

International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN)

144th session of the Executive Board



Agenda Item EB 5.6: Health, environment and climate change (EB144/15 and EB144/16)

IBFAN welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft strategy that suggests new approaches to change the “the way we manage our environment with respect to health and well-being”.

In the case of Breastfeeding much more should be done to protect, promote and support it. Breastfeeding, a practice that has no carbon footprint, contributes to water conservation and helps in the reduction of air pollution is all too often ignored by conservationists.

While we are calling for reduction of avoidable environmental risks, global sales of breastmilk substitutes increase rapidly every year, boosted by sophisticated marketing techniques against which breastfeeding cannot compete. These products are, of course, necessary for babies who are not breastfed, but they need energy to manufacture, materials for packaging, fuel for transport distribution and water, fuel and cleaning agents for daily preparation and use, and they generate Green House Gases. More than 4000 litres of water are estimated to be needed along the production pathway to produce just 1 kg of BMS powder.

If breastfeeding was considered a public health intervention for climate change prevention and mitigation perhaps more would be done to end misleading marketing of baby food companies and support women who want to breastfeed.

Climate change is linked to extreme weather conditions and environmental health emergencies: breastfeeding is a lifeline in emergencies but it needs positive action by governments to be protected. At the very minimum, all governments should fully implement the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes and relevant WHA Resolutions. Goal 12 of the draft strategy, on Governance, should also include the requirement that national and local governments set up proper safeguards against conflicts of interest and commercial influence when facilitating “cross-sectorial cooperation”.

Thank you.

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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