

EMBARGOED until 0001 Monday February 18<sup>th</sup>

## **95 babies could be saved every hour if mothers breastfed in ‘power hour’ after birth – Save the Children**

The lives of 95 babies could be saved every hour - 830,000 a year - if new mothers around the world breastfed immediately after giving birth, Save the Children said today.

In a new report, *Superfood for Babies*, the aid agency said that if babies receive colostrum – the mother’s first milk – within an hour of birth, it will kick start the child’s immune system, making them three times more likely to survive. And, if the mother continues feeding for the next six months, then a child growing up in the developing world is up to 15 times less likely to die from killer diseases like pneumonia and diarrhoea.

Save the Children said the enormous progress already made in reducing child mortality could be accelerated if more mums were encouraged to breastfeed.

Despite the startling statistics, global breastfeeding rates are stalling and actually declining across East Asia and in some of Africa’s most populous countries like Ethiopia and Nigeria. The prevalence of traditional practices as well as a severe shortage of health workers and examples of inappropriate marketing techniques by some baby milk substitute companies, have contributed to this.

Save the Children International Chief Executive Jasmine Whitbread said: “Despite the benefits of breastfeeding being widely known in the developed world, and it being a free, natural way to protect a new born baby, too little attention is being paid to help mums breastfeed in poorer countries.”

The aid agency said four key factors are to blame:

- A lack of empowerment and education for women which means that some harmful traditional practises, which undermine mums breastfeeding their babies, are still rife. Instead of live-saving colostrum, in some places, newborn babies are fed coffee, shea butter or ash in their first hour of life.
- The severe shortages of midwives and of health workers in the developing world, which means that information on the benefits of breastfeeding is inadequate, and there is not enough support to help mums once they give birth.
- Lack of adequate maternity legislation which makes breastfeeding and returning to work a challenge. In reality most mothers living in developing countries do not have access to any paid maternity leave.
- Marketing practices by some breast milk substitute companies that can result in mothers believing that formula is the best way to feed their baby even if they are unable to afford it

*Superfood for Babies* also highlights questionable marketing practices adopted by some breast milk substitute companies active in emerging markets. Asia is a lucrative new market for the industry which is already worth £16 billion and set to grow as whole by 31% by 2015. In East Asia and the Pacific, the number of breastfeeding mothers has fallen from 45% in 2006 to 29% in 2012.

New research by Save the Children International in Asia found mothers who cited examples of marketing activity which violate the internationally agreed code for marketing of breast milk substitutes.

In Pakistan the aid agency worked with respected pollsters Gallup to survey new mothers and health workers finding that:

- 20% of health workers surveyed said they received branded gifts from representatives of breast milk substitute companies, including prescription pads, calendars, pens and note pads
- 11% of mothers surveyed said they had seen or read promotional literature about breast milk substitutes whilst at hospital or a clinic.

In a snapshot of the situation in China the aid agency also spoke to mothers finding that:

- 40% of mothers surveyed reported being given formula samples by some breast milk substitute's company representatives or health workers. Of this 60% were said to be provided by baby food company representatives, and over 30% were said to be given by health workers.
- 40% of mothers surveyed said they had been contacted directly by representatives of breast milk substitutes companies; half of them had been contacted in hospitals and over one-third by phone.

The aid agency said women who give birth with the help of skilled birth attendants are twice as likely to breastfeed in the first crucial hour and that plugging a critical gap of 3.5 million health workers would dramatically increase the number of breastfeeding mums.

Ms Whitbread continued: "If every baby was fed during the first hour of life – what we call the "power hour" – we estimate that up to 830,000 new-born deaths could be prevented every year; that's 95 babies every hour. And if mums were helped to breastfeed for up to six months, many more children would be protected from killer diseases like pneumonia and diarrhoea. It is a matter of life and death."

The aid agency said that stopping children from dying from preventable disease and hunger is possible in our lifetime but only if world leaders step up their fight with greater funding for malnutrition, and breastfeeding in particular.

Ms Whitbread added: "The world is at a tipping point and we could be the generation to stop children dying from preventable disease and malnutrition. This year's G8 – with the UK in the driving seat – is a once in a lifetime opportunity to focus effort on a final push to end hunger."

The aid agency is calling on:

- The UK government to use the G8 presidency in June and associated hunger summit to fund nutrition work with breastfeeding as a core component and to encourage other world leaders to follow their example.
- Other donor countries to step up their funding for nutrition.
- For every developing world country to put in place plans to increase breastfeeding rates.

- Breast milk substitute companies to increase health warnings ***that formula is inferior to breast milk*** to cover one-third of its packaging.
- All governments to turn the International Code and subsequent Resolutions into law and ensure it is independently monitored and enforced.

**For more information contact  
the Save the Children Global Media Unit on +44 (0) 7768 704569**

Notes to editors:

- To calculate that 95 babies could be saved every hour we projected trends in both Ghana and Nepal, alongside the most recent neonatal data. This is an estimate but uses the best available evidence and reflects trends highlighted by WHO. This method assumes that the effects of breastfeeding are constant across various countries and contexts, and that the effects shown in Ghana and Nepal are a reasonable approximation to the global average. A full narrative of the calculation is available upon request
- Predicted figures of East Asia growth have been taken from Euromonitor, *Safety First: Global baby food opportunities and challenges to 2015*, February 2011
- The International Code of the Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes is here <http://www.who.int/nutrition/publications/infantfeeding/9241541601/en/>
- UNICEF recently reviewed the declining rate of exclusive breastfeeding in the region and found that the overall rate, which in 2006 was 45% including China<sup>9</sup> or 32% excluding China, had fallen to 29% for the whole region in 2012.<sup>10</sup> This data is not comparable with current exclusive breastfeeding rates as in 2006 China measured exclusive breastfeeding up to four months and allowed for an infant's additional intake of water.
- In a rough snapshot of evidence Save the Children International spoke to 291 mothers of infants from Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, Beijing, Jinan from Shandong Province, Shanghai, Nanjing from Jiangsu Province, and Shenzhen from Guangdong Province.
- In Pakistan Save the Children International spoke to 2400 mothers and 1200 health workers across Pakistan through respected pollsters Gallup