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THE 2023 SERIES ON BREASTFEEDING

Key Series Messages

Presented by Rafael Pérez-Escamilla, PhD, Yale School of Public Health, on behalf of the Lancet Breastfeeding Series Group

JA Prevent NCD – WP6 2024 Task 6.5 Meeting



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The 2023 Lancet Series on Breastfeeding



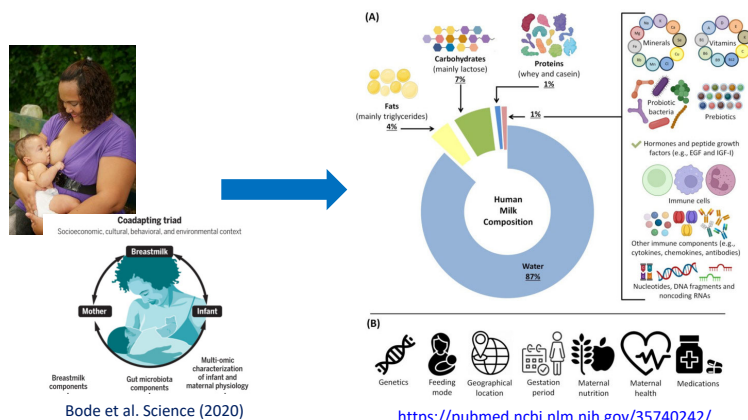
"The marketing of commercial milk formula for use in the first 3 years of life has negatively altered the infant and young child feeding ecosystem"



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1. Commercial Milk Formulas can't replicate the personalized nutrition/medicine properties of breastfeeding

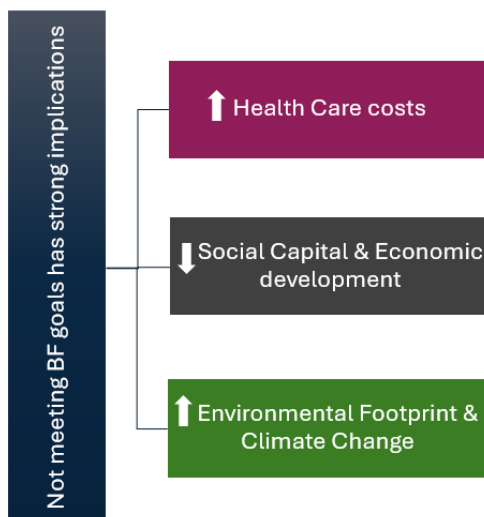
- BF is a process driven by a complex biosocial system
- Breast milk cannot be disassociated from the process of BF



Recommend using 'Commercial Milk Formula' instead of "Breast Milk Substitute"

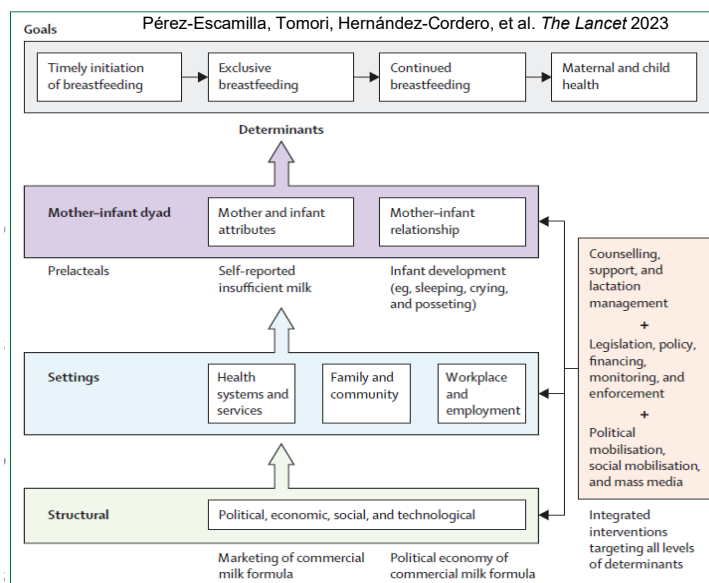
- To highlight the artificial and ultra-processed nature of formula products
- 'Substitute' conveys the notion of equivalence

2. Not meeting BF goals has strong economic and social implications



3. Structural factors strongly interfere with BF

- Most women can't meet their BF goals
- Political, economic, commercial, social and technological systems strongly influence infant feeding decisions through diverse settings
 - Health
 - Family & Community
 - Workplace & employment



4. Commercial Milk Formula companies use a sophisticated marketing playbook to capture parents and communities, science and policy and shape societal and professional norms, values and beliefs to alter decisions



2017, Vitafoods. CEO

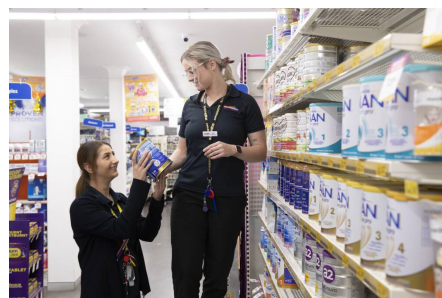
"...infant nutrition wasn't necessarily about the ingredients or innovation".

