

A proposal to recognize investment in breastfeeding as a carbon offset

Julie Patricia Smith,^a Phillip Baker,^b Roger Mathisen,^c Aoife Long,^d Nigel Rollins^e & Marilyn Waring^f



The WHO Council on the Economics of Health for All:

- Valuing what matters
- Better health financing
- Innovation for the common good
- Public sector capacity

Global breastfeeding targets reduces GHG emissions - far more than decarbonizing formula manufacturing

We propose that breastfeeding investments be recognized as a carbon offset.

Measuring what matters – towards new metrics

We illustrate conceptual shortcomings of current economic accounting norms and conceptual frameworks which don't recognize the values of breastfeeding, and outline new metrics and tools for incorporating economic and environmental values of health for all into policy and practice.

The planet and children suffer when **more than half of babies** get substances other than **breastmilk** in their first six months of life.

Additional government investment of **US\$5.7 billion** is needed to meet the **global nutrition target for exclusive breastfeeding by 2025**, but donor disbursements were only **US\$59 million** in 2021.

Global agreements for a 'clean development mechanism' including a **recent 'loss and damage fund'** have potential to redistribute global development financing to low and middle income countries to tackle climate change challenges. We propose that countries' investments in breastfeeding, such as through better paid maternity leave, should be eligible for such funding.

One kg of commercial milk formula generates around **11-14 kg of greenhouse gas** and uses more than **5,000 L of water** during the product life cycle.

When breastfeeding declines, the economy, as currently measured, expands, because only commercial baby food sales are counted in GDP.



MOTHERS' MILK TOOL Green Feeding Climate Action Tool



Better health financing - breastfeeding investments as a carbon offset

Having new metrics for measuring women's production of breastmilk, can support new public investments in breastfeeding as a carbon offset, with significant gains and co-benefits for women's, children's and planetary health.

MARILYN WARING
New Zealand feminist, member of the WHO Council

“Urgent reorientation of economic policies is needed. The advocacy for a well-being framework 'Beyond GDP' is more of the same. The market-centric paradigm and its measurement system persist. The Economics of Health for All requires a paradigm shift.”

PATRIZIA FRACASSI
Senior Nutrition and Food Systems Officer, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)

“Breastfeeding plays a critical role in climate change policies, addressing mitigation, adaptation, and resilience. The widespread use of Commercial Milk Formula as a breastmilk substitute has an environmental cost.”

DR. VICTOR AGUAYO
Global Director, Child Nutrition and Development, UNICEF

“Protecting, promoting and supporting breastfeeding is arguably the single most important child survival, nutrition and development intervention in early life. It also is the greenest option to feed children in the first six months of life. As such, investments in breastfeeding should be considered a carbon offset in global financing arrangements for sustainable development.”

DR. MEERA SHEKAR
Global Lead for Nutrition, World Bank

“The insights presented in the paper underscore the critical role of breastfeeding in achieving health for all. I endorse the call for a reorientation of economic and financial policies to value breastfeeding not only for its unparalleled contributions to nutrition and health but also as a viable carbon offset. This aligns with the World Bank's commitments to supporting sustainable development and addressing climate change.”

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Abstract: This paper addresses the connection between the economy and health. The health of the population is a key determinant of economic growth and well-being. The health of the population is also a key determinant of the environment. The health of the population and the environment are interconnected. The health of the population and the environment are interconnected. The health of the population and the environment are interconnected.

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