



A Generation On: Baby milk marketing still putting children's lives at risk

Almost 1.4 million children are still dying every year because they are not getting enough of their mother's milk. Aggressive marketing by companies is one of the reasons babies are not breastfed.

World leaders have committed to cutting infant mortality by two-thirds by 2015. The protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding could make the single biggest contribution to children's survival.¹

It's over 25 years since the introduction of the International Code of Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes in 1981.² And we're a whole generation on from the start of the international campaign and boycott to stop companies such as Nestlé promoting alternatives to breast milk. Yet, manufacturers are still flouting the Code by heavily promoting manufactured baby milk and food. We think that's appalling.

Globally, improving breastfeeding rates could save the lives of nearly 3,800 children a day. In

Bangladesh, for example, improving breastfeeding rates could cut child mortality by one third.³

Meanwhile, in the UK, in 2006/07, for every pound spent by the government to promote breastfeeding,⁴ over £10 was spent by leading manufacturers to promote baby milk and foods. While funding for companies' advertising campaigns grew by a whopping 37 per cent during that year,⁵ UK government spending on breastfeeding promotion has steadily gone down since 2004/05.⁶ Sadly, despite recent improvements, breastfeeding rates in the UK remain among the lowest in Europe.⁷

Save the Children UK is calling on manufacturers to put babies' health before profit by complying with the Code, which was adopted at the World Health Assembly (WHA). We are also calling on the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF to take on a stronger role in monitoring Code compliance and to support governments to strengthen legislation on the marketing of breast milk substitutes.



How breastfeeding saves lives

Breastfeeding:

- has positive effects on the health of mothers and children, whether they are rich or poor
- reduces the risk of acute infections such as diarrhoea, chest, ear and urinary tract infections, flu, and meningitis
- protects against chronic conditions in the child such as allergies and type I diabetes
- prevents cardiovascular diseases, including high blood pressure and obesity later in life
- promotes child development and is associated with higher IQ scores in low-birth-weight babies.

Breastfeeding is unparalleled in providing the ideal food for infants. The optimal way to feed a baby is exclusive breastfeeding for the first six

months followed by breastfeeding combined with complementary foods until the child is two years old.⁸ In the case of mothers infected with HIV, the WHO recommends that they abstain from breastfeeding only if replacement feeding that is acceptable, feasible, affordable, sustainable and safe is readily available. Otherwise, exclusive breastfeeding is still recommended for the first six months.⁹ Recent research from South Africa has shown that babies of HIV-positive mothers who received formula or animal milk in addition to breast milk were twice as likely to be infected with the HIV virus as infants who received breast milk only. The study also found that infants of HIV-positive mothers were more likely to survive if they were exclusively breastfed than if they were given breast milk and formula.¹⁰

Marketing baby milk and food

Despite all the impressive health benefits of breastfeeding, public awareness campaigns promoting breastfeeding have lagged well behind marketing campaigns for manufactured baby milk and food. Sadly, a small minority of the 129 million babies born in the world each year receive optimal breastfeeding, and many are not breastfed at all.¹¹ While commercial promotion of substitutes is not solely responsible for this, there is scientific evidence linking aggressive marketing with reduced breastfeeding and knock-on effects on children's survival.¹²

The international Code does not ban the sale of baby milk, but addresses how it is marketed. It aims to ensure that mothers receive accurate and unbiased information in order to make an informed decision.¹³ However, companies invest millions in the promotion of formula milk products. Selling baby milk is a lucrative business. The more babies are born and the more mothers decide to give up breastfeeding, the more money there is to be made.

The UK

The UK baby food market is dominated by three companies – Heinz, SMA (Wyeth) and Nutricia (Numico).¹⁴ Jointly they account for about 84 per cent of all retail sales of baby food in the UK.¹⁵ It is a highly profitable business, totalling £329 million in sales in 2004/05 and set to grow by 20 per cent by 2010.¹⁶ It is estimated that it costs UK parents about £650 to bottle-feed a baby for one year.¹⁷ The three top UK baby milk manufacturers spent £7.6 million on marketing campaigns in the UK in 2006/07. This is over ten times what the UK government spent on promoting breastfeeding in the same year.¹⁸

In 2006, the UK government launched a new scheme, Healthy Start, replacing the Welfare Food scheme. Healthy Start provides teenage mothers and families on benefits with children under 4 with weekly vouchers to swap for fresh milk, fruit, vegetables, vitamins, as well as baby milk. The aim of the scheme is to encourage healthier eating, including breastfeeding, which was inadvertently undermined by the Welfare Food scheme.



