



12. Moving Forward: the Next 20 Years

A quarter century of adaptation and growth is something worth celebrating and in the preceding pages you would have found many examples of celebrations. WABA approached this milestone with reflection and review. What are the contemporary opportunities and challenges to the protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding?

We decided to conceptualise the challenge by placing the breastfeeding mother and infant, the dyad, at the centre of our thinking. What are the circles of influence around her that either enable her and allow for her agency, or are constraints? This analytic process stopped us from being observers but envisaging instead what we could do to play our part in ensuring that mother and infant have a successful breastfeeding journey.

As a metaphor, we imagined the concept of 'spaces' that surround the breastfeeding mother and her baby – the social, community and regulated spaces, which impact on the life and choices of a breastfeeding mother and infant. There is the home and family space; the healthcare space; the public and civic space; the government space, both local and national; the work space; and the policy-setting and normative space, mostly occupied by UN agencies and their partners.

Our inquiry led to some worrying trends: although early initiation rates appear positive, these are often not sustained. Healthcare systems, when under pressure of patient numbers or diminished resources, struggle to provide the breastfeeding mother the support she needs. The sales of breastmilk substitutes are growing, exponentially in some regions. Women are entering the labour force in record numbers, but they face higher unemployment rates and more precarious labour conditions. Women represent the majority of the world's working poor and are disproportionality represented in the informal sector. The ratification of the ILO Conventions on Maternity Protection remain disappointingly low. The attitudes, beliefs and expectations of family are a major contributing factor to a woman's infant feeding decisions. A supportive partner has a positive