

Nutrition Security and Maternity Protection through Exclusive and Continued Breastfeeding Promotion in the Workplace

The Challenge



A lactation station in PERMEX Producer and Exporter Corporation in Zamboanga City provides opportunity for breastfeeding mothers to continue exclusive breastfeeding even while working. PERMEX is a producer and exporter of canned sardines and tuna products.

The Philippine government passed the Expanded Breastfeeding Act of 2009 (Republic Act 10028) as a national breastfeeding policy that aims to address the declining breastfeeding rates in the country and provide health and nutrition support to lactating mothers and their children. RA 10028 took effect on 13 May 2010 and mandates the setting up of breastfeeding stations in health and non-health facilities and provides nursing employees with 40-minute breaks for expressing their milk or breastfeeding.

Five years after, several commercial establishments and workplaces are yet to put up lactation stations and adopt a breastfeeding support programme. This defeats the primary purpose of the law, and continues the strain for working mothers, who are unable to breastfeed after giving birth because of concern for their job security. The absence of appropriate measures to ensure that the law is being implemented is a cause for concern, since malnutrition among children under five remains prevalent in the country, especially in poverty-stricken areas.

As a result, most working mothers are still forced to give up exclusively breastfeeding their children from 0 to 6 months and continued breastfeeding 6 months up to 2 years and beyond; and resort to feeding their infants with expensive infant formula. This deprives the children of optimum nutrition critical to their growth and development.

The Response

The International Labour Organization (ILO), in partnership with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), takes extra effort to support exclusive and continued breastfeeding in the workplace. A Joint Programme (JP) is deemed essential to promote an enabling environment and encourage women workers and nursing mothers to practice exclusive breastfeeding in the formal and informal workplace.

This JP is geared towards sustaining and complementing the gains of exclusive breastfeeding (EBF) initiatives in the workplace under the "MDG-Fund Joint Programme on Ensuring Food Security and Nutrition for Children 0-24 Months Old in the Philippines". The Nutrition Security and Maternity Protection through Exclusive and Continued Breastfeeding Promotion in the Workplace, also dubbed as the NSMP Project, rests on promoting awareness on support for breastfeeding at the workplace among formal and informal sectors, monitoring recent legislations related to breastfeeding practices and maternity protection, and campaigning for the setting up of lactation stations and adoption of breastfeeding support programmes in the local government units, and private and public facilities. This project is being implemented in three JP cities: Naga City, Iloilo City and Zamboanga City.

To ensure the sustainability of the JP, national government agencies, local government units, health partners managers and constituents from the labour sector, including workers' and employers' organizations along with other partners, have been and will continue to engage in the planning, implementation and evaluation of the programme. The JP adopts a tripartite approach — government, workers and employers working together as its primary strategy and uses nutrition as a platform of concern across government, private and civil society sectors.

Key Statistics

- According to a joint statement made by the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF and Department of Health (DOH) in 2012, an estimated 8,400 lives can be saved every year if every Philippine family practices optimal breastfeeding.
- Cases of improper feeding, which include lack or absence of breastfeeding, account for 16,000 out of 82,000 deaths for children 5 years old and below (ILO, 2012).
- In 2011, 2 out of 10 Filipino children are underweight-for-age and 3 out of 10 are underheight-for-age (Philippine Nutrition Facts and Figures, FNRI-DOST, 2011).

Objectives

- Increase exclusive breastfeeding rates in the project areas by 20 per cent annually.
- Improve the capacities of national and local governments and stakeholders to promote and implement programmes on Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF).

Achievements

- EBF promotion among workers in vulnerable employment was mainstreamed in the local councils of the three JP areas leading to the inclusion of provisions for employees in disadvantaged work conditions in the ordinances and Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) being proposed to promote exclusive breastfeeding in the workplace (EBFW) in the three JP cities.
- A federation of market vendors' associations and three public transport operators' and drivers' associations in Naga City were trained to access local government support for their respective EBFW programmes.
- Funding for EBFW programmes for workers in vulnerable employment was secured in Iloilo City and Zamboanga City. Sustaining EBFW programmes in Iloilo City was included in the budget of Local Enterprise Office; while the local council of Zamboanga City included EBFW in the annual Gender and Development (GAD) fund.
- 95 workers in vulnerable employment and 61 trade union members were trained as EBFW Peer Educators, while 26 peer education groups were organized among trade union members in the three JP areas. Peer Educators will serve as front-liners in the promotion of EBFW in their respective workplaces.
- 80 representatives from 40 companies participated in the training on programme management, monitoring and evaluation and peer education for business firms. This ensures that EBFW programmes are sustained and evaluated periodically in workplaces.
- 52 stakeholders from the tripartite partners (employers, government offices, civil society organizations and workers) participated in the national advocacy and communication workshop leading to the initial crafting of advocacy plans for promoting EBFW.
- LGU officials, officers of groups of workers in vulnerable employment, and officers of chambers of commerce in the three JP areas were trained to develop profiling and monitoring and evaluation tools for EBF in disadvantaged work conditions.
- 35 trade union member-representatives from formal workplaces in Metro Manila and three JP areas were involved in the National Consultation on Sustaining EBF/IYCF in Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBAs). This resulted to crafting of initial drafts of CBAs with provisions for EBFW, and to the passage of a national resolution supporting EBFW.

Relevant ILO Conventions

- Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156)
- Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183)

National Policy

- Expanded Breastfeeding Promotion Act of 2009 (RA 10028)
- Philippine Magna Carta of Women (RA 9710)



Ms Olga Rentoy, a barangay health aide demonstrates how to use breast pumps when expressing milk in a meeting with market vendors and members of transport groups in Naga City.

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Components

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ILO Project Sites: Naga City, Iloilo City and Zamboanga City

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