



Statement on UN Climate Change Conference COP28¹

30 Nov – 12 Dec 2023 in Dubai (UAE)

Will COP28 protect our children’s future and health?

Families all over the world are suffering the disastrous impact of global warming on their lives, their health and their livelihoods. They know that their children will be directly affected by climate change, both now and in the future.

Climate change across the life course: Evidence to action

Launch of a joint call to action by WHO-UNICEF-UNFPA and advocacy brief by PMNCH and partners

PRE-COP28 VIRTUAL WEBINAR
21 November 2023 • 13:00 CET
Register: <https://bit.ly/3Mna04w>

Logos: World Health Organization, UNICEF for every child, UNFPA, PMNCH, ibp network, hrp research for impact

“Evidence shows that pregnant and lactating women, newborns, children, and adolescents are particularly vulnerable to climate change due to their unique stages in the life course. Despite contributing the least to greenhouse gas emissions, newborns, children, and adolescents today and future generations will bear the worst

consequences during their lifetime. Newborns and younger children, including those unborn, are uniquely at risk because they breathe faster, have higher metabolic rates, and are developing their immune systems, amongst other physiological, developmental, and behavioural vulnerabilities.”²

People do not want endless discussions at COP28 on abstract words like adaptation, mitigation or atmospheric pollution. They need to know that COP28 will provide an action plan to limit the smog and soot, droughts, floods and storms they are experiencing, right now.

“Climate change is an existential threat to the health and wellbeing of this and future generations of children. Globally, more than 1 billion children currently live in countries that are at ‘extremely high-risk’ from the impacts of climate change. This means half the world’s children could suffer irreparable harm as our planet continues to warm. They could lose their homes or schools to increasingly violent storms ... they could suffer from severe wasting because local crops have dried up from drought ... or they could lose their lives to heat waves or pneumonia brought on by air pollution.”³

¹ <https://unfccc.int/cop28>

² <https://pmnch.who.int/resources/publications/m/item/prioritizing-women-s-children-s-and-adolescents-health-in-the-climate-crisis>

³ UNICEF statement for Child Rights Day:

<https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/children-live-world-increasingly-hostile-their-rights>

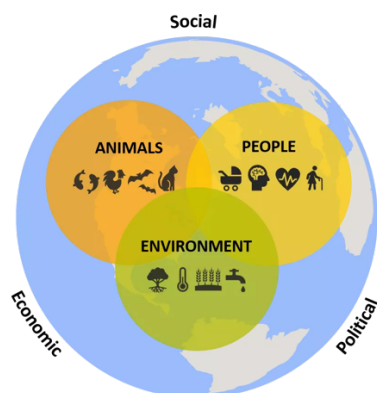
Climate change has become a climate crisis and is affecting our health every day. Our families' concerns include:

- Staying cool during heatwaves
- Staying warm and dry during storms and floods
- Staying alive and safe during disasters (hurricanes and typhoons)
- Staying healthy and well in a polluted environment
- Keeping a good quality of life during economic uncertainty
- Keeping their land free from toxic chemicals and pesticides
- Keeping their property safe for present and future generations
- Keeping their water sources safe during droughts

In short, families want a future for themselves and their children and want to know what actions they can take.

One Health

The health of our planet and the health of its people and all life on earth are not only interconnected, but indivisible. The Director General of WHO has said “A transformation of the world’s food systems is needed urgently, based on a One Health approach that protects and promotes the health of humans, animals and the planet.”⁴



⁴<https://www.babymilkaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/DR-Tedros-CAC45-2022.pdf>

It is difficult for populations to adapt to these disaster situations caused by climate change. We need to start right at the beginning to mitigate their impact – how we produce our food and the way we feed our youngest and most vulnerable populations and their parents are the critical first steps to address our families' urgent concerns.

Right from the Start

The One Health for All – All for One Health approach must begin right from the start – with our newborn babies and their mothers.

Breastfeeding is an infant's first food and first medicine. WHO recommends optimal infant and young child feeding practices, defined by early initiation and six months of exclusive breastfeeding, continued for two years and beyond, complemented with safe and nutritious family foods, locally produced using sustainable agriculture.

