



FEDERAL
MINISTRY
OF HEALTH

BREASTFEEDING IMPROVES SURVIVAL, HEALTH, AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Findings from *The Lancet* Breastfeeding Series, and implications for health, social, and economic development in Nigeria

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In 2016, the leading medical journal, *The Lancet*, published a Breastfeeding Series that reviewed and analyzed extensive scientific data on breastfeeding. The findings affirm what many experts have known for generations: breastfeeding can offer life-saving benefits to children and women in every country. *The Lancet* Breastfeeding Series found measurable impact of breastfeeding on maternal and child survival, health, nutritional status, educational outcomes, and economic productivity. Improving breastfeeding practices could save hundreds of thousands of lives and add billions of dollars to the global economy annually.

While breastfeeding has proven benefits for both women and children, **25 percent of infants under six months in Nigeria are exclusively breastfed (breastmilk only—no food or water) during the first six months of life**,^{1,2} and only one in three children initiates breastfeeding within the first hour after birth.¹ By acting on this evidence, Nigeria can accelerate progress toward short- and long-term national and global health and development targets.

BREASTFEEDING BENEFITS INDIVIDUALS, FAMILIES AND NATIONS

Breastfeeding and child health

As noted in *The Lancet*, breastfeeding is one of the most cost-effective and impactful interventions for reducing malnutrition and under-five mortality—both of which are very high in Nigeria. Research shows that infants under six months who are not breastfed are **three to four times more likely to die** than those who receive any breastmilk. Nearly half of all diarrhea episodes and one-third of all respiratory infections would be prevented with increased breastfeeding.

For children six to 23 months, continued breastfeeding is associated with a **50 percent reduction in death**.³

Breastfeeding and economic growth

Breastfeeding has implications not only for the health of children, but also for Nigeria's economy. Low breastfeeding rates are associated with poor brain development at the individual level, which reduces learning ability, productivity, and lifetime earnings. At the societal level, this leads to a loss of Gross National Income (GNI) estimated at 0.06 percent, or \$150 million (USD) annually.⁴



KEY FINDINGS FOR NIGERIA⁴

The Lancet Breastfeeding Series

- Improving breastfeeding practices could save approximately **100,000 lives** in Nigeria each year.
- Increasing breastfeeding rates could add **\$150 million (USD)** to Nigeria's economy each year as a result of increased productivity.
- Breastfeeding can help prepare Nigeria's children for a prosperous future. Breastfeeding is associated with **higher intelligence** (three IQ points on average), which studies show translates to improved performance in school and increased long-term earning potential.

The well-established benefits of breastfeeding, including greater protection against infectious and chronic diseases, also translate to significant cost savings for families and for the health care system. Globally, breastfeeding could prevent 72 percent of hospital admissions for diarrhea and 57 percent of respiratory infections.³ Taking action to protect, promote and support breastfeeding directly ties to Nigeria's economic growth.

ACTIONS RECOMMENDED BY THE LANCET BREASTFEEDING SERIES TO IMPROVE BREASTFEEDING IN NIGERIA

The *Lancet* Series found that women are two and a half times more likely to breastfeed where the practice is protected, promoted and supported. Actions, policies and programmes should work together to provide strong support for breastfeeding mothers at health facilities, communities, homes and work places. Nigerian policymakers and parliamentarians have been tasked with doing their part to ensure that optimal environment for breastfeeding all children and families. The *Abuja Breastfeeding Declaration*⁴, unveiled and signed by representatives of the government in June 2016, commits Nigeria to prioritizing the key policy and programme actions outlined in *The Lancet Breastfeeding Series*, including:

- **Disseminating accurate information** to the general public and health providers on breastfeeding as a powerful intervention for health and development, benefitting both children and women.
- **Fostering positive social attitudes toward breastfeeding** and reinforcing a breastfeeding culture through community influentials, role models, and national opinion leaders.
- **Regulating the breastmilk substitute industry** by implementing, monitoring, and enforcing the World Health Organization's *International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes*.
- **Demonstrating political will** to support breastfeeding by making adequate program investments and penalizing regulatory violations.

- **Scaling up and monitoring breastfeeding interventions** in health services and the workplace, and tracking trends in breastfeeding practices.
- **Enacting policy interventions** to ensure that maternity protection and workplace interventions are implemented, and that health and maternity services are breastfeeding-friendly, and comply with the Code.

BREASTMILK FUELS PROGRESS TOWARDS ATTAINMENT OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Promoting optimal breastfeeding is a proven, affordable and low-technology way to support national and global health targets. Building an enabling environment to support breastfeeding is a key step to reaching the National Strategic Plan of Action for Nutrition (NSPAN) target of a 50 percent exclusive breastfeeding rate by 2018 and delivers on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the World Health Assembly (WHA) Global Nutrition Targets, and the Global Strategy for Women and Children's Health.



MANY COUNTRIES ARE TURNING TO THE BENEFITS OF BREASTFEEDING TO ADVANCE HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS. AN INVESTMENT IN BREASTFEEDING IN NIGERIA IS AN INVESTMENT IN THE COUNTRY'S HEALTH AND WEALTH.

1. National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). 2017 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2016-17, Survey Findings Report.
 2. Nigeria Nutrition and Health Survey 2014.
 3. Victora, C.G., et al., *The Lancet Breastfeeding Series* "Breastfeeding in the 21st century: epidemiology, mechanisms, and lifelong effect," 2016.
 4. Rollins N.C., et al., *The Lancet Breastfeeding Series* "Why invest, and what it will take to improve breastfeeding practices in less than a generation," 2016.
 5. Federal Ministry of Health, "Abuja Breastfeeding Declaration," June 2016.

