creative protest that demonstrated their strong opposition to 'Golden Rice'.

Session IV: Luang-prabang Call for Action

The concerns articulated in each session of the three day forum informed the development of the Luang Prabang Call to Action on Infant and Young Child Feeding. The call to action was presented by Dr.Khamseng Philavong and discussed and agreed upon by the participants present. The comments were compiled and collated to develop the final draft of the Luang Prabang Call to Action on Infant and Young Child Feeding by Dr.Arun Gupta and Radha Holla of IBFAN Asia RCO to be made available to all participants.

Session V: Making of a law to protect breastfeeding

The session by Dr.S.K.Roy was an overview on the New Breast Milk Substitutes, Infant Foods, Complementary Infant foods manufactured commercially and the accessories related thereto (Regulation of Marketing) Act, 2013 of Bangladesh.

Session VI: MIYCN-summarizing the findings from country experiences.

Ines Fernandez-Philippines gave a brief summary of the session on MIYCN after compiling the country experiences which reflected the poor nutritional status of children, the not rising breastfeeding rates and enormous spending on infant formula by families and the richness and abundance of micronutrient rich food available in the region. She highlighted the need for further investigation and take necessary action to protect, promote and support breastfeeding and infant and young child feeding practices. The need for capacity building in lactation management, training and accreditation of skilled staff, right information and adequate counselling to mothers and families, Implementation of the International Code, workplace and community breastfeeding facilities, and monitoring and evaluation of interventions to be ensured.

Session VII: Group discussion on future plans

Then according to regions four Groups were formed namely SEA, SA, EA and Oceania for discussion on future plans of the region. Sixty minutes were allocated for the group discussion. The groups worked on the TOR given with issues on Assessment and reporting on WBTi, Dissemination of WBCi tool at country level, WBW 2014, Implementation of Code and participation in working groups on Codex, Infant feeding & Chemical Contaminants etc. The session was coordinated by Dr. Arun Gupta (South Asia), Inez Fernandes (Southeast Asia) and Kim Jaiok (East Asia).

South Asia group suggested conducting workshop on gaps identified in WBTi assessment. Also conduct National workshop on WBCi financial tool. To work towards implementation of the International Code by organizing orientation/training on BMS Code.

South East Asia group plans to submit the reports of the WBTi assessment. All countries need training on WBCi tool, '4 in 1' training course on Infant and Young Child Feeding and Code monitoring.

East Asia group would trial use of the WBCi financial tool. They plan to use the WBTi assessment gaps to lobby with governments and for advocacy purposes. Also

work towards implementation of the Code and internet monitoring for detecting violations.

Oceania group planned to do the assessment and reporting of WBTi. The region plans for to introduction, orientation, training and dissemination of the WBCi financial tool to all countries. Also suggested to have training on the code during WBTi/WBCi trainings.

Session VIII: Closing Ceremony.

The session was chaired by Dr.Arun Gupta-India, Innes Fernandez-Philippines, and Kim JaiOk-Korea. It started with the group presentation, wherein each group briefly presented the plan of action developed during group work.

Next Dr. Roselina Yaakub-Brunei MOH announced the official invitation from government of Brunei Darussalam with MOH as host to the 10th One Asia Breastfeeding Partners Forum in Bendar Seri Begawan November 2014.

Due to technical reasons, the final draft of the call to action could not be developed. Thus it was decided to give it time and to develop and send to all by mail within a week.

To conclude a token of appreciation was presented to all the resource persons by the organizers. Then the RRs gave their closing remarks and thanked the organizers for the success of the OABPF 9 and committed themselves to extend continued support to Lao PDR, other countries in the Asian region, as well as to breastfeeding.

