

Assessment of status of infant and young child feeding (IYCF) practice, policy and programs: Achievements and Gaps, in Ethiopia

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Abstract

Background: Breastfeeding is universal in Ethiopia. Ethiopian Demographic Health Survey indicates that Exclusive breastfeeding is not widely practised in Ethiopia despite the World Health Organization's recommendation of exclusive breastfeeding for up to the first 6 months of life.

Objectives:

- To find achievements and gaps in the existing policy, program and practices in reference to Infant and Young Child Feeding in Ethiopia
- To build a consensus among all partners on the way forward to improve the existing IYCF practice

Methods: Secondary data including different national publications, guidelines and reports were collected and assessed based on the 15 indicators modified by International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN) in order to identify the current situations in the country in reference to the infant and young child feeding policy, program and practices. The assessment took place during November 2012. Participants from government, non-government and international NGOs reviewed different documents and compiled the report. There was an elaborate discussion on each indicator before consensus was reached. The document was also validated by participants from different organizations on February 13, 2013.

Results: In this assessment gaps were identified and recommendations were also forwarded. The main gaps include the absence of National Code of Marketing of Breast milk Substitutes and Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative, Inadequate maternity leave conditions to exclusively breastfeed for six months, lack of knowledge and experience by mothers about optimal complementary feeding practice, the risk of bottle feeding, and management of breastfeeding such as expression of breast milk. Inadequate skills and competencies by care providers to provide effective IYCF counselling support to mothers/caretakers is also part of the gap.

Recommendations and conclusion: Key recommendations forwarded by the participants are the earnest need of Implementation of the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative and the International Code of Marketing of Breast milk Substitutes and capacitating of health workers in giving IYCF support skills for mothers. There is also the need to review the Terms of Reference of the National Nutrition Technical Working Group (NTWG) and the Current labour regulations to ensure exclusive breastfeeding by working mothers both in the formal and informal sectors. This calls for the attention of policy makers, respective government organizations and national and international partners to support and promote optimal breastfeeding for the well being of infants and children in the country.

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