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Babies and mothers worldwide failed by lack of investment in breastfeeding

Sri Lanka ranked in the top 23 countries globally on breastfeeding rates, as new analysis shows an investment of US$4.70 per newborn could generate US$300 billion in economic gains by 2025.

COLOMBO, 1 August 2017 – No country in the world fully meets recommended standards for breastfeeding, according to a new report by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO) in collaboration with the Global Breastfeeding Collective, a new initiative to increase global breastfeeding rates.

The Global Breastfeeding Scorecard, which evaluated 194 nations, found that only 40 per cent of children younger than six months are breastfed exclusively (given nothing but breast milk) and only 23 countries have exclusive breastfeeding rates above 60 per cent. Sri Lanka, as one of the first countries in the world to adopt the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes in 1981, and following investment in the promotion of breastfeeding ranks within the top 23 countries, with 82 per cent of mothers exclusively breastfeeding their children across the nation.

Evidence shows that breastfeeding has cognitive and health benefits for both infants and their mothers. It is especially critical during the first six months of life, helping prevent diarrhoea and pneumonia, two major causes of death in infants. Mothers who breastfeed have a reduced risk of ovarian and breast cancer, two leading causes of death among women.

“The amazing thing about breastfeeding is that it supports the brain development of children, building their ‘cognitive capital’ and ensuring they learn and grow into happy, healthy and productive adults. Breastfeeding is simply one of the most effective investments any nation can make in the health of their young and the future health of their economies and societies,” said UNICEF Sri Lanka Representative Tim Sutton. “We should all be immensely proud that in Sri Lanka 82%* of mothers exclusively breastfeed their children for six months, but we must all work to sustain these real gains. Together, we must continue to implement and monitor the International Code of Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes, ensuring that mothers are empowered with the right information especially in times of emergency; together we must continue to strengthen the ‘Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative’ which ensures that hospitals promote breastfeeding; and perhaps most importantly, together we must continue investing in our health staff, who ensure that mothers have the knowledge and confidence to breastfeed their children.”

“Breastfeeding is the best start in life one can give to the newborn and it has positive effects that last through adulthood – no other health intervention has a return on investment matching that for breastfeeding,” said WHO Representative to Sri Lanka Dr Razia Pendse. “For sustaining breastfeeding, it is important to ensure nutrition and health of adolescent girls, women of reproductive age, antenatal and breastfeeding mothers. Sri Lanka has been a pioneer in promoting and protecting breastfeeding and has breastfeeding as a central pillar in the National Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding (2015 - 2020).”
The scorecard was released at the start of World Breastfeeding Week alongside a new analysis demonstrating that an annual investment of only US$4.70 per newborn is required to increase the global rate of exclusive breastfeeding among children under six months to 50 per cent by 2025.

*Nurturing the Health and Wealth of Nations: The Investment Case for Breastfeeding,* suggests that meeting this target could save the lives of 520,000 children under the age of five and potentially generate US$300 billion in economic gains over 10 years, as a result of reduced illness and health care costs and increased productivity.

The investment case shows that in five of the world’s largest emerging economies—China, India, Indonesia, Mexico and Nigeria—the lack of investment in breastfeeding results in an estimated 236,000 child deaths per year and US$119 billion in economic losses.

Globally, investment in breastfeeding is far too low. Each year, governments in lower- and middle-income countries spend approximately US$250 million on breastfeeding programs; and donors provide only an additional US$85 million.

The Global Breastfeeding Collective is calling on countries to:

- Increase funding to raise breastfeeding rates from birth through two years.
- Fully implement the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes and relevant World Health Assembly resolutions through strong legal measures that are enforced and independently monitored by organizations free from conflicts of interest.
- Enact paid family leave and workplace breastfeeding policies, building on the International Labour Organization’s maternity protection guidelines as a minimum requirement, including provisions for the informal sector.
- Implement the Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding in maternity facilities, including providing breastmilk for sick and vulnerable newborns.
  Improve access to skilled breastfeeding counselling as part of comprehensive breastfeeding policies and programmes in health facilities.
- Strengthen links between health facilities and communities, and encourage community networks that protect, promote, and support breastfeeding.
- Strengthen monitoring systems that track the progress of policies, programmes, and funding towards achieving both national and global breastfeeding targets.

Breastfeeding is critical for the achievement of many of the Sustainable Development Goals. It improves nutrition (SDG2), prevents child mortality and decreases the risk of non-communicable diseases (SDG3), and supports cognitive development and education (SDG4). Breastfeeding is also an enabler to ending poverty, promoting economic growth and reducing inequalities.

*Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), Department of Census and Statistic, 2016*  
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Notes to editors
Multimedia content is available [here](http://uni.cf/breastfeeding).
Visit [http://uni.cf/breastfeeding](http://uni.cf/breastfeeding) to download The Global Breastfeeding Scorecard and The Investment Case for Breastfeeding.
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About the Global Breastfeeding Scorecard
The Scorecard compiles data from countries all over the world on the status of seven priorities set by the Global Breastfeeding Collective to increase the rate of breastfeeding.
The 23 countries that have achieved exclusive breastfeeding rates above 60 per cent are: Bolivia, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Cambodia, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Eritrea, Kenya, Kiribati, Lesotho, Malawi, Micronesia, Federated States of Nauru, Nepal, Peru, Rwanda, São Tome and Principe, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Swaziland, Timor-Leste, Uganda, Vanuatu, and Zambia.

About the Global Breastfeeding Collective
Co-led by UNICEF and WHO, the Global Breastfeeding Collective’s mission is to rally political, legal, financial, and public support for breastfeeding, which will benefit mothers, children, and society.

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