- **Breastfeeding protects in times of crisis and conflicts.**
- **Breastfeeding saves lives in disaster situations caused by climate change**

“When families are forced out of their homes, with little or no access to food, clean water, sanitation and basic health care, it's babies and young children who are most vulnerable to infectious diseases and severe malnutrition. In emergencies, breastfeeding is a life line. In these situations, breastfeeding guarantees a safe, nutritious, available and convenient food source for babies and a protective shield against disease and death. Even when a mother's diet is unbalanced or limited, she still produces nourishing breast milk that will strengthen her baby's immune system.”⁵

⁵ UNICEF USA
<https://www.unicefusa.org/stories/emergencies-breastfeeding-keeps-babies-alive>



Photo: IBFAN Philippines

Implementing WHO’s optimal infant and young child feeding avoids the use of formula milks and ultra-processed foods that contribute to climate change. These baby milks and foods are manufactured on an industrial scale and exported or imported worldwide. Each kilogram of these products requires intensive use of scarce resources, energy, water and land. Evidence shows that production of formulas and highly processed baby foods increases the areas of land used for intensive dairy farming, generates water scarcity, and increases pollution by waste, toxic pesticides and fertilisers, while transport adds to greenhouse gas emissions.⁶

More breastfeeding and more healthy bio-diverse family foods all over the world mean:

1-Less impact on the planet:

- less land used for intensive agriculture to produce artificial milk- or soy-based infant formula as well as ultra-processed foods (UPFs)
- less energy used to manufacture artificial infant formula and UPFs
- less potentially toxic fertilisers and pesticides used in dairy farming and agriculture
- less deforestation for palm plantations for oil used in formulas and UPFs

- less scarce water resources used for production of milk for formulas
- less risk of industrial contamination through formula (bacteria such as Salmonella, Cronobacter and toxic heavy metals such as arsenic and cadmium)
- less methane emissions from agriculture and manufacturing
- less CO2 emissions from transportation of formulas, UPFs and fertilisers
- less packaging of products
- less waste and plastic pollution
- less plastic in feeding equipment to prepare bottles
- less electricity consumption for home preparation
- less water consumption for preparation of formula and cleaning bottles

2-Less impact on our health:

- less childhood illness
- less maternal illness
- less consumption of medicines (especially antibiotics)
- less hospital admissions
- less medical expenses for families

3-More breastfeeding also means more:

- healthy babies and toddlers survive and stay healthy
- healthy mothers
- protection for the environment
- progress to reduce carbon footprint
- scarce water resources protected
- protection of other natural resources
- financial savings for families
- cost savings for our health systems
- economic benefits for individuals, families and society

⁶ Smith J. (2019). A commentary on the carbon footprint of milk formula: harms to planetary health and policy implications

<https://internationalbreastfeedingjournal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13006-019-0243-8>

Health impacts of Climate Change: Women and children at greatest risk

Pregnant women are exposed to the worst effects of global warming; the survival and healthy development of babies and toddlers are threatened by climate crises. The impacts of heat stress on pregnant women and prenatal health include effects even before birth and can lead to premature births.⁷

Not only mothers-to-be and breastfeeding mothers, but all women and their families deserve community support and protection. “UNICEF’S vision for breastfeeding is founded on the understanding that breastfeeding is not a one-woman job; that making it work requires government leadership and support from families, communities, workplaces and the health system.”⁸

Pervasive and manipulative marketing tactics are undermining women’s freedom of choice

All the evidence shows how optimal infant feeding protects the health of our planet and its people by

Recommendations

Families and communities everywhere need to create strong and sustained pressure to convince policy-makers and governments to take determined action to protect, promote and support optimal breastfeeding and family foods.

Community health workers and health professionals will help women, their families and their communities to understand what causes climate change and how their actions to change food production and feeding practices can help reduce the impact of climate change.

Protecting and supporting women who want to breastfeed may seem like a minor gesture to prevent climate change, but if millions of women realise that they have the opportunity to do something concrete and powerful to protect resources, their gesture becomes an act of empowerment and hope.

GIFA-IBFAN, 7 December 2023 www.gifa.org

⁷ Climate change is an urgent threat to pregnant women and children, WHO 21.11.2023
<https://www.who.int/news/item/21-11-2023-climate-change-is-an-urgent-threat-to-pregnant-women-and-children>

reducing harms to our health, our environment and our economies. Yet manufacturers use exploitative advertising and intensive promotion to expand their markets for commercial milk formulas and other ultra-processed foods. Families should be allowed to make feeding decisions free from commercial pressures for their babies, toddlers and young children.

After 6 months, babies eat their first family foods. Sustained breastfeeding needs support for as long as the family wants. Breastmilk continues to provide precious sources of nutrition, especially when complemented by home-prepared family foods that are minimally processed and thus offer value for money. Sustainable local agriculture provides foods that are biodiverse, reliable, and culturally appropriate.

Community support can be undermined by marketing and promotion of formula and ultra-processed foods. This is the reason the International Code of Marketing is crucial.⁹ New digital marketing using social media and influencers are particularly predatory and must be addressed by the 2024 World Health Assembly.

⁸ <https://www.unicef.org/reports/breastfeeding>

⁹ <https://www.who.int/teams/nutrition-and-food-safety/food-and-nutrition-actions-in-health-systems/code-and-subsequent-resolutions>