

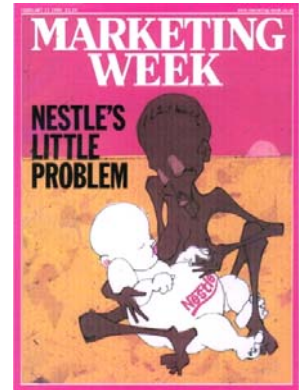
Innocenti + 15, 22 November 2005

Challenges: The International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes

As we gather to discuss ways to improve infant and young child feeding practices which impact on growth, development of children, other actors in the field are talking about growth and development of a different kind – that of sales and profitability of commercial products. These actors are the companies which produce breastmilk substitutes, feeding bottles and teats and I would like to show you how they are “looking good but behaving badly”.

Looking good, behaving badly >>

In looking at challenges and how to overcome them, I will focus solely on the marketing behaviour of companies. I will also explore ways of removing the threat posed by them so that the aims and objectives of the Global Strategy on Infant and Young Child Feeding can be fulfilled. There are other weighty issues hinging on the Code and resolutions which I will not be able to discuss in the allocated time.



For a variety of reasons, not all mothers choose to breastfeed. Promotion by companies is widely acknowledged to be one reason. It poses an ongoing challenge to anyone seeking to protect infant health.

<< Competition by commercial promotions



Breastfeeding rates are crawling up after years of concerted efforts by governments, international organisations and citizen networks. Profits from sales of commercial products, on the other hand, are increasing by leaps and bounds. Either we are doing a poor job at promoting breastfeeding or companies are better in marketing their products. I submit that it is the latter. They have more money and know how to do a better job.

<< Escalating sales and profits

Breastmilk substitutes are mostly unnecessary and always expensive. In comparison, breastmilk is natural, safe and free. They are in competition – an unfair one because of the financial resources which corporate machineries have at their disposal to make “designer food” desirable. The Code and resolutions are the only tools we have to level an uneven playing field. These tools prevent a range of promotional practices from interfering with breastfeeding. The Code and resolutions are a threat to companies and a lucrative market estimated to be worth US\$20 billion. Yet, in the face of societal

pressure, companies which were keen to portray themselves as responsible corporate citizens professed their support for the Code. Do they really?



>> Code watchers



Since the Code was adopted in 1981, companies have stopped some of the more blatant marketing malpractices they were engaging in prior to the Code. But not all – not as much as they promised, and they keep inventing new ways to get around it.

<< Advertising before the Code

If advertisements were rather upfront in the past, now we are faced with subtler messages which are just as dangerous but harder to pin down. You will see from this bill-board that no product is being advertised but the message in the slogan – World's number.1 Child - is clear to all.

Advertising now... >>



Companies are changing their tune. Instead of outright advertising, they now produce information materials in the forms of booklets and posters which display breastfeeding messages next to company names and logos. Many applaud this move as a positive act - we see it as a tactic which discourages breastfeeding. The underhanded tactics employed by companies are best encapsulated by this brochure which Nestlé distributes to doctors in Thailand. This brochure claims breastfeeding is best but opens up to show the Nan formula which not only separates the child from the breast but is portrayed as "closer than ever" to breastmilk.

<< Formula separating babies from the breast.

A disturbing development catching on globally is the way companies are cashing in on the emotional desire of parents to have smart children. Companies now sell "intelligence in a bottle". DHA/ARA fatty acids found naturally in breastmilk enhance brain development so these acids are imitated and added to formula. Even though there are no long term studies to substantiate the benefits of such additives, parents are willing to pay extra – up to 15-30% more - for the IQ promise.

IQ in a bottle? >>



Apart from the IQ springboard, companies also make functional claims on products supposedly "closer to breastmilk" to boost baby's immunities to disease and to promote health, growth etc.

<< Closer to breastmilk...?

Bottle and teat companies also come under the purview of the Code but they are often overlooked and overshadowed by the antics of baby food companies. So they behave as if the Code does not exist. This is an Italian ad – which has a slogan - "I want it exactly like this!"

Like this... exactly! >>





Health facilities and health workers continue to be targeted for company promotion. Sponsorship of medical seminars, conferences and medical associations is becoming more widespread, creating dependency and giving rise to conflicts of interest.

<< *No Free Lunch!*

Companies infiltrate health care facilities and win over doctors with gifts and display items sporting company or brand names and logos. They are rewarded many times over by the medical endorsement which grateful health workers confer on company products.

