

# CLIMATE CHANGE AND HEALTH

June 2015

## What on Earth has Infant Feeding got to do with Climate Change?

As rising levels of greenhouse gases make our oceans warmer, cyclones, tropical storms and typhoons become more violent, while glaciers melt and disappear. Newborn babies, infants and their mothers suffer from the disasters caused by extreme weather events such as typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda which devastated the Philippines in November 2013.



Photo: IBFAN Philippines



Photo: IBFAN Philippines

## Breastfeeding alleviates the health impacts of extreme weather caused by climate change

Protecting, promoting and supporting breastfeeding is one practical example of “finding durable solutions to the post-disaster phase to empower and assist people disproportionately affected by disasters ...”<sup>1</sup>

Infants and young children are highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. They are the first ones who suffer in the disasters caused by global warming and environmental degradation: <http://ibfan.org/infant-feeding-in-emergencies>

Whenever natural disasters strike, breastfeeding protects babies' health and can ensure they survive in the post-disaster period. Scientific research has provided the evidence for this protective effect on infants' health and that of their mothers: <http://ibfan.org/Importance-of-Breastfeeding>

Supporting breastfeeding mothers to re-establish breastfeeding thus alleviates the severe impact on the survival and health of vulnerable infants during the increasing number of disasters caused by climate change.



Photo: IBFAN Philippines

In the Philippines, the BESTeam<sup>2</sup> prioritised feeding the mothers who had suffered from the destruction of the typhoon by supporting, consoling and counselling them so that they could relactate and breastfeed their babies.

The emergency response included breastfeeding counselling through home visits in the communities as well as cluster counselling inside the evacuation tents. The relactation process was done by the Breastfeeding

Expert Counsellor applying mother to mother support approach.

When breastfeeding is re-established, mothers who have suffered trauma regain confidence in their ability to care for their children, even in the midst of devastation, and become active providers, rather than passive recipients of formula donations.

## Formula feeding: Disastrous for infant health in emergencies

These emergencies bring death and destruction; further risks threaten the health of babies and young children who do survive the initial typhoon. Donations of infant formula double the disaster for these survivors. Whereas breastmilk boosts the development of a baby's healthy immune system to fight off disease, formula contains no anti-infective agents.

Formula donations exacerbate the dangers whenever formula is prepared and administered in the unhygienic conditions with unsafe water that are typical of evacuation camps and emergency situations. The victims of a disaster then become victims of hazardous formula feeding, which causes

diarrheal and respiratory diseases leading to further malnutrition. "Breastfeeding serves to protect a child's right to food security and medicine. Temporary lack of food and water in emergency conditions in a disaster-stricken area cannot be presumed to justify the prescription of formula for babies. In such situations, the health risks to which the babies are already exposed can only be exacerbated when panic sets in and the authorities unjustifiably offer formula as an emergency response. Such a panic-driven response only leads to victims being victimised twice over."<sup>3</sup>

## Formula feeding: Disastrous for the health of our planet

Formula feeding is not only a disaster in emergency situations. Formula is also a disaster for the environment: it contributes to the increased carbon emissions, pollution, waste and environmental degradation which cause these emergencies.

The use of infant formula places a tremendous burden on the environment, due to the release of greenhouse gases during the production, transport and intensive promotion of formula worldwide. Producing formula from raw cows' milk emits greenhouse gases, carbon dioxide and methane; manufacturing processes to make formula and transportation and packaging create pollution and waste.

The manufacture of formula also uses precious natural resources such as land, energy, raw materials and water. Intensive dairy farming requires and uses large tracts of land as well as huge amounts of water. Scarce



energy supplies are used for the production, transport and processing of the raw material of formula - cows' milk from farm to factory. Energy, fuel, metals, paper and water are then needed in industrial processing for the manufacture, packaging, transport and then the promotion of formula. Thus, inappropriate

feeding practices in emergencies can lead to an increase in formula feeding and bring negative effects that may endure for future generations.

The publication 'Formula for Disaster' examines this environmental threat and how we can all of us work to counter it by promoting, protecting and supporting breastfeeding: <http://ibfan.org/environmental-awareness>.

## Every breastfeeding mother contributes to the health of her baby and to the health of our planet

Breastfeeding contributes to healthier mothers and babies. But it is far less known that breastfeeding also contributes to a healthier planet: it is environmentally friendly.

Breastmilk is a renewable natural resource that is also environmentally sustainable. Breastfeeding helps to mitigate climate change caused by global warming and environmental degradation. Breastfeeding uses none of our planet's scarce reserves of raw materials, water or grazing land, requires no fuel or energy to process and transport, and produces none of the carbon emissions, waste or pollution that contribute to the warming and degradation of our planet.

Breastfeeding under the Tree of Life, in Luang Prabang, Laos, October 2014. Breastfeeding is available on-site, at the correct temperature and needs no packaging. So it requires no electricity or fuel, uses no water resources, no transportation and creates no pollution or garbage.

Efforts to protect sound infant and young child feeding in emergencies have stimulated the production and exchange of indigenous foods for babies older than 6 months, thus encouraging the reconstitution of family farming and contributing to building resilient communities.

Home-made: preparing indigenous foods after the Philippines typhoon, with foods from areas not affected by the disaster where they were produced by sustainable, biodiverse, climate-resilient agriculture.<sup>4</sup>



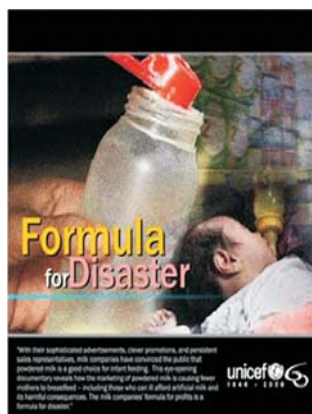
*Photo: Ms. Jenny Ong, Philippines (courtesy: Ms. Vaniavan Fernandes)*



*Photo: IBFAN Philippines*

## Formula for Disaster

The global market for breastmilk substitutes, that is infant formulas and baby foods, is set to double or even triple in the next few years. In China alone the market for infant formula will double from 2013 to reach US\$ 31 billion by 2017. Worldwide, the formula market is forecast by Euromonitor to reach US\$ 70 billion by 2017.



homes. These 3 billion people are often poor and disadvantaged: "they are the ones most likely to suffer the most from extreme weather and climate events."

In the same way that we need to invest in clean green technologies such as renewable energy, so we need to invest in breastfeeding, the cleanest, greenest way to feed

What will be the impact of formula market expansion - and of the intensive promotion needed to create and expand new markets - on the health of mothers and babies and our planet Earth?

Key recommendations to mitigate climate change include limiting fossil-fuel burning by investing in alternative and renewable energy sources for the 3 billion people who still have to burn solid fuels to cook and heat their

infants and young children. In the next few years, the expansion of the formula market will multiply the harmful impact of formula feeding and affect the lives and livelihoods of millions. To counter this threat, we must invest more resources to protect, promote and support breastfeeding - and thus respect the Earth, our Sister, our Mother.



Man-made: clean, green?



Mom-made cleanest and greenest!



References

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g b i c s the global breastfeeding initiative for child survival

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This document has been produced by the International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN) with the support of the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad).



INFAC Canada Infant Feeding Action Coalition Protecting, Promoting & Supporting Breastfeeding



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