Opportunistically, however, some leading companies tried to exploit Healthy Start to market their products and gain access to parents.

For instance, Cow & Gate (Numico) launched a marketing campaign targeting national newspapers to coincide with the launch of Healthy Start in early December 2006. Their advertisements promoted the whole portfolio of products, including infant formula, which is illegal under UK law, claiming that its baby milk is the 'closest to breast milk'. They also publicized their national helpline for callers to get information about Healthy Start vouchers.¹⁹ Following complaints from public pressure groups, the Department of Health took action to clamp down on Cow & Gate's advertising spree. Heinz

also took their chances in order to promote Farley's formula to health workers claiming it was the only brand to offer '900g baby milk tins for less than the price of a Healthy Start voucher' (see figure 1). Their strap line read: 'Farley's Baby Milks, Best Formula, Best Price' and a graph suggested that their formula is close to breast milk and better than competing brands. Both companies were violating the Code.

In March 2007, marketing claims conventionally used by all companies to promote baby milk, including that it is 'as close as possible to breast milk' (Aptamil), that 'prebiotics support natural defences' or that it 'helps brain and eye development', were deemed illegal by the UK



Figure 1. A leaflet promoting Farley's formula baby milk to health workers



Trading Standards.²⁰ Companies are now required to re-design their labels and scrap promotional campaigns in accordance with the revised guidelines.

Research in the UK by Save the Children²¹ uncovered that:

- All companies still openly market certain ranges of baby food and drink (eg, flavoured water and juices) to babies from four months, if not younger, contravening WHO guidance, which recommends exclusive breastfeeding until six months.
- Retailers ranging from supermarkets to groceries and pharmacies undercut each other through multiples promotions and everyday low pricing. These retailers account for almost three-quarters of all sales of breast milk substitutes in the UK²² and also violate the Code.
- Brands increasingly rely on 'below-the-line' (indirect) advertising directed at new mothers

because direct advertising of infant formula is unlawful in the UK. 'Educational materials' on children's nutrition and growth, telephone support lines and, increasingly, websites are being used to reach out to mothers, pregnant women and potential mums to advertise the full portfolio of products and establish 'brand loyalty' often even before their babies are born.²³ Mothers are also offered substantial vouchers (up to £90 from Cow & Gate) as an inducement for signing up to companies' 'mums' clubs'. These tactics are clearly prohibited by the Code and WHA resolutions.

- Companies aim to enhance their products' credibility and sales by forging links with health professionals and doctors. They do this by offering incentives such as prize draws and VIP trips, and create conflicts of interest through support of educational activities, departments or organisations, and funding research.

Unethical marketing to mothers

UK

Research published in the UK²⁴ demonstrates the power of companies' promotion of infant formula. It reported that 60 per cent of pregnant or breastfeeding women in the UK had seen or heard infant formula advertisements, even though advertising infant formula to the public has been banned for ten years in the UK. Advertising led almost a third of these women to believe that infant formula was as good, or even better, than breast milk. One in five mothers also reported giving follow-on formula to babies of less than three months, even though it was intended for babies of six months. Up to three-quarters of babies born in the UK are either exclusively or partly artificially fed before they are six months old.²⁵ However, nine in ten mothers who stop breastfeeding within six weeks of birth say that they would have liked to continue for longer.²⁶

Botswana

Research in Botswana,²⁷ supported by Save the Children, has revealed that violations of the Code by baby food companies are still common. Baby milk and food are indiscriminately advertised in the public domain; product labels are not written in the appropriate local language, posing a serious health hazard for babies; and companies still distribute information materials to public health centres and hospitals in open violation of the Code. More than a third of all young mothers and pregnant women in the capital, Gaborone, have seen or heard advertisements for infant formulas and food targeted at babies of less than six months.²⁸ Almost 30 per cent of mothers also reported having been advised by either health professionals or peers and family to use infant formula, usually of a specific brand (most commonly Nestlé's NAN) or other food and drinks for their babies under six months.²⁹



