

The purpose of this Planning Guide for national implementation is to help translate the aim, objectives and operational targets of the Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding into concrete, focused national strategy, policy and action plans. The guide is written for programme managers in governments and their partners, primarily those working in maternal and child health and nutrition. It proposes a step-wise process to develop a country-specific strategy, with plans to be implemented in support of appropriate infant and young child feeding, especially in the first two years of life.

This Guide has two parts. Part I is intended to help a responsible individual or group through the steps proposed, and focuses on the process involved in developing a national infant and young child feeding strategy. Part II provides details and references related to the content of the various components of a plan of action that are related to the operational targets of the Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding.

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# Planning Guide

## for national implementation of the Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding



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## Infant and Young Child Feeding as a Public Health Issue

Appropriate infant and young child feeding is essential for survival, growth and development. The Convention on the Rights of the Child states that access to adequate nutrition, including family support for optimal feeding practices, is a right that should be supported for every child (see Box 1 for a description of optimal practices). Children who are not well nourished suffer from ill-health, and undernutrition is associated with over 50% of deaths in children under five years of age. Infants and young children bear the heaviest burden of undernutrition, and suffer the highest risk of disability and death associated with it. At the same time, increasing numbers of young children worldwide are showing signs of obesity because of poor feeding practices, risking a lifetime of negative health consequences.

The consequences of inappropriate feeding practices in early childhood are major obstacles to government efforts towards sustainable socioeconomic development and poverty reduction. In addition, the Millennium Development Goals will not be achieved without action to reduce the rate of malnutrition in infants and young children. Appropriate feeding contributes directly to the achievement of Goal 1 (eradicate extreme poverty and hunger), in particular Target 2 (to halve the proportion of people who suffer from hunger); and to Goal 4 (reduce child mortality), in particular Target 5 (reduce under-five mortality by two-thirds). It also contributes to other Goals in ways such as fostering multi-sectoral collaboration and increased attention to support for the mother's nutritional and social needs.

Nutrition interventions are important at many points in the life course (Figure), and attention to practices in the early period will bring benefits throughout.

### From a Global Strategy to National Implementation

The Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding (see Box 2) is intended as a broad framework for international action. The further step now needed is the development by each country of a comprehensive national strategy and action plan for infant and young child feeding. In this process, there is a need to ensure that all health services protect, promote and support appropriate feeding practices and also to give attention to guidelines for ensuring appropriate feeding in exceptionally difficult circumstances. The approaches in the Global Strategy may already be set out in existing national nutrition and/or child health strategies, policies and programme documents and budgets. National nutrition or child health plans of action or broad

#### BOX 1

##### Optimal Infant and Young Child Feeding Practices<sup>1</sup>

As a global public health recommendation, infants should be exclusively breastfed for the first six months of life to achieve optimal growth, development and health. Thereafter, to meet their evolving nutritional requirements, infants should receive nutritionally adequate and safe complementary foods while breastfeeding continues up to two years or beyond.

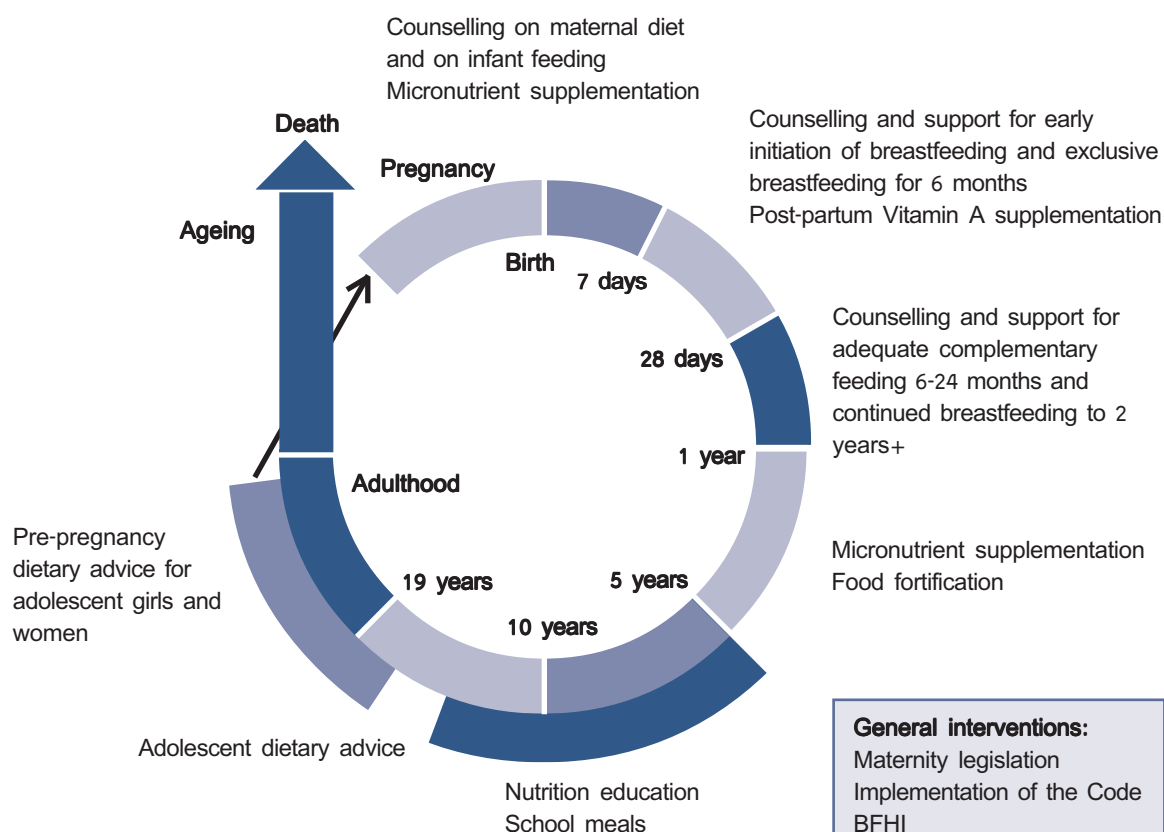
Special attention and practical support is needed for feeding in exceptionally difficult circumstances. The circumstances where specific recommendations apply include: infants less than six months of age who are malnourished, low-birth-weight infants, infants and children in emergencies, infants born to HIV-positive women, and children living in special circumstances, such as orphans and vulnerable children or infants born to adolescent mothers.

