

## WORLD BREASTFEEDING WEEK 2008

UNICEF is once again pleased to join the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) and its affiliates, WHO and NGO partners in celebration of World Breastfeeding Week, 1-7 August 2008.

This year's theme -- support for mothers -- highlights the value of providing support for women who are breastfeeding, as a means of maximizing the benefits that breastfeeding provides to children. There is ample evidence that providing support for mothers promotes exclusive breastfeeding and extends the number of months that mothers breastfeed their children.

There has been substantial and encouraging progress over the past 10 years in exclusive breastfeeding, with rates increasing in 13 developing countries by 20 percentage points or more<sup>1</sup>. These successes show that progress is possible. But only an estimated 38 per cent of children under six months in the developing world are exclusively breastfed.

Exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life reduces infant mortality linked to common childhood illnesses and under-nutrition. Breastfeeding can also reduce the number of deaths caused by major childhood killers like acute respiratory infection and diarrhea.

Actions that could increase sustainable support for breastfeeding mothers include the creation of community structures such as mother to mother groups, provision of health system support for breastfeeding mothers and provision of breastfeeding education for health workers and lay counselors, alongside workplace support for breastfeeding and additional support aimed at mothers affected by emergencies, HIV and other crises. Communications directed at mothers to encourage exclusive breastfeeding are also important means of support.

Appropriate infant feeding can save lives, ensure optimal growth and development and contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Providing effective support for mothers to breastfeed their children is an important means to improve the lives and well being of children.



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<sup>1</sup> Source: UNICEF database 2007