

## **BREASTFEEDING AS (CARE) WORK... It needs to be counted as paid work!**

In 1994, WABA positioned breastfeeding as a feminist issue which requires a new definition of women's work. This definition recognises women's reproductive and care work in addition to their productive paid work. Breastfeeding as care or nurturing work needs to be acknowledged as critically important work. In some countries, this work is counted as paid work. Other policy initiatives support women through paid maternity entitlements. Policies that do not help women integrate different kinds of productive and reproductive work into their lives will not help breastfeeding mothers.

Women's reproductive and domestic work, child care and other care work take up a large portion of a woman's day<sup>1</sup>. Time is much longer for women in developing countries where basic amenities are rare and women spend large amounts of time fetching water, fire wood and meeting other basic needs<sup>2</sup>. The amount of time women spend on breastfeeding is even larger. In Australia, a study by J. Smith shows that at 6 months, the time for the mother to breastfeed exclusively is about 2.5 hours a day or 18 hours per week; more when the baby is younger. But the reality is women spend much more time caring for children while managing various other household chores. This includes time for bottle feeding which is substantial when water and fuel are not reliable!

Reproductive work, including breastfeeding, while very time consuming for women, is NOT paid, nor even counted as contributions to the national economy in most countries. There is little in official, legal, health and social frameworks to support, pay or compensate women for breastfeeding! "New" thinking around women's work is absolutely necessary! Breastfeeding as care or nurturing work needs to be counted as PAID WORK and integrated within the national economic valuation of women's work. Feminist economics provides such a framework for integration and can support policy advocacy and outcomes.

### **What you can you do!**

- **National or Local Governments** - Study and adopt ways to value women's reproductive work, including breastfeeding and include it in your country's Gross Domestic Product.
- See "Making Mothers Milk Count"<sup>3</sup> to kick off national discussion and initiate change.

### **Other Actors**

- Recognise and value motherhood! Act to support and protect mothers as they carry out their mothering work!
- Women and development studies can help to include breastfeeding as paid work and remove blinkers to counting mother's milk and mother's work!

*(Source: contributions from Dr. Penny van Esterik and Dr. Julie Smith as part of the WBW 2015 Action Folder development process. By Sarah Amin)*

*Please click here for WABA's World Breastfeeding Week 2015 webpage; <http://worldbreastfeedingweek.org/>*

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1 A 2011 study in Britain found that working women spend at least 81 mins a day (9.45 hours a week) looking after their children; this figure being the lowest among 21 other industrialised countries surveyed. Working mothers spend 81 minutes a day looking after their children," the Telegraph, by Laura Donnelly, Health Correspondent, BST 27 Mar 2011 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/8408503/Working-mothers-spend-81-minutes-a-day-looking-after-their-children.htmls>

2 See ICRW: <http://www.icrw.org/sites/default/files/publications/Infrastructure-Shortfalls-Cost-Poor-Women-Time-and-Opportunity-Toward-Achieving-the-Third-Millennium-Development-Goal-to-Promote-Gender-Equality-and-Empower-Women.pdf>

3 Smith, JP (2014) 'Making Mothers' Milk Count'. *Counting on Marilyn Waring: New Advances of Feminist Economics*, M Bjørnholt & A McKay. Bradford, Ontario, Demeter Press: 267-286.