#### Definitions of Strategy and Policy

A **strategy** is defined here as a brief normative document that sets out the basic principles on which actions are based. A strategy may serve as the basis for accelerated action while a broader policy document is being developed or revised. This planning guide focuses mainly on strategy development, but much of it could also apply to policy.

A **policy** is usually a formal document setting out the government's position, and generally is developed over a long time period while it is cleared with relevant bodies.

<sup>1</sup> WHO. Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding. Geneva, 2003

**FIGURE** Nutrition interventions around the life course**BOX 2****Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding**

WHO and UNICEF, with the broad participation of many stakeholders, developed the Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding to revitalize global commitment to appropriate infant and young child nutrition. The Global Strategy builds on existing achievements, particularly the Innocenti Declaration on the Protection, Promotion and Support of Breastfeeding (WHO, 1990), the Baby-friendly Hospital Initiative (WHO, 1992), the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes (WHO, 1981) and subsequent World Health Assembly resolutions, and creative legislation to support breastfeeding after women return to work.

The Global Strategy is intended as a framework for actions to protect, promote and support appropriate infant and young child feeding. The Global Strategy's specific objectives are to:

- raise awareness of the main problems affecting infant and young child feeding, identify approaches to their solution, and provide a framework of essential interventions;
- increase the commitment of governments, international organizations and other concerned parties for optimal feeding practices for infants and young children;
- create an environment that will enable mothers, families and other caregivers in all circumstances to make – and implement – informed choices about optimal feeding practices for infants and young children.

development plans including these issues may also exist. While these policies and plans are valuable for general purposes, a more specific plan of action for infant and young child feeding is usually required, especially for advocacy, resource identification and mobilization, assigning roles and responsibilities and monitoring of implementation.

The obstacles to full adoption of appropriate feeding practices vary considerably from country to country, and while we know that comprehensive multi-sectoral interventions create sustained impact on feeding practices, each country may require different specific interventions, or a varied mix of interventions. The gains achieved by ongoing initiatives, particularly breastfeeding initiatives, also vary substantially between countries. A national strategy should identify how actions meant to benefit particular population groups or vulnerable areas will be defined and strengthened while consolidating gains. It should also identify, and include in efforts, suitable partners, including non-governmental organizations and health professionals. The roles and responsibilities of private and public health care providers in protecting, promoting and supporting infant feeding may differ between settings, resulting in specific needs for training and skills development. Countries need to decide how to integrate infant feeding promotion and support into other family, maternal or child nutrition and health activities in their particular circumstances. Finally, because of the variable social, economic and cultural conditions, countries need to develop their own communication strategies as an integral part of the plan, building on the best channels for delivery.

### Purpose of this Guide

This guide is intended to help translate the Global Strategy's aim, objectives and operational targets into concrete, focused national strategy, policy and action plans. The guide is written for programme managers in governments and their partners, primarily those working in maternal and child health and nutrition. It proposes a step-wise process to develop a country-specific strategy, with plans to be implemented in support of appropriate infant and young child feeding, especially in the first two years of life.

This process provides a unique opportunity to build a common understanding among many concerned partners about what needs to be done and why, and to generate their commitment to it. Therefore, attention to the process is

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