



Breastfeeding: The Best Investment (WBW 1998)

The cost-benefit analysis of the 'value' of breastfeeding to nations have often provided strong arguments in favour of supporting financial investments of budgetary prioritisation in governments to support breastfeeding. While research in this area has not been vast, and few governments have actually placed monetary value on breastmilk production in their countries, the little available research data almost always point to longer-term benefits to a society as well as to health systems, individual employers and families.

This theme was thus chosen to highlight the economic value of breastfeeding versus the high cost of bottle feeding and to initiate action to protect, promote and support breastfeeding as one of the best health investments in the future of any country. It demonstrated to the world that breastfeeding brings savings across the board to households, employers, healthcare systems and nations.

This theme was particularly significant at a time when the world was undergoing an economic recession, and most meaningful for the underprivileged and poor in several parts of the world.

In West Africa, the WBW 1998 Action Folder, adapted and translated into French by WBW celebrants in Benin expressed frustration with industrialised nations that were promoting artificial milk-substitutes to poorer countries. It highlighted studies which compared the percentages of monthly wages spent on powdered milk by families in industrialised nations like Germany and New Zealand which spend only 5-6%, to those of Benin families, which spend 91% of their monthly earnings to bottle-feed one baby.²² Such a gap only shows that bottle feeding is totally unsustainable and can wipe out a family's income in no time. As such, it cannot even be considered an option for the majority of the poor nations in the global South!

WABA's on-going work to highlight such economic data to decision-makers and to encourage more countries to conduct cost-benefit analysis on breastfeeding strengthens global advocacy to promote breastfeeding not only as the healthiest, but also the most cost-effective infant feeding option for the majority of women worldwide.

22. Breastfeeding. The Best Investment. A report of WBW 1998 activities around the world. WABA