



# International Women's Day 2008

## Press Release

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**World Alliance for  
Breastfeeding Action**

PO Box 1200,  
10850 Penang, Malaysia  
Tel (604) 658 4816  
Fax (604) 657 2655  
Email [waba@streamyx.com](mailto:waba@streamyx.com)  
[www.waba.org.my](http://www.waba.org.my)

## **FINANCING FOR GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT: LET'S COUNT BREASTFEEDING AND CHILDCARE!**

*There can be no 'decent work' agenda in any country of the world where the needs of those providing care to their fellow human beings are neither recognised nor protected. Care work is real work and...it deserves to be fully integrated into the analysis of work. Its neglect in mainstream statistics, economic analysis and social policy in the twentieth century was deplorable.<sup>1</sup>*

**Mary Daly and Guy Standing, 2001**

The World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) supports "Financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women", the priority theme of the 52nd session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) meeting in New York, 25 February - 7 March 2008.

Gender budgeting is a critical tool for national development strategies. It is required to fulfill international gender equality and human rights commitments as set out in the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the Plan of Action adopted at the International Conference on Population and Development. Financing for gender equality and women's empowerment means that governments plan budgets with increased allocation for gender-sensitive policies and programmes.

Often women's reproductive work, including breastfeeding, is not valued. It is mostly seen as a personal matter. WABA calls for appropriate valuation and financing of such work on the basis that reproductive work, feeding and caring for even one's own family, should be viewed in a broader social and economic context of providing the country with a healthy workforce for the future. Only when such work is properly valued will it be adequately supported by society.

Breastfeeding constitutes a type of childcare work that is unique to women, but its economic contributions to society are ignored. Breastfeeding provides a unique source of nutrition for young children, not only for healthy growth and development but also for better survival of infants. A gender-equitable division of labour would recognise and accommodate this unique care work by lactating women. Hence, it is vital to remember breastfeeding when making policy decisions about how to spend money for gender equality.

Care work is one element in a *gender budget analysis*, the study of the gender effects of policy decisions as they are expressed through funding allocations. For example, when government health and social services are cut, a gender analysis would highlight the resulting increase in the unpaid caring work load of women in families and communities.

In a truly supportive setting, every mother would get skilled and practical help from family and health workers, beginning before birth. Post-birth, her workload of both caring work and paid employment would be adjusted to allow time and energy for continued breastfeeding. She would not suffer discrimination or face increased risk of domestic abuse because she is lactating. All these conditions could be achieved, at a relatively low cost, if people understood the value of breastfeeding and human milk, as well as the true social and economic costs that follow when children are prematurely weaned.

The average mother can provide almost 350 litres of milk per child over the first two years of breastfeeding. However, only one country, Norway, accounts for human milk production in its national food statistics. While the economic value of breastfeeding may be difficult to quantify, even an approximation would be an improvement over the present situation. The absence of human milk from national accounts and budgets allows human milk substitutes to dominate the “infant food market” in national statistics.

Only when the real value of breastfeeding, both as a product (breastmilk) and as women’s work (of breastfeeding and caring), is recognised and appreciated, will governments increase their budgetary allocations for policies and programmes to promote and support breastfeeding. With increased budgets, governments will also be able to provide for other measures conducive to breastfeeding, such as paid maternity leave for all women workers (in the formal and informal sector, in rural and agricultural work), flexible work schedules and family-friendly policies, child care support, health and nutrition programmes for pregnant and lactating women, etc..

The United Nations Breastfeeding Advocacy Team (UNBAT) comprises four global Non-Governmental Organisations that focus on breastfeeding.<sup>2</sup> UNBAT has proposed a Breastfeeding Budget which takes into account the following:

- 1) outputs from exclusive breastfeeding, which include the food and care that women provide by breastfeeding;
- 2) cost-savings from exclusive breastfeeding, which include the costs of milk substitutes plus the excess health and other costs incurred when babies are weaned prematurely (costs of breastmilk substitutes, infant lives, healthcare costs, environmental burden); and
- 3) inputs that enable women to breastfeed exclusively, which include funds to build a supportive infrastructure that provides the information, support, time and energy (nutrition) needed by breastfeeding mothers

UNBAT suggests the following actions for governments and NGOs:

- Begin a dialogue between gender budget analysts and breastfeeding advocates.
- Endorse and implement the GSIYCF (Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding) world-wide.
- Implement and monitor the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes worldwide.
- Integrate breastfeeding into discussions about and analysis of care work.
- Include the market value of human milk and breastfeeding in the national accounts.
- Highlight national breastfeeding rates along with other measures of women’s empowerment.

To see the Breastfeeding Budget, visit [www.waba.org.my/](http://www.waba.org.my/)

For more information, kindly contact:

Sarah Amin  
Co-Director  
World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA)  
PO Box 1200, 10850 Penang, Malaysia  
Tel: 604-658 4816 Fax: 604-657 2655  
Email: [waba@streamyx.com](mailto:waba@streamyx.com)  
Website: [www.waba.org.my](http://www.waba.org.my)

Chris Mulford  
Co-coordinator  
WABA Women and Work Task Force  
Email: [chrismulfo@comcast.net](mailto:chrismulfo@comcast.net)

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Daly M & G Standing, *Care Work: the quest for security*, International Labour Organisation, 2001, p 1.

<sup>2</sup> Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine (ABM) [www.bfmed.org/](http://www.bfmed.org/), International Lactation Consultant Association (ILCA), <http://www.ilca.org/>, La Leche League International (LLL), <http://www.llli.org/>, World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA), <http://www.waba.org.my/>