Breastfeeding

Goal
Empowerment of all women to breastfeed their children exclusively for four to six months and to continue breastfeeding, with complementary food, well into the second year

Best practices
Optimal breastfeeding practices include exclusive breastfeeding (only breastmilk with no other foods or liquids) for the first six months of life, followed by breastmilk and complementary foods (solid or semi-solid foods) from six months of age on, and continued breastfeeding for up to two years of age or beyond with complementary foods.

The International Code
The World Health Assembly adopted the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes in 1981 to protect and promote breastfeeding, through the provision of adequate information on appropriate infant feeding and the regulation of the marketing of breastmilk substitutes, bottles and teats. All governments should adopt the Code into national legislation. To date, 24 governments have adopted all of the Code’s provisions into law, while a further 52 have partially adopted them.

TRENDS IN BREASTFEEDING PATTERNS
Percentage of children who are exclusively breastfed, who are breastfed and receive complementary foods and those who continue to breastfeed at specified ages

Result
Exclusive breastfeeding rates increased by 10 per cent over the decade. Improvements were also noted in complementary feeding and in continued breastfeeding for the first and second year of life.

... but
Only about half of all infants are exclusively breastfed for the first four months of life. Now the recommendation is for exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months*.

Issue
Breastmilk alone is the ideal nourishment for infants for the first six months of life as it contains all the nutrients, antibodies, hormones and antioxidants an infant needs to thrive. It protects babies from diarrhoea and acute respiratory infections, stimulates their immune systems and response to vaccination, and, according to some studies, confers cognitive benefits. Breastfeeding also has many health and emotional benefits for the mother.

*Guidelines issued during the 54th World Health Assembly in May 2001.