

The overall **OBJECTIVE:**

To protect breastfeeding and optimal feeding practices as a key natural resource for food security and safety and as a basic women's right

gBICS CONTRIBUTION TO THE PROTECTION OF THE Sexual and reproductive health and rights

g b i c s the global breastfeeding
initiative for child survival

gBICS is supported by Norad

gBICS contribution to the protection of the **SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS**

WHO's definition of reproductive health includes the ability to have a safe and satisfying sex life and also the ability to make decisions without coercion about reproduction, including the timing, spacing, and number of children to have. Women have the right to make decisions about their reproductive and sexual lives without pressure from communities, religious groups, governments, or health professionals. gBICS partners agree that guaranteeing these rights requires not only access to accurate and complete information so that women may make informed choices about fertility regulation, contraception, and HIV/AIDS but also access to quality health care services to enable women to get through pregnancy and childbirth safely. gBICS partners also develop work with religious leaders in Africa, and in general with governments and health professionals to guarantee these basic rights.

Recognition and protection of reproductive and sexual rights, including the right to self determination and pleasure in sexuality, are key to improving women's health worldwide. The terrain of reproductive and sexual rights is defined in terms of power and resources: "the body exists in a socially mediated universe". Protecting women's reproductive rights, then, entails not only appropriate comprehensive medical attention, but addressing a host of social, economic, and political factors that affect women as well as their families and wider communities.

Women have the right to make informed decisions on whether they want to breastfeed or not and society needs to develop mechanisms to support their choice. The International Code and national regulations are important instruments to facilitate informed decisions. gBICS Partners have been active in defending women right to be protected from commercial pressures which may distort their judgement and undermine their decisions.



For gBICS partners breastfeeding is a reproductive right and contributes to gender equality. Breastfeeding is more than just a lifestyle choice. Rather, it is the biological norm of the human species and, as thus, represents an integral part of women's reproductive cycles. Some might argue that breastfeeding constrains mothers, relegating them to the care of infants and restricting their full participation in social life. However, respect for and support of breastfeeding as an integral part of a woman's reproductive cycle and, thus, as a right, allows us to shift the responsibility for breastfeeding success or failure from individual women to the social, economic, cultural and political factors that negatively impact women's and children's well-

being by creating obstacles to breastfeeding success.

Indeed, recognizing breastfeeding as a fundamental reproductive and sexual health right for women is important for gender equality and women's health and well-being. Breastfeeding represents an important element in securing other rights for women because it provides unique benefits to women: it delays return to fertility, promotes women's economic independence, and decreases women's risks for various health problems, including certain kinds of cancer. It also challenges negative media images, especially those promoted by the infant-formula industry misleading with aggressive baby food marketing which creates undue pressure on women. Breastfeeding challenges the objectification of women and the sexualisation of breasts in media and society. gBICS partners in the western part of the world have been very active in supporting women to breastfeed in public and changing national and local policies to that effect.

Working with Youth.

Based on this perspective of women's rights, gBICS partners develop work with youth. Most partners have a policy of involving youth in the daily work of the group and making them take responsibility in network coordination and the development of action on gender awareness. This is part of the IBFAN's rejuvenation. And, of course, as young people in reproductive ages, they begin to develop their own actions making the network their own, like,

for example work against obstetric violence or, in the case of Africa, with people living with HIV/AIDS or, in Latin America, developing their own organization, called RUMBA. The 'WABA YOUth' Initiative focuses on outreach to youth.

HIV/AIDS.

Transmission of HIV to the child may occur either during pregnancy, delivery or through breastfeeding. In the absence of interventions, 15-25% of HIV-positive mothers who do not breast-feed will infect their infants during pregnancy or delivery. With breastfeeding, there is an absolute increase in transmission of about 5-20%. This is furthermore influenced by a range of factors related to maternal and infant health and feeding practices. Current evidence also shows that provision of antiretroviral prophylaxis to children or breastfeeding mothers increases HIV free survival in breastfeeding infants. This clearly indicates that not all patterns of breastfeeding carry the same risk. Mixed feeding before 6 months¹ increases both the risk of transmission and infection due to other causes. The risk of postnatal transmission can be reduced by exclusive breastfeeding and it can be further lowered with maternal and/or infant antiretroviral (ARV) prophylaxis.

One of main gBICS expected outcomes is to increase awareness on breastfeeding in the HIV context and improved implementation of the 2010 WHO guidelines on HIV and infant feeding, to ensure optimal infant feeding, nutrition and care to minimize the risk of HIV transmission through breastmilk and maximize child survival. gBICS partners were present at every step of the way in the development of these guidelines and the subsequent Questions & Answers which clarify

¹ Combining breastfeeding and formula feeding and/or early introduction of solid and semisolid foods



them, as well as in the update of the UN Framework for Priority Actions on HIV and infant feeding. gBICS will now engage in the development of comprehensive and integrated Information, Education and Communication strategies that include training and public statements, conduct operational research on counselling and Peer support for infant feeding and HIV and work to strengthen capacity of national, community networks for improved support and follow up to women and children, particularly including HIV infected women.



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