IDEAS *for* ACTION

We can protect, respect, facilitate and fulfil the right to breastfeed!

How you can use international instruments

- Find out from the websites (see resources pg. 6) if your country has ratified any of the international agreements or declarations listed on page 1. This will help you determine the obligations your country has assumed to protect, respect, facilitate and fulfill breastfeeding as a human right and for which it can be held legally accountable. These websites will also give you information on the status of relevant legislation in your country.

- Raise awareness in your community of their rights according to any of these international agreements to which your country is a party through the media and relevant health and labour/union journals.

- Start a group to lobby for your country to become a party to any of these human rights instruments where it has not yet done so

- Rights agreements and legislation mean nothing unless they are implemented! Start a monitoring group and a newsletter reporting on violations of relevant laws and human rights. Send it to the international committees that oversee implementation of these rights (See footnote 2 pg 3). For e.g., breastfeeding groups report to the CRC Committee on: Breastfeeding data, implementation of the International Code and company violations, progress on BFHI and current status of maternity leave legislation.

What groups can do at the national level

- National breastfeeding support groups should serve as networks, connecting concerned individuals and conveying to governments, employers and others collective concerns through petitions, lobbying and other activities.

- Some international agreements are monitored by national NGO coalitions. For example, you can contact the Convention on the Rights of the Child NGO Liaison Office (see address under 'Resources') to find out if there is such a group in your country – or to start one. Get a copy of your country's report at <www.unhchr.ch> so you can check for breastfeeding-related issues. If breastfeeding and international code implementation is not mentioned in the report, send an NGO report to the committee telling it about your government's failure to report on this important child and maternal health issue. (IBFAN-Geneva can help you do this. See 'Resources' for contact information)

- Do an assessment of how well your country rates in terms of breastfeeding and implementing the Innocenti targets. Use WABA's Global Participatory Action Research (GLOPAR) framework/tools for your investigation and to produce a country report card based on the assessment. Publicise the results to create public awareness and stimulate actions.

How communities can support breastfeeding

- Support new mothers! Ensure that women receive relevant information about breastfeeding, and that maternity clinics use evidence-based and problem-oriented routines and materials.

- Ask the Mayor or Health Minister to issue a proclamation declaring World Breastfeeding Week (WBW).

- Hold a press conference with local experts. Ask the media to broadcast or print free public service announcements about WBW, and about the hazards of artificial feeding.

- Get politicians, religious leaders and celebrities to speak for breastfeeding.

- Offer a free workshop or dialogue session to introduce 'baby-friendliness' in your community.

- Ask local shops and restaurants to participate in WBW with window displays and discounted meals for breastfeeding mothers and families.

- Organise an exhibition at shopping centres, transportation stations, hospitals, clinics, and local health care or community centres. Use multimedia displays that explain about the benefits of breastfeeding and dangers of bottle feeding.

What working women can do

- Ensure that the breastfeeding rights of women working in both the formal and informal sectors are supported by your government and employers. Ask your ministry of labour if your country is ratifying the revised ILO Maternity Protection Convention.

- Campaign for facilities and paid time for breastfeeding or expressing milk at the workplace.

- Explore creative ways to support the breastfeeding rights of mothers working in the informal sectors. See examples on the WABA website describing the Seed Grant program: http://www.waba.org.br/action.htm.

Rights, agreements and legislation mean nothing unless they are implemented!

What health workers can do

- Inform health-care providers about the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative and the crucial role breastfeeding plays in long-term health. Ask if you can set up a display or exhibition at national meetings of health workers.

- Find out if hospitals in your community have been assessed and designated under the WHO Baby-Friendly criteria. Send a list of all Baby-Friendly hospitals to the media for announcements.

- Ask your national WHO or UNICEF representative about rights-based programmes they are operating. Find out how you can help each other.

- Encourage fathers to attend ante-natal and/or breastfeeding classes with mothers.

- Support women's right to quality reproductive health care services including mother-friendly birthing practices as defined by WHO.

How you can use the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes and relevant WHA Resolutions

- Find out what your health ministry is doing about implementing the Code. Encourage full implementation in order to fulfil your country's obligations under the CRC and other human rights agreements.

- Find out if health workers (paediatricians, nurses, doctors) are aware or supportive of the Code and if local/international health care facilities have put it into practice.

- Monitor and report violations of the Code and WHA Resolutions to relevant government authorities and non-governmental organizations and violating companies. Name the offenders!

- Using national monitoring data, encourage the media to investigate actions on Code implementation and to promote breastfeeding.

- Contact the International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN) and ask how you can work together.