The leading medical journal The Lancet’s 2016 Breastfeeding Series reviewed and analyzed extensive scientific data on breastfeeding. Their findings affirm what many experts have known for generations: breastfeeding can offer life-saving benefits to children and women in every country, particularly those experiencing poverty. The Lancet Breastfeeding Series found measurable impact of breastfeeding on maternal and child survival, health, nutritional status, educational outcomes and even 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, only 25 percent of infants in Nigeria are exclusively breastfed (breastmilk only—no food or water) during the first six months of life, and only one in ten children is breastfed optimally during the first two years of life. By taking action 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
Breastfeeding is the most cost-effective intervention 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.\(^2\)

**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 .06 percent, or $150 million (USD) annually.\(^3\)

**Key Findings for Nigeria**

*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. 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 charged with doing their part to ensure that optimal breastfeeding benefits all children and families. The Abuja Breastfeeding Declaration⁴, 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:

- **Disseminate accurate information** on the value of breastfeeding as a powerful intervention for health and development, benefitting both children and women.
- **Foster positive social attitudes toward breastfeeding** and reinforce a breastfeeding culture.
- **Demonstrate political will** to support breastfeeding.
- **Scale up and monitor breastfeeding interventions** and trends in breastfeeding practices.
- **Enact policy interventions** to ensure that maternity protection and workplace interventions are implemented, and 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. Nigeria Nutrition and Health Survey 2014.