International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN)

142th session of the Executive Board

Agenda Item EB 3.5: Health, environment and climate change (EB142/12)

Breastfeeding and Human milk's contribution to environment sustainability and food security year-round should be considered in climate-smart development goals at national and global level.

The promotion, protection and support of breastfeeding has significant impact on mitigating harm to the environment. When women breastfeed their contribution to the reduction of Green House Gasses (GHG) and water conservation is substantial and an unacknowledged contribution that women make to reduce the impacts of climate change.

Breastmilk is a natural, renewable food, environmentally safe and produced and delivered without pollution, unnecessary packaging or waste.
Breastmilk substitutes leave a major ecological footprint. BMS need energy to manufacture, materials for packaging, fuel for transport distribution and water, fuel and cleaning agents for daily preparation and use. More than 4000 liters of water are estimated to be needed along the production pathway to produce just 1 kg of BMS powder.
In the US alone, 550 million cans, 86 000 tons of metal and 364 000 tons of paper are used annually to package the product, that ends up in landfills.
Furthermore, the methane gas emanating from dairy herds is a potent form of GHG, increasing land degradation and reducing biodiversity.

These effects are all mitigated when women and babies are supported for optimal feeding.

Breastfeeding is especially important and protective with the increasing food insecurity and extreme weather conditions that the world's most vulnerable - women and their children face.

Policies and practices that implement the International Code and resolutions and support women to breastfeed are unique ways to contribute to meaningful approaches to mitigate the impact of climate change and a cornerstone to global efforts to achieve the SDG 13 on climate change.

IBFAN's 6-country study of the impact of infant formula production on GHG emissions can be sourced at: http://ibfan.org/docs/Carbon-Footprints-Due-to-Milk-Formula.pdf

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