

CONNECTING GIRLS, INSPIRING FUTURES!

WABA supports International Women's Day 2012

Today's fast paced modern world of technology, fast paced careers and lifestyles on the one hand, and on the other hand economic pressures that demand both parents earn to make ends meet, have created a society where the basic connection between mother and child and bonding is either lacking or lost for the majority of families. It is common for children to be left to be cared for by the baby sitter, maid or a child care institution; or grandparents and siblings, for long periods. In many cases, from birth, mother-child bonding and nurturing is compromised by bottle feeding, and made worse if done by a maid or nanny. Without the skin to skin contact that breastfeeding provides, infants miss out on this added touch and closeness provided by breastfeeding on demand for the first months of life. As a result, many children, including girls, are often disconnected from a very tender age! In a bottle feeding culture, we are disconnected not just from healthy feeding practices, but more importantly, also from healthy and loving relationships, and ultimately a healthy future.

Modernization, competitive schooling, and families coping with the pressures of earning, and surviving, cause much stress and distance between children and their families. While young boys are similarly affected, the disconnection for girls has repercussions into future generations, as they become mothers and nurturers. Many women feel distanced from their mothering potential. The modern working women's lifestyle often leaves her disengaged from her children even if this may not be her choice or intention.

Meanwhile the introduction of new communication technologies – handphones, social media, ipads, etc. – have increased connections among girls, but these have at the same time led to physical separation. Girls totally engaged in communicating through the internet, twitter and social media have little interest in learning to communicate face to face, to bond, and to connect physically.

Further with the continued commercialization of their bodies through the media, women have become more detached, ashamed, embarrassed, and thus disconnected from their bodies. In societies where the breast is highly sexualized, even breastfeeding often causes confusing emotions when perceived as a sexual act and feeding of older infants become taboo. Generally, insecurity among girls is all the result of disconnection – from who they are, their bodies and the inner power they embody.

This International Women's Day (IWD), we are reminded that WE collectively must be a force for change to increase this natural awareness of women's bodies, of who we are, and give this power back to women, starting from girlhood. Let girls and women first feel truly connected with themselves, their bodies and then with each other. Return to them the awareness of their true power, and the power of their body to feed their young and nurture the future. We need to help our young girls who are unable to connect, to bond with each other even as they lack that foundation in their childhood.

In conjunction with IWD 2012 theme *"Connecting Girls, Inspiring Future"*, WABA supports global actions aimed at developing our current and future generations, especially actions that involve girls' participation, that connect with girls, that are for girls and by girls, in order to inspire their future! Getting girls engaged actively starting with schools is critical. It has therefore been our priority to nurture and mobilize our youth by empowering girls and inspiring both young women and young men, towards a better understanding and awareness of themselves, their

reproductive health and rights; and to be advocates for protecting, promoting and supporting breastfeeding.

Recently, as part of WABA's 21st anniversary we launched our most recent video YOUTH in ACTION "Feed the Future". We hope to inspire young people and show that together, we can nurture the future. It is an outcome of the World Breastfeeding Week 2011 and workshops for young people in Penang, Malaysia. See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BSdk_1NxUK8

As part of this UNICEF Malaysia supported project, we also launched the updated video on working women entitled "*WABA celebrates women in nurturing the future with Care, Common Sense and Creativity*", see: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F4FY6fRomDc>

It gives WABA great pleasure to share our contribution of audio-visual work, which have involved youth (especially girls) and aim to engage and mobilize more young people via creative dance and movement, interaction, discussion and learning. We also hope the videos in our Multimedia Project will inspire further focus and work to promote breastfeeding, and inspire more YOUth in Action.

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