

7. Protecting Infant Health

The International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes (The Code) was adopted by the World Health Assembly (WHA) in 1981. This was in response to public and professional concern over the decline of breastfeeding due to the unscrupulous and uncontrolled marketing of infant formula, feeding bottles, teats, follow-on formulas and breastmilk substitutes. Aggressive and inappropriate marketing of breastmilk substitutes was identified by the WHA as a significant factor contributing to the alarming decline of breastfeeding rates, and the associated malnutrition and morbidity among young infants worldwide.

“Biological feeding has been the universal method of nurturing infants since the beginning of human existence on this planet. It is only in the past 50 years that processed cow’s milk has been widely used as an alternative to the natural method of feeding the infant.”

– Patrice Jellife, a founding member of WABA

Protect Breastfeeding: Making the Code Work (WBW 1994)

The *Innocenti Declaration*’s third operational target calls on all governments to “take action to give effect to the principles and aims of the Articles of the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes and subsequent relevant WHA resolutions in their entirety”. The Code is neither a treaty nor a regulation. National governments must translate the Code into national legislation in order to make it binding.

Without adequate protection from aggressive marketing tactics by formula companies, mothers, parents, caregivers and healthcare professionals become targets of misleading information which makes it very difficult for women to make an informed choice on the optimal way to feed their babies.

The International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN) has championed the Code since 1979. When WABA was formed, Code compliance was identified as one of the eight pillars for action. The International Code