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BREASTFEEDING

PROVIDING A HEALTHY START FOR A HEALTHY FUTURE

The cognitive, health and economic benefits of breastfeeding are well established and recognized, yet only 44 percent of children under 6-months-old worldwide are exclusively breastfed and only 49 percent of infants initiate breastfeeding within one hour of birth.

Breastfeeding has one of the highest returns on investment of any development activity: every dollar invested in breastfeeding interventions yields an estimated \$35 in economic gains. Breastfeeding duration is also associated with higher IQ and income as well as greater educational attainment. Inversely, suboptimal breastfeeding is associated with economic losses of about \$302 billion each year, or 0.49 percent of world gross national income. With support to scale up global breastfeeding practices, the deaths of 823,000 children under 5-years-old and 20,000 women could be prevented, annually.

In line with recommendations from global and national health authorities, such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the American Academy of Pediatrics, USAID supports immediate and exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months, followed by the introduction of age-appropriate complementary foods along with continued breastfeeding for up to two years of age and beyond.

USAID STRATEGY

USAID's breastfeeding efforts are guided by the Agency's Multi-sectoral Nutrition Strategy. As part of this strategy, the United States strives to achieve WHO Global Nutrition Targets, including increasing the rate of exclusive breastfeeding in the first six months of life to at least 50 percent by 2025. These targets align with cross-government priorities, as outlined in the U.S. Government Global Nutrition Coordination Plan.

USAID EFFORTS

USAID's maternal and child nutrition efforts support breastfeeding in 25 priority countries. Our breastfeeding interventions educate and support mothers and families on the benefits of breastfeeding by addressing the key barriers to optimal breastfeeding practices. These interventions

include government capacity-building exercises; peer-support groups for men, women and families; community video; radio talk shows; community and facility-based counseling and lactation support; training courses for health facility staff; kangaroo mother care and breastfeeding support for premature and low birthweight babies; and data collection of breastfeeding practices and rates, among others.

Our maternal and child nutrition efforts work as part of, and in addition to, the significant support provided through USAID's Food for Peace development and emergency programs and the Agency's work in humanitarian settings. Our health investments to improve maternal and child nutrition also involve close collaboration with other health sectors, such as working with HIV/AIDS programming to provide education and counseling for HIV+ mothers on how to breastfeed while adhering to antiretroviral treatment.

To establish sustainable breastfeeding programs that endure beyond U.S. development assistance, USAID partners directly with a variety of civil society, multilateral and bilateral developmental organizations, in addition to working closely with local governments to expand and institutionalize nutrition efforts. Together, we accelerate progress toward our collective goal of improving the rate of exclusive breastfeeding globally.

RESULTS AND IMPACT

For more than 40 years, USAID has promoted breastfeeding to save lives, prevent malnutrition and enhance the long-term health and development of women and children. Since 1990, USAID's efforts contributed to the average prevalence of exclusive breastfeeding doubling across USAID's priority nutrition countries. More recently, our impact includes reaching more than 8.5 million pregnant women with nutrition interventions, including breastfeeding counseling and support, in 2019 alone.

USAID's breastfeeding efforts involve partnerships with host country governments that help improve their recognition of the importance of breastfeeding to reduce child mortality and promote healthy growth and development. In partnership with host countries, USAID's impact includes:

1. Across USAID's integrated nutrition project areas in **Nepal**, exclusive breastfeeding prevalence is 26 percent higher than in non-project areas.
2. In **northern Ethiopia**, USAID supported training for 406 health workers on nutrition interventions including early initiation of breastfeeding and distributed 140,000 nutrition cards containing key messages on breastfeeding.
3. In partnership with key district personnel and healthcare workers in **Uganda**, since 2017 USAID has reached nearly 1,963 households within five districts with critical breastfeeding education.
4. In **Afghanistan**, USAID helped 230,000 mother-baby pairs initiate breastfeeding in the first hour after birth across five provinces in 2019.
5. In 2019, USAID helped five hospitals in **Malawi** achieve "baby-friendly" accreditation and helped ten additional hospitals maintain their "baby-friendly" status as part of the national program.

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