Save the Children findings in Bangladesh

Child malnutrition and infant mortality rates are extremely high in Bangladesh. Save the Children estimates that child mortality could be cut by almost a third, saving the lives of 314 children every day, if breastfeeding rates were improved.³⁰ However, the total value of baby milk and food imports in Bangladesh is almost £16 million per year.³¹ This is 100 times more than the government of Bangladesh can afford to invest in supporting the Bangladesh Breastfeeding Foundation and other service providers responsible for the country's breastfeeding promotion.³²

Hazera's story

Hazera is 21 years old and lives in Dhaka. When she gave birth to her son she tried to breastfeed him but found it difficult. "I couldn't get the baby to suck because there was no milk," she said. There were 40 new mothers on her ward, and just one nurse, so she didn't get much help from hospital staff. Her mother-in-law and husband put pressure on her to feed the baby. Her husband rushed to the local pharmacy to buy a tin of



Hazera in hospital with her newborn baby son. It takes her husband three days to earn what it costs to buy one tin of milk formula.

formula. The pharmacist advised him which brand to buy and told him how to prepare each feed as he couldn't read the label on the tin. The formula cost 350 taka (£2.78). It takes Hazera's husband three days to earn that amount. They don't know how they will be able to afford to continue bottle-feeding their baby unless they switch to a cheaper alternative, such as dried cow's milk.

What needs to change?

Thirty years into the Nestlé boycott and over 25 years on from the signing of the International Code of Marketing of Breast milk Substitutes, the aspirations of the Code still remain elusive in many countries and mothers are still widely exposed to marketing messages promoting and idealizing artificial feeding. At best, the Code provides a benchmark for best practice, and at worst it is a symbol of the failure of voluntary self-enforcement by companies to ensure children's rights are upheld.³³ Millions of lives are lost because babies are not adequately breastfed. We cannot afford to wait another generation before this is fixed. Save the Children is calling on baby food companies, governments, the WHO and UNICEF to put their full weight behind the Code.

Baby food companies

In 2003, the ethical investment index FTSE4Good developed criteria to determine whether or not baby food companies should be included in the index.³⁴ Before then, all baby food manufacturers were automatically excluded from the index because of evidence of Code violations. In order to qualify for entry on the FTSE4Good index, baby milk companies do not have to demonstrate full Code compliance, only that they have put management systems in place to reach, eventually, Code compliance. In 2006, one company, Novartis, through its baby food division Gerber, became the first company to meet the FTSE4Good breast milk substitutes marketing criteria and to make it onto the index. Gerber dominates US baby food sales with 82 per cent of the market and it has the lead



position in Mexico, Latin America and Poland. Their entry onto the FTSE4Good index was therefore a remarkable step forward, which acted as a catalyst for some of the other industry's heavyweights that had previously failed to engage with FTSE.

In April 2007 Gerber was taken over by Nestlé, a FTSE4Good non-complier. It is anticipated that this, and other recent acquisitions, will contribute to a record boost in sales and profits in Nestlé's nutrition division.³⁵ However, as Gerber is not a listed company in its own right, we are back to square one with no longer any breast milk substitutes manufacturers on the FTSE4Good index. The question now is, can Gerber, a bold company which had positioned itself towards Code compliance, influence Nestlé, the industry's colossus, to rectify its unethical ways? In the 30th year of the international boycott, Save the Children calls on Nestlé to take on this challenge.

Save the Children has ranked the world's major manufacturers of breast milk substitutes (see Table 1) according to their level of engagement with FTSE for inclusion on the FTSE4Good index. Companies at the bottom have opted out of the FTSE4Good process altogether, whereas the ones near the top are engaging in negotiations with FTSE

but have thus far failed to comply with their criteria. With Gerber now out of the game, the race is on for the next company to make it on the index.

Recommendations

- Save the Children urges all manufacturers to put children before profits and to comply with the Code.
- Companies (see Table 1) must develop policies in line with the Code and put in place management systems that will have an immediate impact on marketing practice and lead to a dramatic reduction in Code violations.
- The FTSE4Good Breast Milk Substitutes Criteria currently fall short of the Code as they do not include follow-on milks, aimed at children above six months. Save the Children is calling for this shortcoming to be urgently addressed.

