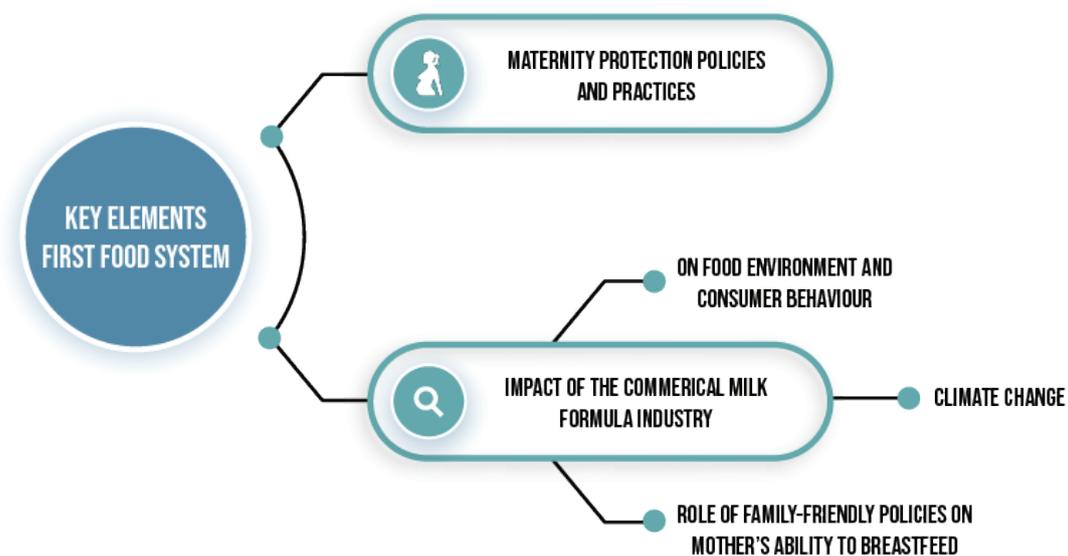


BREASTFEEDING: THE FIRST FOOD SYSTEM

Key Elements

The following elements should be incorporated in future food system frameworks:¹



I. Maternity protection policies and practices

In the United Nations system, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) is responsible for labor and employment issues, aiming for social justice through labour negotiation between government, employers and trade union organisations. ILO develops policies and programmes promoting fair and decent working conditions.

The ILO urges States to provide maternity protection for female workers through a series of conventions. The first ILO Maternity Protection Convention in 1919 called for 6 weeks' maternity leave, and two breastfeeding breaks a day. The second Maternity Protection Convention in 1952 called for 12 weeks' paid maternity leave, and for breastfeeding breaks to be part of paid working time.

The Maternity Protection Convention 183, promulgated in 2000, represents the minimum standards for working women during pregnancy and after giving birth: At least 14 weeks of paid maternity leave and recommendation 191 which recommends extending this to 18 weeks of leave with: Paid leave (at least 2/3 of salary) and medical benefits both paid by social security or social/health insurance; One or more breastfeeding breaks as part of working time; Health protection for pregnant and breastfeeding workers; Job protection against dismissal if pregnant or breastfeeding; Non-discrimination against hiring women of childbearing age and Inclusion of working women from the non-formal sector. Unfortunately, only a

¹ Alive & Thrive. FHI Solutions and Save the Children. Global Policy Brief. Oot L, Mason F, Lapping K. The First-Food System: The Importance of Breast-feeding in Global Food Systems Discussions.

few countries have ratified Convention C183. In 2000, the ILO added Recommendation 191 to: Establish hygienic facilities for breastfeeding (nursing) near the workplace; Allow paid breastfeeding breaks to be taken at the beginning/end of each day (shorter working day) and; Extend maternity leave to 18 weeks.^{2,3,4}

Return to the workplace is one of the leading obstacles to successful breastfeeding and contributes to women's decision to stop breastfeeding early.⁵ Interventions such as maternity leave, workplace support and employment status of mothers led to a 30 per cent increase in breastfeeding rates.⁶ Breastfeeding is linked to birth spacing and thus empowers women with greater reproductive autonomy.⁷

II. Impact of the Commercial Milk Formula (CMF) Industry

Key factors in the current framework merit specific emphasis.⁸

Factor 1: Impact of the CMF industry on the food environment and consumer behavior

Driven by profit motives, aggressive marketing by the commercial milk formula (CMF) industry has negatively impacted on infant feeding practices, consumer behavior, diets and food environments. CMF marketing messages have resulted in unclear, inconsistent nutritional messages to mothers, families and communities.⁹ Global CMF sales ballooned from ~US\$1.5 billion in 1978 to US\$55.6 billion in 2019. This expansion has occurred firstly, through the widening geographical reach of the CMF and baby food industry and its marketing practices, as corporations have penetrated new markets, especially in the Global South. Secondly, diversification and the broadening of product ranges beyond infant formula, to include a wide menu of follow-up, toddler and specialized formulas for a broader range of age groups and conditions, thereby widening the scope of mother-child populations subject to commodification.¹⁰

While the vast majority of infants do not require formula, it is the choice of feeding by some parents. The CMF industry continuously designs marketing strategies to change social norms and influence feeding decisions. such as product and cross-product promotion (e.g., promotion of milks for children aged 12-36 months to create brand recognition), distribution through trusted sources like health facilities and health workers, and extensive social and mass media campaigns.

