



India stands YELLOW on Breastfeeding programme and policy

Smt. Reva Nayyar, Secretary, Ministry of Women and Child Development (MOWCD), released the **State of World's Breastfeeding: India 2005: A Report Card** at the time of the meeting of 'State secretaries in-charge of Women and Child Development' held at Delhi. It reveals that India stands at YELLOW on a scale of four colours, Green – Blue – Yellow-Red (ranging 'excellent'–'good' – 'fair'– 'poor'). Smt. Nayyar said, "This is an honest appraisal of India policy and programmes on breastfeeding." The report card shows what progress India has made on implementing the *Global strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding*. It provides a quick visualization, where India stands on each indicator used to assess the policy and programme as well as the resultant practice. India scores 69.5 out of 160 and ranks 'YELLOW' on a scale of four colours. The assessment is based on set of 15 indicators (10 for policy and programmes, and five for resultant practices). Each indicator gets an objective score based on sub set of questions, that further leads to 'colours' ranking. Detailed In detailed analysis , India scores 5 'Reds', 8 'Yellows' and only 2 'Greens' out of total of 15 indicators, revealing a very low level of achievement (<http://www.appartoolkit.com/India.php>.) It only indicates a need for prioritization and effective resource allocation, as well as coordinated actions on Infant and Young Child Feeding. Those in REDs are, maternity protection, HIV and infant feeding, and infant feeding during emergencies, and in YELLOW are community outreach, baby friendly hospital initiative, health and nutrition care, information support, and monitoring & evaluation. All these areas need to be addressed urgently.

The Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India, (www.bpni.org) (BPNI), the regional coordinating office for IBFAN (www.ibfan-asiapacific.org) worked with Government of India and other partners, Departments of Community Medicine and Pediatrics of AIIMS and National Neonatology Forum to facilitate this assessment. Results were used and uploaded to the World Breastfeeding Trends Initiative (**WBTI**), Tracking Assessment and Monitoring (TAM) systems. It uses a web based software tool kit to benchmark the status. (www.worldbreastfeedingtrends.org).

According to the report card, which ranks India stands on breastfeeding practice, only 15.8% women in India start breastfeeding within one hour (RED), less than half practice

exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months (YELLOW) and one third practice optimal complementary feeding (RED). On infant survival; more than 11 lac babies are estimated to die during first month of life and another 5 lac during 2 to 12 months. According to the Global strategy, 2/3rds of these deaths are related to poor infant feeding practices. The report card makes it a compelling reason for India to move towards coordinated actions for improving infant feeding practices, particularly early and exclusive breastfeeding given the new evidence that early breastfeeding within one hour, if practiced in all babies can reduce 22% of neonatal deaths (The research results have been published in the American Journal *Pediatrics* <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/content/full/117/3/e380>), said Dr. Arun Gupta, the national coordinator of BPNI (arun@ibfan-asiapacific.org). He further said that the Prime Minister could consider leading a national movement to save infants, by establishing a 'National Authority for Infant Survival'. Ranking will be repeated after 3 years, he said.

According to Dr. Vinod Paul, Professor of Neonatology at AIIMS (vinodkpaul@hotmail.com), more than 15% of child deaths could be averted in India, if optimal breastfeeding practices were scaled up. He further said that all stakeholders particularly state governments have a key role to play; while centre prepares a coordinated action plan, which is monitored, and evaluated, and has committed resources, States actively implement and reach all mothers. Dr J C Sobti of BPNI (bpni@bpni.org) said, "Programmes should have committed resources. UN agencies like WHO and UNICEF should take due notice and advocate for 'mainstreaming' of 'protecting, promoting and supporting breastfeeding' in child health programmes as recommended by the MDG Task Force and recent World Bank reports"

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Notes for editors

1. Exactly four years ago, in May 2002, The World Health Assembly (WHA) unanimously adopted the *Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding* and all Member States including India endorsed it. Aim of the Strategy was to generate awareness and action to improve infant feeding practices as a means to reduce infant mortality and prevent child malnutrition. (<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/events/2005/wha58/en/>). The strategy called for a National plan of action – which is monitored and evaluated – underlining the need for **coordinated actions** replacing ‘**ad-hoc**’ actions.
2. *Innocenti Declaration on Infant and Young Child Feeding 2005*, (www.innocent15.net) also reinforces the action contained in the Global Strategy and it was adopted in November 2005 by WHO, UNICEF, World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA), International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN), Wellstart International, Regione Toscana, International Lactation Consultants Association (ILCA), La Leche League International (LLL), and Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine; bringing a unique global consensus.
3. The World Bank, an international organization dedicated to reducing global poverty and its concomitant ills, has produced a comprehensive report on the importance of improved nutrition on the reduction of poverty. “Repositioning Nutrition as Central to Development: *A Strategy for Large-Scale Action*” <<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/NUTRITION/Resources/281846-1131636806329/NutritionStrategy.pdf>>. Central to the report’s recommendations is the firm statement that steps to prevent malnutrition **MUST** occur during pregnancy and the first 2 years of life. The World Bank report states unequivocally that exclusive breastfeeding (particularly including the initial feedings of colostrum) for the first six months of life, followed by the introduction of nutrient and energy-rich foods with breastfeeding continuing until two years of age, is the single most important long-term preventative measure that can be taken to combat undernutrition. The report cites the importance of utilizing the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI), the enforcement of the WHO Code on the Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes, **and the use of trained female community workers to create a climate of support and accurate information for pregnant women and new mothers**. While breastfeeding alone will not solve the whole problem of poverty, the World Bank believes it is a fundamental first step. Exclusive breastfeeding can raise immunity levels and reduce disease susceptibility; allow for controlled child spacing and family planning, improve intelligence and later educational achievement, and lay the irreplaceable foundation for optimal life and growth.