

Press Release

SUN-Civil Society Alliance Pakistan congratulates KP Provincial Assembly On the enactment of the Protection of Breastfeeding Child Nutrition Act 2015

Islamabad, January 14, 2015: Scaling Up Nutrition Civil Society Alliance Pakistan (SUN-CSA, Pak), a coalition of over 80 Civil Society Organizations (SCOs) congratulates the Minister for Health, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the Provincial Assembly for the enactment of the “Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Protection Breastfeeding and Child Nutrition Act 2015”. In a press release issued by Secretariat of SUN-CSA Pak, termed the legislation a monumental step in the right direction and hoped that the provincial government will also take necessary steps to effectively implement the law by introducing its rules and by notifying the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Infant Feeding Board to monitor implementation of the law.

On January 9th, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly unanimously passed “Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Protection of Breastfeeding and Child Nutrition Act 2015” thus rendering propagation or assertion of any material in any manner what so ever by a manufacturer or a distributor that encourages bottle-feeding or discourages breastfeeding; a punishable deed.

Under the said law, headed by the Provincial Health Minister an 11-member Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Infant Feeding Board would be constituted. The board would report violations, recommend investigation against manufacturers, distributors or health workers and would advise the government on policies or guidelines for the promotion and protection of breastfeeding. Spearheaded by a district council Nazim, in every district an eight-member district Infant Feeding Committee will also be formulated.

More importantly, the law makes it mandatory for breast milk supplement manufacturers to explicitly conspicuously display the public message which should clearly communicate and register the fact that any supplement or substitute what so ever can not replace the significance of Mother’s Milk and write on milk packages in bold characters that “MOTHER’S MILK IS BEST FOR YOUR BABY AND HELPS IN PREVENTING DIARRHOEA AND OTHER ILLNESSES.”

The law prohibits labeling packages with any public message or advertising note that might discourage breastfeeding. It also directs to label the products with necessary information bilingually that is both in English & Urdu about the appropriate use of such products. The law would invalidate the sale of such products, which would fail to satisfy any provisions of the said law.

The new piece of legislation also makes it mandatory for health workers to support breastfeeding and stops them from promoting any so called substitute product for infants. The law has defined “infant” as any baby up to the age of twelve months. Violators of the law can face imprisonment for a term that may extend up to two years, or a fine not less than Rs50,000 or more than Rs500,000 or both.

Unfortunately, Pakistan has the highest bottle-feeding rates and lowest exclusive breastfeeding rates in South Asia. The percentage of exclusively breast-fed children has remained static has risen only from 37.1 percent in 2006-07 to 37.7 percent in 2012-13. However, when it comes to the bottle-feeding rate, Pakistan has no close competitors; bottle-feeding rate has risen from an already undesirable 32.1% in 2006-07 to a high 41% in 2012-13.

The SUN-CSA, Pakistan believes that the enactment of the “Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Protection of Breastfeeding and Child Nutrition Act 2015” and its effective implementation would go a long way to promote breastfeeding (especially exclusive breastfeeding for six months) and discourage bottle feeding which will in return put a definite dent in the unacceptably high prevalence of childhood illnesses (Diarrhea and Pneumonia) and infant along with under 5 mortality in the province.

The SUN-CSA, Pakistan also call upon the Federal and Provincial Governments to take necessary steps for implementation of breastfeeding laws by establishing/ activating Infant Feeding Boards and deputing/allocating human and financial resources.

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