

From National Coordinator's Desk

Partnership Work!

On an afternoon of 26th September 2006, I met Vinod Paul, Prof. of Pediatrics, All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), the stalwart of newborn health of this proud nation-India. He was instrumental in designing the child health strategy of the *RCH-II*. Over lunch, we were discussing the intricacies related to breastfeeding and what measures and interventions that India should take to scale up the 'breastfeeding trend'?



It was to understand from Vinod - "Why does breastfeeding comes up in the priority list and then abruptly fizzles out?" Each time, breastfeeding is discussed with much vigour and buried down with the same argument: "we cannot go vertically". We were, however, toiling with several possibilities to enhance prioritizing breastfeeding actions that would protect lakhs of infants and malnourished children in India. But, one thing that kept the discussion alive was the issue of breastfeeding that needed a consultation at the highest level with planners, bureaucrats, politicians and officials of the government.

In two hours of discussion with Vinod, I vehemently argued if 'immunization' could have budget provision, why not a budget provision for 'breastfeeding'. Having discussed on the nitty-gritty of both sides, we agreed breastfeeding needs a bigger leap and many partners need to come together to recognize the importance of breastfeeding. Vinod said, "I like the idea of a budget head that will make it work and let us go for it. Let's reach the Prime Minister". An idea struck: develop a *Joint Statement on Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF)* and present it to the Prime Minister.

We acted fast to develop the *Joint Statement*. I sent e-mails to our several partner organizations requesting them to explore the possibility of working together towards drafting a *Joint Statement* on IYCF. And the response was overwhelming. The first meeting of the partners was hosted by Indian Medical Association (IMA) at its office in New Delhi on 11th October, 2006, wherein a draft of the *Joint Statement* was evolved. Later, it was finalized through e-mails.

Three conveners-IMA, NNF and BPNI- wrote a letter to the Prime Minister for an appointment. Despite of the fact that there was no communication from Prime Minister Office (PMO), we did not give up our hopes and approached Mr. Jairam Ramesh, a Union minister of UPA government. He facilitated a meeting with Shri Montek Singh Ahluwalia, Deputy Chairman of Planning Commission. We were asked to make a presentation on the *Joint Statement*, and a detailed explanatory note was also submitted. In the discussion which lasted almost two hours, the Deputy Chairman assured to take an action on issues pertaining to breastfeeding. He agreed with most of the points indicated in the *Joint Statement* and referred the matter for further discussion with the members and advisors of Planning Commission. In the discussion, Deputy Chairman also agreed with the idea for an apex commission/body which would oversee all breastfeeding matters.

This is the replication of another success story we had in 2004. In 2004, our several partners joined hands in the solidarity of breastfeeding movement to strengthen the Infant Milk Substitutes, Feeding Bottles and Infant Foods Regulation of Production, Supply and Distribution) Act, 1992 (IMS Act), which was saved from being repealed.

Whenever BPNI and its partners worked together on infant and young child issues that achieved triumphs. It was because of one thing common we had no 'conflict of interests'.

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