The International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes (Code), adopted in 1981 and its subsequent resolutions were created to protect infants and young children from inappropriate marketing by prohibiting the promotion of breastmilk substitutes, bottles, and teats to the public, health-care workers and facilities, and the distribution of samples or vouchers to new parents. Despite national Code legislation in 84 countries, violations are commonplace even within health systems.

² ILO, 2014 'Maternity and paternity at work. Law and practice across the world'. Available here: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/@publ/documents/publication/wcms_242615.pdf

³ 2015 ILO updates. Available here: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/--dgreports/--gender/documents/briefingnote/wcms_410183.pdf

⁴ UNICEF/ILO (2015) Philippines. Healthy Beginnings For a Better Society: Breastfeeding in the workplace - A toolkit.

⁵ Rollins NC, et al., Why invest, and what it will take to improve breastfeeding practices. The Lancet, 2016, vol. 387, pp. 491-504.

⁶ Sinha B, et al., Interventions to improve breastfeeding outcomes: A systematic review and meta-analysis. Acta Paediatrica, no. 104, pp. 114-134. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/apa.13127/epdf>

⁷ Victora CG, et al., Breastfeeding in the 21st Century: Epidemiology, mechanism and lifelong effect. The Lancet, 2016, vol. 387, pp. 475-490.

⁸ Alive & Thrive. FHI Solutions and Save the Children. Global Policy Brief. Oot L, Mason F, Lapping K. The First-Food System: The Importance of Breast-feeding in Global Food Systems Discussions

⁹ Ching et al., 2021. "Old Tricks, New Opportunities: How Companies Violate the International Code of Marketing of Breast-Milk Substitutes and Undermine Maternal and Child Health during the COVID-19 Pandemic". Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health. Vol 18, no. 5, 2381.

¹⁰ Baker P, et al. Globalization, first-foods systems transformations and corporate power: a synthesis of literature and data on the market and political practices of the transnational baby food industry. Globalization and Health. 2021. 17:58. Available at: <https://globalizationandhealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12992-021-00708-1>

In May 2016, WHO published guidance on ending the inappropriate promotion of foods for infants and young children, which was welcomed by the World Health Assembly (WHA).¹¹ There should be no cross-promotion of breast milk substitutes indirectly through the promotion of foods for infants and young children by the use of similar brand names, packaging designs, labels, text, images, colour schemes etc. CMF companies should not create conflicts of interest in health facilities or throughout health systems, through such activities as donation of equipment or services, gifts or incentives; hosting of events; providing education to parents and other caregivers on infant and young child feeding; or sponsoring scientific meetings.¹²

We implore those at the UNFSS to recognize this negative impact of CMF companies on the food system during discussions of the HLPE framework to ensure adequate attention and focus on addressing the industry's aggressive marketing.

Factor 2: Role of family-friendly policies on a mother's ability to breastfeed

Family-friendly policies are defined as “policies that help to balance and benefit both work and family life that typically provide three types of essential resources needed by parents and caregiver of young children: time, finances, and services”.¹³ These include maternity protections such as paid maternity leave, paid breaks to either breastfeed or express breastmilk, and access to safe, private, and lactation spaces for expressing breastmilk at work, are critical to maternal and infant health and well-being. Inadequate maternity protection policies and domestic laws within both the formal and informal work sectors are key barriers to breastfeeding. Women need time, space, and support from their families, communities, and workplaces to breastfeed successfully.

Chai et al. 2018 reported data from 38 lower-and-middle-income countries demonstrating that a one-month increase in the duration of maternity leave was associated with a 5.9 percentage point increase in the prevalence of exclusive breastfeeding and a 2.2-month increase in breastfeeding duration.¹⁴ Women allowed lactation breaks during work were nearly 62 times more likely to continue breastfeeding than those who do not.¹⁵ In addition, female workers who are encouraged by their coworkers and supervisors to continue breastfeeding are 2.4 times more likely to continue breastfeeding than those who do not have that support.¹⁶

Female workers with access to a dedicated lactation room are 2.4 times more likely to continue breastfeeding than women who do not.¹⁷ In Kenya, workplace policies providing breastfeeding flexitime, breaks for breastfeeding mothers, day-care for infants, facilities for breast milk expression, and home-based nutrition counselling for pregnant and lactating women led to a four-fold increase in the probability of exclusive breastfeeding.¹⁸

Weak mother-baby and family-friendly policies like maternity protection, maternity/paternity leaves impede healthy consumer behaviors. The impact of CMF marketing on our environment and climate change has been estimated at whopping 4 kg of greenhouse gases emitted for every kg of formula milk produced.¹⁹

¹¹ Guidance on ending the inappropriate promotion of foods for infants and young children. In: Sixty-ninth World Health Assembly, Geneva, 23–28 May 2016. Resolutions and decisions, annexes. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2016 (A69/7 Add 1; http://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA69/A69_7Add1-en.pdf).

