

Cameroon PM Sanctions Formulae Manufacturers With Decree

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The Prime Minister and Head of the Cameroon government, Ephraim Inoni, signed a decree regulating the marketing of breast milk substitutes throughout the territory on the 1st December 2005, but its application took off only in June 2006, that is exactly six months after signature. This was disclosed by the Director for health promotion at the ministry of public health, Sibetcheu Daniel, during a meeting in Yaounde with leaders of Health NGOs promoting and protecting nutrition and infant feeding, that constitute the Cameroon Breast feeding Promotion Task Force.

The director for health promotion emphasized on the fact that, the decree of Prime Minister Inoni Ephraim was prompt, because it comes at the time the international community celebrated the 25th anniversary of the International Code on the marketing of breast milk substitutes. The Code is an instrument for the promotion and protection of breastfeeding throughout the world. The theme for this year's World Breastfeeding Week is "Code Watch: 25 years of protecting breastfeeding.

Sibitcheu Daniel acknowledged during the Technical Working Group meeting, that there have been abuses of the code in Cameroon hospitals and health facilities by marketing delegates of formulae manufacturers and distributors with the help of nurses and mid wives.

The application of the PM's decree which forbids any promotion of breast milk substitutes and the penetration of hospitals or health facilities throughout Cameroon by marketing delegates is expected to halt the abuse of the rights of babies. Sibetcheu Daniel announced that the activities to mark the World Breastfeeding Week in Cameroon in 2006 will be decentralised at the level of all ten provinces and health districts, since the focus will be on the dissemination of the prime minister's decree regulating the marketing of breast milk substitutes in Cameroon.

When the Code was adopted in 1981, follow-on milks (FOMs) did not exist. The companies invented FOMs to evade marketing restrictions. Because they are less modified than infant formula, the companies claim FOMs are not breastmilk substitutes. They promote them for older babies, destroying knowledge and confidence in continued breastfeeding. FOM marketing sneaks in infant formula advertising. Design of cans and labels match those of infant formula; under-lid mini-flyers promote infant formula; TV and magazine advertising gives company internet sites and telephone numbers. The two products get confused (a major health risk for young babies): a UK survey found that 60% of parents mistook FOM for infant formula adverts. The Code prohibits all public promotion for any product that replaces breastmilk '*whether suitable or not*'.

Bottles and teats undermine breastfeeding. If used after birth and in the early weeks, they prevent the baby attaching well at the breast, and cause problems which can lead to breastfeeding failure. Avent and other companies claim their products mimic breastfeeding with phrases such as '*natural shape*' or '*mimics a mom*'. Another marketing tactic is to present the idea of an inevitable move from breast to bottle: '*from breast to teat through Chicco*'. Millions of healthy children have never used a bottle or teat in their lives. After 6 months babies need continued breastfeeding, nutritious solid foods and safe water drunk from a clean cup. The Code prohibits advertising of bottles and teats.

This marketing tool is often invisible to the general public, so they may be unaware that health advice can be biased by company interests. Health professionals may be so used to the culture of gifts and financial sponsorship from companies, they take it for granted. Research shows that it influences their professional decisions (7, 8). The Code signed by the PM on the 1st December 2005 prohibits any such gifts to health professionals.

The PM's decree interpreted as the Cameroon Code is a set of marketing rules designed to protect: babies (both breastfed and artificially fed) , parents or anyone caring for a baby and health professionals. It regulates the marketing of all breastmilk substitutes (not just infant formula) and infant feeding utensils which means: any product marketed for baby feeding, **whether suitable or not**, during the first six months; any product marketed for baby-feeding after 6 months which replaces the breastmilk part of the diet ; any feeding bottle or teat (a pacifier is a teat)

The decree has been signed to function nationally and is a baseline: every health facility may strengthen it to make it more effective as it applies to companies and health workers.

The International Code being celebrated this year is a World Health Assembly (WHA) Resolution. A Resolution is how we collectively decide at international level to tackle global health problems. When national representatives agree to a WHA Resolution, they commit their nations to implement that Resolution. Like every WHA Resolutions, the Code belongs to all of us and that is obviously why Prime Minister Inoni Emphraim signed it..

Since the Code was adopted in 1981, eleven other WHA Resolutions have sorted out confusions and addressed new threats to infant and young child health. All of them restate the importance of making the Code work. It is up to us to remind our governments and help them fulfil their commitments to the Code and Resolutions.

The Cameroon Code Focuses On The Following Main Points:

- no advertising of any breastmilk substitutes (any product marketed or represented to replace breastmilk), feeding bottles and teats;

- no free samples;
- no promotion in or through healthcare facilities, including no free or low-cost supplies;
- no contact between marketing personnel and mothers (including health professionals paid by the company to advise or teach);
- no gifts or personal samples to health workers or their families.
- Product labels should be in an appropriate language and have no words or pictures (pictures of infants or health claims) idealizing artificial feeding ;
- Only scientific and factual information to be given to health workers.
- Governments should ensure that objective and consistent information is provided on infant and young child feeding. *
- All information on artificial infant feeding, including labels, should clearly explain the benefits of breastfeeding warn of the costs and hazards associated with artificial feeding;
- Unsuitable products, such as sweetened condensed milk, should not be promoted for babies.
- All products should be of a high quality and take account of the climactic and storage conditions of the country in which they are to be used.
- Manufacturers and distributors should comply with the Code (and all subsequent WHA Resolutions) independently of any government action to implement it.