Sponsorship or bribery? >>



Here are more pictures of banned promotion, this time in the form of gifts to mothers, all specially devised to entice mothers to buy products and give up breastfeeding in the process.

<< *Enticements for mothers*

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Smart marketing puts infant health at risk



poster: Dierenbescherming Netherlands, 1996

Most of the violations shown are drawn from countries where the Code and resolutions have not been implemented as national measures or where they are poorly enforced. It must be stressed that these images are the proverbial "tip of the iceberg" because for every violation reported, one can be sure there are hundreds more that went unnoticed and for each violation recorded, there are thousands more of the same. What is clear is that companies continue to put infant health at risk through promotion.



What is also clear is that every child has the right to the best start in life and that the best start begins with breastfeeding. How do we ensure that governments fully implement the Code and Resolutions and enforce them well so that breastfeeding receives the protection, promotion and support it deserves? What do we do to save the lives of infants who suffer or die of malnutrition because they were NOT breastfed?

<< *Malnutrition caused by formula feeding*

Here we need strategies to turn challenges into opportunities.

1. We need strong statements about the need for Code implementation, monitoring and review from international meetings such as this to keep the issue in the international limelight. The first Innocenti Declaration was successful in bringing about a surge of activities on Code implementation at the national level and served as a useful advocacy tool. Every two years the WHA adopts resolutions which not only tackle issues on infant feeding but which revisit and reaffirm the International Code and keep the Code alive and relevant.

Turning challenges into opportunities >>



2. We need to stir and provoke governments into action by reporting on national progress and give greater emphasis to the duty of WHO Member States to report on actions taken on Code Implementation.

3. We need to mobilise and encourage citizen groups to keep track of country situations and company behaviour on the ground. We need them to pressure for action when necessary. Donors need to provide adequate funding to these citizen groups to ensure their independence.

4. We need to give Code training courses and technical support to countries because even where there is political will, skills are often lacking to translate international recommendations into effective national measures.

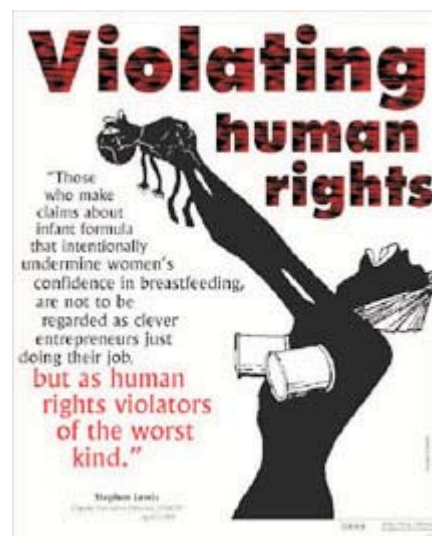
5. We need economic arguments to show decision makers how much foreign exchange is lost through purchase of commercial products and for treating illnesses which would not occur if babies were breastfed.

6. We need to publicise the risk of artificial feeding. In today's La Repubblica, there is a report that Italian authorities have recalled 30 million litres of Nestlé products including infant formula and follow-up formula because of contamination by a toxic substance found in the ink used to the colour the packaging. This is Europe. One wonders what is to become of the products which are marketed in Asia and Africa? What will happen to the children who use the products?

7. We need to continue with the rights based approach to the protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding. The Code has important human rights implications and we need to convince governments that by implementing the Code, the State as primary duty bearer is carrying out its obligations in respecting, protecting and fulfilling the right to food and nutrition as well as the right to the best attainable standard of health.

8. Last but not least, we need to demand that companies stop undermining the right of children to good nutrition and to the highest attainable standard of health. Stephen Lewis, former Executive Director of UNICEF said – "Those who make claims about infant formula that intentionally undermine women's confidence in breastfeeding are not to be regarded as clever entrepreneurs just doing their job but as human rights violators of the worst kind".

Code violators are human right violators >>



ICDC and the wider IBFAN network have been walking the talk where the Code and resolutions are concerned. Our efforts alone are obviously not enough. We have had for many years the support of UNICEF in our Code work. The challenge for us as a citizen network is to sustain that relationship. We also need to inculcate the commitment of other international agencies so that a common vision of keeping companies in line through Code based laws can be cultivated, shared and put into action. Without that, the objectives of the Global Strategy to combat malnutrition would be practically impossible. Thank you.

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The International Code Documentation Centre (ICDC) - was established to support the IBFAN network in their work on the implementation and monitoring of the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes and subsequent World Health Assembly Resolutions.