

# Improving Optimal Breastfeeding in Indonesia: An Investment in Human Capital

**The evidence is stronger than ever that breastfeeding has substantial health and economic benefits for children and women in low-, middle- and high-income countries alike.** Improving breastfeeding practices could save hundreds of thousands of lives and add billions of dollars to the global economy each year. Despite its well-established benefits, global and national investments in policies and programmes to support breastfeeding have lagged. As the world focuses on achieving the new Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, it is critical to increase support for breastfeeding as a proven and sustainable approach to drive sustainable progress.

## **The Lancet Breastfeeding Series**

A new series in *The Lancet* medical journal raises visibility around the science and opportunities of breastfeeding.<sup>1</sup> *The Lancet* Breastfeeding Series is the first of its kind to evaluate global breastfeeding trends and inequalities, while also looking at the short- and long-term benefits and consequences for children, mothers and countries.

The series found that:

- Improving breastfeeding practices could **save over 820,000 lives** a year globally—87 percent of them infants under six months of age.
- Longer breastfeeding is associated with **higher intelligence** (three IQ points on average), which studies show translates to improved performance in school and increased long-term earning potential.
- Each year a mother breastfeeds, her risk of developing invasive **breast cancer decreases by six percent**.
- Globally, estimated costs of lower cognitive ability associated with not breastfeeding amount to about **\$300 billion annually** (about 0.49 percent of GNI). For Indonesia, that figure amounts to **\$1.34 billion annually** (about 0.16 percent of its GNI).

## **Indonesia and Breastfeeding**

Although 96 percent of children under age two in Indonesia are ever breastfed, other indicators show the need for significant investment in breastfeeding practices. According to the 2012 Indonesia Demographic and Health Survey<sup>2</sup>:

- 49 percent of infants are breastfed within the first hour of birth;
- 42 percent of infants are exclusively breastfed within the first 6 months of life;
- 77 percent of infants continue breastfeeding at one year;
- 55 percent of children are breastfed at two years;
- 60 percent of children receive a prelacteal feed – something other than breast milk during the first three days of life<sup>3</sup>; and
- 61 percent of children ages four to five months receive complementary foods, formula or other liquids.

## **Strengthening Policies and Programmes**

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<sup>1</sup> Victora, Cesar G., et al. "Breastfeeding in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Epidemiology, Mechanisms and Lifelong Effect." *The Lancet* 387 (2016) 475-504

<sup>2</sup> Indonesia Demographic and Health Survey, 2012

<sup>3</sup> Statistics Indonesia (Badan Pusat Statistik—BPS), National Population and Family Planning Board (BKKBN), and Kementerian Kesehatan (Kemenkes—MOH), and ICF International. 2013. Indonesia Demographic and Health Survey 2012. Jakarta, Indonesia: BPS, BKKBN, Kemenkes, and ICF International.

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*The Lancet* Series found that women are two and a half times more likely to breastfeed where the practice is protected, promoted and supported. Indonesia should strengthen areas of action identified by the Series as high-potential policy and programme opportunities, including:

- **Expanding paid leave policies** enabling working mothers to take time off to care for newborns and support breastfeeding;
- **Strengthening and enforcing legislation to restrict marketing and promotion of breastmilk substitutes** for infants and young children through national laws and rigorous monitoring to ensure that marketing does not undermine breastfeeding;
- **Reinforcing a breastfeeding culture** by strengthening policies and practices that support breastfeeding in health facilities; and
- **Continued political will** across government and civil society to invest time and resources in programmes that support breastfeeding.

## A Path to Global Targets

Indonesia has an opportunity to build on recent progress and further strengthen its policies and programmes to improve breastfeeding rates around the country. Indonesia's commitment to the World Health Assembly's target on exclusive breastfeeding is reflected in several policy and planning documents, including the Scaling Up Nutrition Policy Framework (2012), the National Medium Term Development Plan (RPJMN, 2015-19), and forthcoming National Plan of Action on Food and Nutrition (RAN-PG, 2015-19). Given the relevance of early, exclusive and continued breastfeeding to the health and prosperity of Indonesia's people, it is strongly recommended that it be included as one of the national SDG indicators for Indonesia.

In addition, it is important that adequate attention is given to all other essential breastfeeding practices in Indonesia's policies and plans, including early initiation and continued breastfeeding until at least two years of life. After the first six months, breastmilk continues to provide a substantial supply of vital nutrients, immunological benefits and comfort to infants and young children, including at least half of energy needs from 6 to 12 months and one-third of energy needs between 12 and 24 months.

Whether it is the Sustainable Development Goals, the WHO Global Nutrition Targets, the Global Strategy for Women and Children's health or other targets, the benefits of breastfeeding can amplify health and development efforts, while the consequences of poor infant and young child nutrition can hold countries back. By reducing child deaths and improving nutrition, child health, education and maternal health, breastfeeding has the potential to be a fundamental driver in achieving global, regional and national goals.