"What we are selling is actually sleep...If the baby doesn't sleep for three nights and the mother is exhausted ..."

"selling peace of mind"

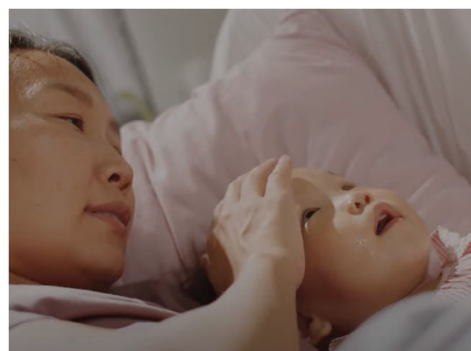
Reframing 'Normal' as a Marketing Opportunity

- New parents may be concerned about maturing baby behaviors
- CMF marketing frames normal maturing behaviours as 'something is wrong' – pathological – or mothers are inadequate
 - "If you are not sure whether you have enough milk..."
 - "If your infant has a rash or cries or possets or is unsettled... maybe they have an allergy"
 and offer products as **solutions**
- "Selling peace of mind"... certainty of quantity of milk consumed
- Without skilled support and reassurance, parents change from breastfeeding to CMF – or from one CMF to another



Misreading cues leads to... Self-reported insufficient milk (SRIM)

- Perceived infant satiety & satisfaction shape self-assessment of milk supply
- Crying, fussiness and short sleep duration undermine confidence
- Partners, family members and health staff also misinterpret cues
- **SRIM is the reason given by**
 - 45% of mothers globally for introducing CMFs before 6 months
- Yet, effective counselling and support helps parents understand infant cues and improve effective breastfeeding and breastmilk production



Marketing of Commercial Milk Formula: a system to **capture** parents, communities, **science and health workers** and policy and... **shape societal and professional norms, values and beliefs** and to alter decisions

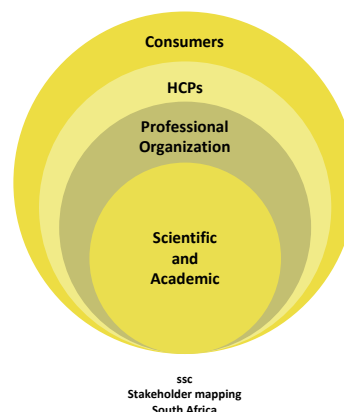
Why are health workers and their associations so important? Category Entry Points

- Sponsorship
- Research
- Guideline groups



Conflicts of Interest

The Echo Chamber



World Health Organization

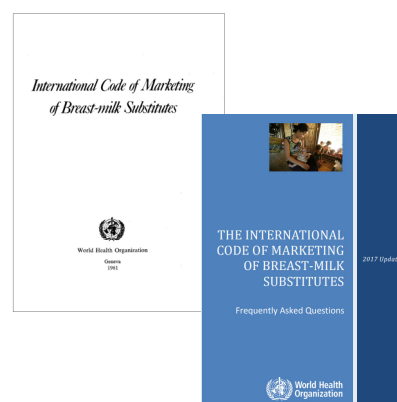
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Marketing of Commercial Milk Formula: a system to **capture** parents, communities, science and **policy and international recommendations** and... **shape societal and professional norms, values and beliefs** and to alter decisions

➤ **International policy frameworks are being manipulated to decrease their effectiveness**

Systematic reviews, case studies and analyses of public access information demonstrate:

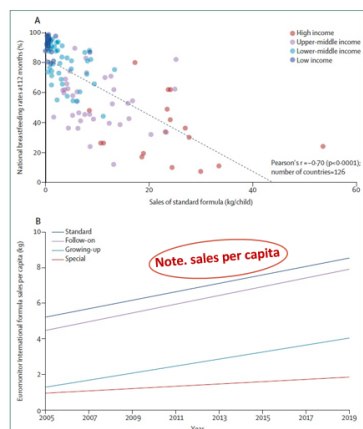
- The Code is **blocked, reinterpreted, circumvented** and **ignored**
- Codex Alimentarius is **manipulated** to establish weak standards that become a ceiling for regulation of CMF marketing



World Health Organization

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5. Commercial Milk Formula companies function as an oligopoly that has enormous economic, political and social power rooted in a neocolonial economic system



> CMF Marketing System is Powerful & Profitable

• **\$55.6 bn sales in 2019**

> Many reasons for these changes:

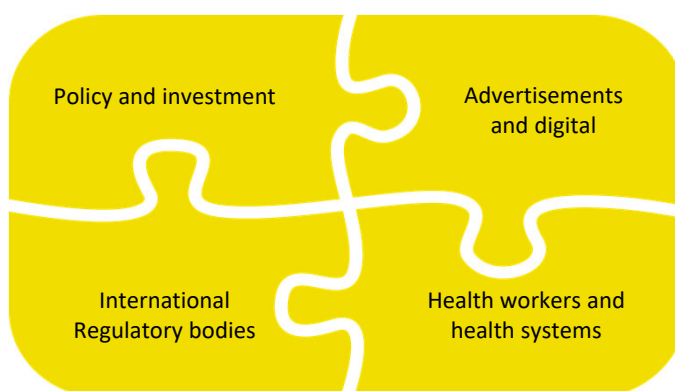
- Preference, work constraints, perceived insufficient milk, poor support
- **Central role of marketing**
 - 4.3-6.8% annual sales spent on marketing
= **US\$ 2.6-3.5 billion per year**
 - **Underestimate** – does not include lobbying, social media, sponsorship of health workers



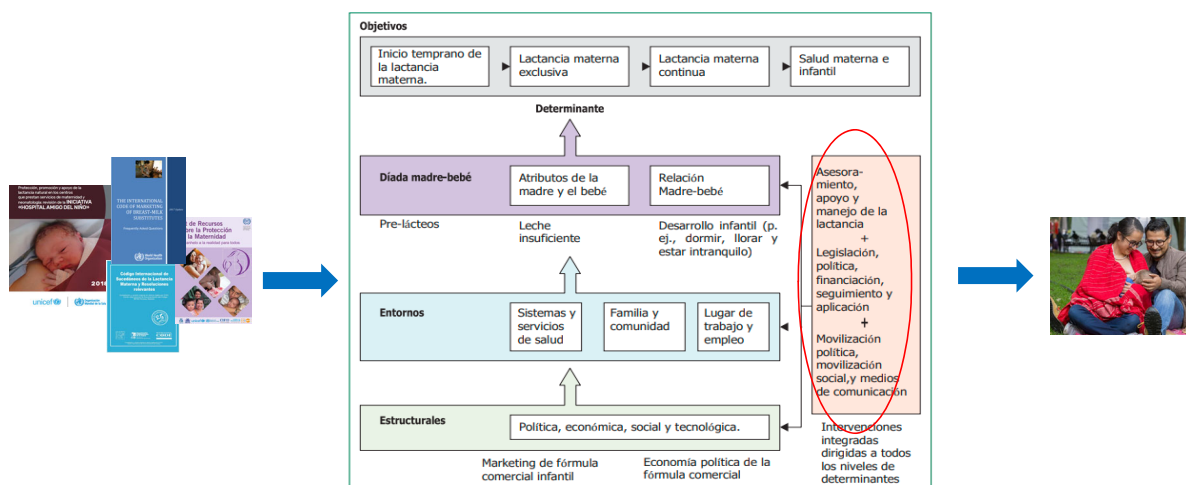
Summary

- CMF industry deploys a system that turns the birth of an infant and the care of parents into a business opportunity
- This system undermines breastfeeding and human rights
- Criticism of industry and marketing is not criticism of women, their decisions or circumstances

A systems approach is needed to address the CMF playbook



6. Multilevel and multisectoral interventions improve BF at scale



Understanding Normal Infant Behavior

- Human babies are born in an immature state
- Post-birth adjustment and maturation
- Takes time and support to learn to feed, settle and sleep
- Normal sleep patterns of infants don't align with adult sleep patterns
- Newborns express their discomfort through crying, signalling the need for help and care
- Crying is adaptive and communicates many needs



Implications

1. Governments must provide accurate and timely information about breastfeeding and infant behaviors, better support, and skills development for health professionals, parents and communities
2. A legal global treaty to end the marketing of CMF while continuing to strengthen national Code legislation
3. Civil society, health professionals and politicians must have a better understanding of the CMF industry's marketing and political strategies and how they perform economically with respect to tax and externalities
4. Health systems must deliver women-centered maternity care = investment and an empowered health force **plus** end undue formula milk industry influence over research, training and other professional activities
5. Governments and society must recognize and value care work – incorporating it into economic accounting systems and policy – and properly invest in maternity protection
6. **Unless the imbalance in power between private commercial interests and those with a duty and mandate to protect the rights and needs of children and mothers is corrected, then nothing will change**

It's not just about infant and young child feeding – it's about the impact of commercial interests on child development and society more generally. It's about the economic power used by the formula industry and the detriment to health and rights

Our vision: a world where parents and families are supported in the care of their infants, and for breastfeeding to be robustly promoted and supported, and protected at all levels