



birth matters

BREASTFEEDING: A KEY TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

By Laura Maxson, LM

August is National Breastfeeding month. The 10th Annual Breastfeeding Walk will take place on Aug 12, from 3-6pm at the Watsonville Plaza (corner of Main & E. Beach St.) Sponsored by Community Bridges/WIC and supported by the Santa Cruz County Breastfeeding Coalition, the walk is part of a free, family event with t-shirts, raffle, healthy snacks, community resources, face painting and more.

Each year the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) sets a theme for World Breastfeeding Week, Aug 1-7. This year's theme, *Breastfeeding: a key to Sustainable Development*, focuses on linking breastfeeding to the United Nation's, 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

These 17 goals and WABA's suggested links with breastfeeding are listed in their entirety below. Find out more about how you can help reach these goals at www.worldbreastfeedingweek.org.

No Poverty: Breastfeeding is a natural and low-cost way of feeding babies and children. It is affordable for everyone and does not burden household budgets compared to artificial feeding. Breastfeeding contributes to poverty reduction.

Zero Hunger: Exclusive breastfeeding and continued breastfeeding for two years and beyond provide high quality nutrients and adequate energy and can help prevent hunger, under-nutrition and obesity. Breastfeeding also means food security for infants.

Good Health and Wellbeing: Breastfeeding significantly improves the health, development and survival of infants and children. It also contributes to improved health and wellbeing of mothers, both in the short and long term.

Quality Education: Breastfeeding and adequate complementary feeding are fundamentals for readiness to learn. Breastfeeding and good quality complementary foods significantly contribute to mental and cognitive development and thus promote learning.

Gender Equity: Breastfeeding is the great equalizers, giving every child a fair and best start in life. Breastfeeding is uniquely a right of women and they should be supported by society to breastfeed optimally. The breastfeeding experience can be satisfying and empowering for the mother as she is in control of how she feeds her baby.

Clean Water and Sanitation: Breastfeeding on demand provides all the water a baby needs, even in hot weather. On the other hand, formula feeding requires access to clean water, hygiene and sanitation.

Affordable and Clean Energy: Breastfeeding entails less energy when compared to formula production industries. It also reduces the need for water, firewood and fossil fuels in the home.

Decent Work and Economic Growth: Breastfeeding women who are supported by their employers are more productive and loyal. Maternity protection and other workplace policies can enable women to combine breastfeeding and their other work or employment. Decent jobs should cater to the needs of breastfeeding women,

especially those in precarious situations.

Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure: With industrialization and urbanization the time and space challenges become more prominent. Breastfeeding mothers who work outside the home need to manage these challenges and be supported by employers, their own families and communities. Crèches near the workplace, lactation rooms and breastfeeding breaks can make a big difference.

Reduced Inequities: Breastfeeding practices differ across the globe. Breastfeeding needs to be protected, promoted and supported among all, but in particular among poor and vulnerable groups. This will help to reduce inequalities.

Sustainable Cities and Communities: In the bustle of big cities, breastfeeding mothers and their babies need to feel safe and welcome in all public spaces. When disaster and humanitarian crises strike, women and children are affected disproportionately. Pregnant and lactating women need particular support during such times.

Responsible Consumption and Production: Breastfeeding provides a healthy, viable, non-polluting, non-resource intensive, sustainable and natural source of nutrition and sustenance.

Climate Action: Breastfeeding safeguards infant health and nutrition in times of adversity and weather-related disasters due to global warming.

More Info:

WABA - worldbreastfeedingweek.org
WIC walk - www.communitybridges.org/wic
Birth Network's Local Resources - www.birthnet.org

Life Below Water: Breastfeeding entails less waste compared to formula feeding. Industrial formula production and distribution lead to waste that pollutes the seas and affects marine life.

Life on Land: Breastfeeding is ecological compared to formula feeding. Formula production implies dairy farming that often puts pressure on natural resources and contributes to carbon emissions and climate change.

Peace and Justice, Strong Institutions: Breastfeeding is enshrined in many human rights frameworks and conventions. National legislation and policies to protect and support breastfeeding mothers and babies are needed to ensure that their rights are upheld.

Partnership for Goals: The Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding (GSIYCF) fosters multi-sectorial collaboration, and can build upon various partnerships for support of development through breastfeeding programs and initiatives."

Laura Maxson, LM, CPM, the mother of three grown children, has been working with pregnant and breastfeeding women for over 20 years. Currently she is the executive director of Birth Network of Santa Cruz County and has a homebirth midwifery practice. Contact her at midwife@scshop.com or postmaster@birthnet.org.