

Press Release

Provinces account higher Infant Mortality Rate since the implementation of breastfeeding laws remain a far cry

August 5, 2011

While observing the "World Breastfeeding Week 2011", TheNetwork reminds the health care authorities at provincial level to the detriment of the child health, lack of implementation of 8 years old breastfeeding law has made Pakistan a leading bottle feeding country in the world. According to Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey 2006-07, situation is dismissal as the exclusive breastfeeding remains flunked because of increasing percentage of infants receive pre-lacteal feed (first food to new born other than mother's milk) which contributes to higher Infant mortality rate in Sindh, Punjab, Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The median duration of exclusive breastfeeding is estimated at a little less than one month. While the recommended period of exclusive breastfeeding is six months by World Health Organisation and UNICEF.

World Breastfeeding Week commenced on August 1 and reminds once again the progress on the implementation of Protection of Breastfeeding and Young Child Nutrition Ordinance 2002 remains sluggish. Significant gaps in the implementation mechanism of BF ordinance and lack of awareness among health care providers leave a question on the functioning of government regarding child health indicators. After the devolution of Ministry of health hopes lie with the provincial governments' need to adopt protection of breastfeeding laws and form the Infant Feeding Boards apace, for the stricter and strengthened enforcement mechanism at provincial level, Nadeem Iqbal, Executive Coordinator TheNetwork for Consumer Protection said. TheNetwork for Consumer Protection, is a member of Consumer International, a UK based world federation of consumer groups.

Low breastfeeding is the root cause of chronic malnutrition. The provinces suffers a high infant and maternal mortality and inadequate health care facilities with high population growth. Inappropriate feeding practices along with food insecurity contribute significantly to the burden of malnutrition in most parts of the provinces. The poverty profile of Pakistan reveals that Sindh is reported provincial infant mortality rate with 81 deaths per thousand. The root cause of about 90 percent children's malnutrition in Balochistan is no exclusive breastfeeding and added of them 30 percent children who suffer acute malnutrition die of simple infection due to their weakness. 30 percent children who suffer acute malnutrition die of simple infection due to their weakness. Balochistan's provincial infant mortality rate is 49 deaths per thousand. Punjab, the largest province is marked with highest infant mortality rate and highest poverty rate with highest income inequality in the country. Punjab is considered the most affluent province the provincial infant mortality rate is 81 deaths per thousand while the infant mortality in Sargodha district of Punjab is reported 98%. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is considered better at Infant Mortality Rate than Punjab and Sindh provinces as the provincial infant mortality rate is 63% deaths per thousand but still the situation is foiled.

Provinces can improve child health indicators by promptly adopting and implementing Protection of Breastfeeding and Young Child Nutrition Ordinance 2002.

Nadeem Iqbal expressed his concerns over the upcoming challenges of the capacity of provincial government for quick adoption and implementation of protection of breastfeeding ordinance and activation of provincial infant feeding committees. He emphasized the provincial ministries of health to play its crucial role to secure the health of future generations by adopting the breastfeeding legislation at earliest.

The theme of World Breastfeeding Week 2011 is "Talk to Me! Breastfeeding –A 3 Dimensions Experience." Breastfeeding is the first step/dimension towards reducing undernutrition – from day one of life. Communication is an essential part of protecting, promoting and supporting breastfeeding. This third dimension includes cross-generation, cross-sector, cross-gender, and cross-culture communication and encourages the sharing of knowledge and experience, thus enabling wider outreach. TheNetwork calls for formation of Infant Feeding Committee for implementation of the breastfeeding laws at Provincial and district level to protect breastfeeding practices regulate the unethical marketing practices of baby milk industry.

It is imperative to take affirmative action in this regard enabling province to effectively pursue the health related Millennium Development Goals, which focus specifically on significantly reducing maternal and child mortality. This can only be achieved by implementing a strong mother and child health package at community level in the province to promote exclusive breast-feeding for six months.