Governments

The main responsibility for implementing and monitoring the Code is on national governments. Since 1981, 139 countries out of the 193 that adopted the Code have taken some measure to implement it, supported by the International Baby Food Action Network and UNICEF. Countries, including Brazil, India and Sri Lanka, have translated most of the Code and resolutions into national law.

Table 1: World's major breast-milk substitutes companies ranked by engagement with FTSE on the FTSE4Good Breast Milk Substitutes Criteria

Ranking	Company	Examples of brands
~	Numico (Netherlands)	eg, Nutricia, Milupa, Cow & Gate
~	Danone (France)	eg, Bledina
~	Abbott Laboratories (USA)	eg, Similac, Isomil
~	Wyeth (USA)	eg, SMA
~	Nestlé (Switzerland)	eg, NAN, Nidina, Gerber
X	Heinz (USA)	eg, Farley's, Mother's Own
X	Meiji Diaries (Japan)	eg, Meiji FP-T
X	Bristol Myers Squibb (USA)	eg, Enfamil

Key
~ Mixed engagement
X No engagement

Source: Responsible Investment Unit, FTSE Group



Most countries, including the UK, Bangladesh and Botswana, have either implemented some provisions of the Code as law, implemented the Code as a voluntary measure, or currently have laws in draft form.³⁶

In 2006 the European Commission revised its legislation on the marketing and composition of breast milk substitutes, partly in line with the Code. This year, the UK will review legislation on the marketing of breast milk substitutes to bring it in line with the new EC regulations. This offers an invaluable window of opportunity for tightening UK law closing the loopholes that breast milk substitutes manufacturers have exploited since the law was introduced in 1995.

In those countries where the Code has been upheld and fully incorporated into law, like Brazil, for instance, violations have stopped and breastfeeding rates gradually improved. In Brazil, the Code and subsequent WHA resolutions have been embedded into regulation since 1988 and are monitored by the government's health inspectorate (ANVISA) and IBFAN. This has contributed to breastfeeding rates rising by 4 per cent a year.³⁷ In addition to strong legislation governments must therefore monitor compliance on a regular basis and take action on practices in breach of the law.

Recommendations

- Save the Children calls on the UK government to go further than the new EU Directive in tightening its legislation to ensure that mothers and babies in the UK are protected in the manner recommended by the World Health Assembly from commercial promotion of breast milk substitutes.
- Save the Children also calls on the UK government to reverse the decrease in funding allocated to the promotion of breastfeeding.
- The government of Bangladesh must strengthen the enforcement of its national code by ensuring that all manufacturers are registered with the legal authorities, and that they are adequately sanctioned for violating the Code.

World Health Organization and UNICEF

Save the Children believes that the World Health Organization (WHO) should take on a stronger role in enforcing the Code and in making violations publicly unacceptable and consigned to history, and that UNICEF should promote more rigorous monitoring of its implementation.

Recommendations

- The WHO must help governments strengthen legislation on the marketing of baby milk substitutes and food, and monitor their implementation. It must be bolder in getting companies to comply with the Code.
- UNICEF must ensure that compliance with the Code becomes a measure of progress on countries' implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Notes

¹ G Jones *et al* and the Bellagio Child Survival Study Group (2003) 'How many child deaths can we prevent this year?', *The Lancet*, Vol 362, July 2003

² The International Code of Marketing of Breast milk Substitutes was adopted at the World Health Assembly (WHA) in 1981. Since then a number of WHA resolutions have been adopted updating and adding to the original Code. The Code and subsequent WHA Resolutions must be considered together.

³ Research by Save the Children UK based on G Jones *et al*, *ibid*

⁴ In 2006/07 the UK government allocated a total of £729,011 for breastfeeding promotion including developing educational materials, PR materials for breastfeeding campaigns, developing and updating websites, conferences and supporting the work of the National Network of Breastfeeding Co-ordinators.

