

Montek assures to introduce breastfeeding in 11th plan



16 national organizations led by BPNI presented a Joint Statement to Planning Commission on IYCF for ensuring infant's right to food and asked the commission to incorporate it in 11th plan as part of core strategic intervention

BPNI NEWS DESK, NEW DELHI: Dr. Montek Singh Ahluwalia, Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission, had shown keen interests in the data presented by Dr. Arun Gupta, particularly related to IBFAN-Asia Pacific's assessment on breastfeeding practices, policies and programmes in 8 South Asian countries and expressed his deep concern over the high rate of IMR and neonatal deaths in India.

Extremely concerned over India's high rank which stood at 6th among 8 South Asian countries, Dr Ahluwalia wanted Dr Gupta's assertions on the efficacy of early initiation of breastfeeding, exclusive breastfeeding and complementary feeding and how it could reduce the IMR and neonatal deaths in India.

Acknowledging that IYCF, especially breastfeeding, is the most important task in front of the government today, Sh. Ahluwalia, however, requested BPNI to create an organizational chart of an institution that could center-stage breastfeeding.

Breastfeeding has also been designated as a key strategy for poverty reduction in the Joint Statement and recognizes optimal infant and young child feeding in Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) and incorporate 0-6 months for exclusive breastfeeding in all programmes to ensure infants' basic right to food, informed BPNI consultant Radha Holla.

The Joint Statement also asked the Planning Commission to declare "breastfeeding education" as a basic service equal to immunization in both health and nutrition sectors. While recalling major actions later in a press briefing, Dr Gupta said that five actions drawn in the Joint Statement should be incorporated in 11th plan.

A group of 16 health professionals and citizen movement organizations had submitted this joint statement on Infant and Young Child Feeding to Mr. Montek Singh Ahluwalia on 29 December 2006 and sought for recognizing "breastfeeding" in the 11th plan as a core intervention for ensuring the survival and optimal development of infants in India.

The representatives had sought for adequate measures that could protect infants and young children from further deaths and ensure proper development for those who survived. The latest provisional report of NFHS-3 and UNICEF's recent report on The State of the World's Children 2007 show high prevalence of IMR in India and varying in different states. In few states, however, the IMR rate has been increased during last 2 decades and recent years.

Today, overwhelming evidence exists that universally initiating breastfeeding within one hour of birth, exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months, and continued breastfeeding with adequate and appropriate complementary feeding for at least two years, can rapidly reduce infant mortality by more than 43%. Breastfeeding has also been shown to lead to optimal brain development, increasing IQ levels, informed Dr. Arun Gupta, National Coordinator, BPNI.

5 major actions demanded in the joint statement

- a. ensure adequate budget for national and state plans;
- b. create a commission on infant nutrition for specific tasks and coordination for optimizing infant nutrition;
- c. establish accountability and mechanisms on infant nutrition in MOH and MWCD;
- d. provide legislation support to all women for adequate healthcare support and
- e. assure six months maternity leave to ensure initiation of breastfeeding within one hour of birth, exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months.