

BREASTFEEDING – CHALLENGES & RIGHTS

WHY BREASTFEEDING?

- Breastfeeding is so much more than food alone for a baby.
- Mother's breastmilk contains many hundreds of health-enhancing molecules, enzymes, proteins and hormones that will contribute to baby's development and child survival.
- Breastfeeding protects babies from diarrhoea and acute respiratory infections, stimulates their immune systems and improves response to vaccinations.
- The WHO/UNICEF *Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding* recommends that children breastfeed exclusively for the first six months of life, and then continue breastfeeding with adequate complementary food up to two years or beyond.

THE CHALLENGE

- Many mothers today neither exclusively breastfeed for the first six months of the baby's life nor continue breastfeeding for the recommended two years or more, and instead replace breastmilk with commercial or other substitutes.
- Formula feeding is expensive and carries risks of additional illness and death, particularly where the levels of infectious disease are high and where preparation and storage of these substitutes is not carried out properly.
- Many studies indicate that a non-breastfed child living in disease-ridden and unhygienic conditions is between six and 25 times more likely to die of diarrhoea and four times more likely to die of pneumonia than breastfed infants.
- A recent study of postneonatal mortality in the United States found a 25% increase in mortality when infants were not breastfed.

BREASTFEEDING RIGHTS

- The *Convention on the Rights of the Child* recognises that every child has the inherent right to life and aims to ensure their survival and development.
- Breastfeeding is the perfect way to provide the best food for a baby, benefiting children the world over.
- Breastfeeding within the first hour after delivery further increases child survival. Normal initiation of breastfeeding in the first minutes to first hours of life begins with skin-to-skin contact, and helps mothers and infants to achieve optimal breastfeeding.
- Women have a right to this knowledge and to receive the support that they need to initiate breastfeeding accordingly.