⁵ In 2005/06 major baby milk and food manufacturers spent a total of £5,582,089 on advertising their products in the UK compared to a total of £7,626,847 in 2006/07. Source: Nielsen Research Multimedia System

⁶ UK government spending on breastfeeding promotion has decreased from £747,000 in 2004/05 to £743,000 in 2005/06 and £729,011 in 2006/07. Source: Department of Health answer to PQ tabled by Annette Brooke MP on 26/03/07

⁷ Department of Health, Infant Feeding Survey 2005, preliminary results released in May 2006.



⁸ WHO (2006) The International Code of Marketing of Breast milk Substitutes: frequently asked questions www.who.int/child-adolescenthealth/New_Publications/NUTRITION/ISBN_92_4_159429_2.pdf

⁹ *Ibid*

¹⁰ Mother-to-child transmission of HIV-1 infection during exclusive breastfeeding in the first six months of life: an intervention cohort study, Hoosen M Coovadia, Nigel C Rollins, Ruth M Bland, Kirsty Little, Anna Coutsooudis, Michael L Bennis, Marie-Louise Newell, *The Lancet* 2007; 369: 1107–16

¹¹ <http://www.unicef.org/programme/breastfeeding/challenge.htm>

¹² WHO (1998) *Evidence for the 10 Steps to Successful Breastfeeding*

¹³ The Code and subsequent WHA resolutions cover advertising or any other form of promotion of infant formulas, follow-on milks, feeding bottles or teats. Complementary foods, such as cereals and baby food in small jars, should not be promoted for use below the age of six months.

¹⁴ Including Cow & Gate and Milupa.

¹⁵ Mintel International group Limited (2005) *Mintel Premier Summary Report*, November 2005

¹⁶ *Ibid*

¹⁷ Save the Children UK (August 2006) Code-watch research, unpublished

¹⁸ Nielsen Media Research (March 2007) unpublished research

¹⁹ *Daily Star* advert from 11 December 2006.

²⁰ New Trading Standards guidelines in line with UK legislation on the marketing of breast milk substitutes were issued in March 2007.

²¹ To mark the 25th anniversary of the Code, Save the Children involved its supporters in a monitoring exercise to provide a snapshot of ongoing violations of the Code. This was done in partnership with Baby Milk Action in the UK and with the International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN), the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) and UNICEF globally. Activists around the world were engaged in spotting violations during World Breastfeeding Week from 1–7 August 2006. For more information on reported violations refer to <http://worldbreastfeedingweek.org/>

²² *Mintel Premier Summary Report*, Mintel International group Limited, November 2005

²³ *Ibid*

²⁴ National Childbirth Trust and UNICEF (September 2005) Follow-on Milk Advertising Survey, www.nct.org.uk/media/pressrelease?prid=43

²⁵ Department of Health (2000) Infant-feeding Survey UK www.dh.gov.uk/assetRoot/04/05/97/63/04059763.pdf

²⁶ *Ibid*

²⁷ Interagency Group on Breastfeeding Monitoring, UNICEF UK, Ministry of Health Botswana and UNICEF Botswana, Monitoring of Compliance with the International Code of Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes and subsequent World Health Assembly Resolutions in Gaborone, Botswana (November 2005)

²⁸ *Ibid*

²⁹ *Ibid*

³⁰ Research by Save the Children UK based on G Jones *et al* and the Bellagio Child Survival Study Group (2003) *op cit*

³¹ Prof M Q K Talukder (2002) Benefits, protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding, unpublished

³² Research by Bangladesh Breastfeeding Foundation and Save the Children UK, unpublished

³³ A Holder and D Doane, *Why Corporate Social Responsibility is Failing Children*, Save the Children UK and Corporate Responsibility Coalition, March 2007

³⁴ http://www.ftse.com/Indices/FTSE4GOOD_Index_Series/Downloads/Breast_milk_substitute.pdf

FTSE4Good criteria, however, fall short of the International Code in that they do not include follow-on milks, aimed at children above six months.

³⁵ Statement by Richard Laube, Head of Nestlé Nutrition, to shareholders at the Annual General Meeting on 19th April 2007, Geneva.

³⁶ International Baby Food Action Network (2006) *The State of the Code by Country*, www.ibfan.org/site2005/abm/paginas/articles/arch_art/298-11.pdf

³⁷ M F Rea, 'Rethinking Breastfeeding in Brazil: How we reached 10 months of duration'. *Cadernos de Saude Publica* 2003; 19 suppl.1:37-45

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