¹² World Health Assembly Resolution 69.9. <http://www.who.int/nutrition/publications/infantfeeding/information-note-followup-formula-bms/en/>

¹³ UNICEF. 2019a. Paid Parental Leave and Family-Friendly Policies. An evidence brief. New York: UNICEF.

¹⁴ Chai, Y. et al., 2018. “Does extending the duration of legislated paid maternity leave improve breastfeeding practices? Evidence from 38 low-income and middle-income countries.” *BMJ Global Health*. Vol. 3 (e001032).

¹⁵ Alive & Thrive. 2020. Policy paper on workplace lactation programs in Viet Nam.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Tsai SY. 2013. “Impact of a breastfeeding-friendly workplace on an employed mother's intention to continue breastfeeding after returning to work.” *Breastfeed Med*. Vol. 8(2): p. 210-216. doi:10.1089/bfm.2012.0119.

¹⁸ Kimani-Murage, EW, Wilunda, C, Macharia, TN, et al. 2021. “Effect of a baby-friendly workplace support intervention on exclusive breastfeeding in Kenya.” *Matern Child Nutr*. e13191.

¹⁹ UNICEF. Breastfeeding and the Sustainable Development Goals. Factsheet.

Family-friendly policies also benefit businesses and employers by increasing workers' productivity, earnings, and satisfaction, businesses attract and retain high quality staff, improving the company's brand and image (and often earnings), and improving employee health, morale, and engagement.^{20,21,22} Studies from Kenya and Bangladesh showed similar benefits, indicating reduced absenteeism and improved workplace productivity.²³ Women working in the informal economy are particularly unlikely to have any form of maternity protection, contributing to a cycle of poverty and food insecurity.²⁴

Factor 3. Climate change

Climate change is a real and persistent issue and must be addressed urgently. A 2016 study found that emissions created by producing CMF from just six Asian Pacific countries (Australia, China, Malaysia, India, Philippines, and South Korea) generated 2.89 million tonnes of carbon dioxide, the equivalent of driving more than six billion miles by car. Conservative estimates indicate that each kilogram (kg) of milk formula produced generated four kg of GHGs during production.²⁵

CMF production impacts the climate in numerous ways. First, the main ingredient in most CMF is cow's milk and dairy farming is a major contributor to GHGs through the release of methane and other gases into the air. In addition, the land necessary to feed dairy cattle can lead to deforestation and the food used to feed dairy cows often utilizes pesticides and fertilizers, further degrading the environment. Aside from the specific impacts to the air, land, and water, CMF products also require energy and materials to produce, package, distribute, and prepare the formula. Breastmilk production, on the other hand, only requires the mother to consume 500 additional calories a day to account for the extra energy expended in producing milk. CMF products also often come in non-recyclable materials. Research shows that feeding one million babies with formula for two years requires, on average, approximately 150 million cans of formula. Although using a breast pump to express milk requires additional equipment, many of these products can be reused and thus are better for the environment than the one-time use containers of CMF products.²⁶ (WABA, 2020). Given these impacts, a specific mention of the emerging role CMF products play in climate change in the HLPE framework would help to bring attention to addressing the negative impacts of the CMF industry on the environment and the food system itself.

This brief was prepared by the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction with support from SUN Civil Society Network.

²⁰ UNICEF. 2019a. Paid Parental Leave and Family-Friendly Policies. An evidence brief. New York: UNICEF.

²¹ Office of Women's Health. 2018. Business Case for Breastfeeding. Retrieved April 3, 2019, from womenshealth.gov website: <https://www.womenshealth.gov/breastfeeding/breastfeeding-home-work-andpublic/breastfeeding-and-going-back-work/business-case>.

²² Global Breastfeeding Collective. 2019. Breastfeeding Advocacy Brief: Breastfeeding and Family-Friendly Policies.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Alive & Thrive. FHI Solutions and Save the Children. Global Policy Brief. Oot L, Mason F, Lapping K. The First-Food System: The Importance of Breastfeeding in Global Food Systems Discussions

²⁵ Smith, J.P. 2019. "A commentary on the carbon footprint of milk formula: harms to planetary health and policy implications." Intl Breastfeed J. Vol 14, no. 49.

²⁶ World Alliance for Breastfeeding (WABA). 2020. Support breastfeeding for a healthier planet. Retrieved from: <https://worldbreastfeedingweek.org/2020/wbw2020-action-folder/>