

# Economic and Environmental Implications of Not Breastfeeding in Brazil: A Public Health Perspective Using Green Feeding Tools

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## Introduction

Breastfeeding is globally recognized as an essential intervention for child, maternal, and planetary health. However, despite its numerous benefits, breastfeeding rates in Brazil and worldwide remain below the targets set by the World Health Organization [1]. In recent years, tools such as the Green Feeding Tool have enabled more accurate estimates of the impacts of not breastfeeding—including economic costs, carbon emissions, and the burden on healthcare systems [2–4]. In this context, the strategic role of IBFAN, particularly in Brazil, stands out in formulating public policies aimed at protecting and promoting breastfeeding.

## Economic and Environmental Consequences of Not Breastfeeding

The Cost of Not Breastfeeding Tool estimates that the global economic losses due to not breastfeeding exceed \$1 billion per day [3]. In the Brazilian context, these losses are estimated at approximately R\$ 13 billion per year, considering direct healthcare costs and productivity losses (1). Beyond economic impacts, the production, distribution, and disposal of infant formulas generate a significant environmental footprint, contributing over 6 million tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO<sub>2</sub>eq) annually on a global scale [4].

Since 1979, IBFAN (International Baby Food Action Network) has been active globally in advocating for breastfeeding and monitoring the practices of the infant formula industry [5]. In Brazil, its work has been crucial in establishing the NBCAL (Brazilian Norm for the Marketing of Foods for Infants), as well as for its ongoing oversight. Among its achievements are the extension of maternity leave to 180 days, the regulation of advertising for infant formulas, and the strengthening of the national network of human milk banks [5].

IBFAN is one of the leading global networks for monitoring and advocacy in defense of breastfeeding and the implementation of the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes, adopted by the World Health Organization in 1981 [5]. Since then, IBFAN has actively opposed unethical practices in the formula industry, such as misleading advertising, free distribution of products in maternity wards, and legislative lobbying. Kuitunen (2023), suggests that the current guidance

against pacifiers and bottles may be based on weak and potentially biased observational studies [6].

Step 9 of the WHO's Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) recommends restricting the use of bottles and pacifiers [5]. However, recent studies, such as that by Kuitunen (2023), question the scientific basis for this recommendation. The author emphasizes that the risks attributed to these devices are based on weak evidence, and randomized clinical trials do not confirm detriment to breastfeeding. He advocates for a more informative and less blame-oriented approach, respecting families' right to make their own decisions.

In Brazil, IBFAN Brazil is an international reference in the implementation and oversight of the NBCAL (Brazilian Norm for the Marketing of Foods for Infants and Young Children, Pacifiers, and Bottles). Its work has been fundamental in consolidating robust public policies, such as [5]:

- The extension of maternity leave to 180 days in public agencies;
- The creation and strengthening of the human milk bank network, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Fiocruz;
- Strategic action in the National Congress for the regulation of advertising for infant formulas and related utensils.

IBFAN's continuous vigilance has been essential to prevent legislative backsliding that could compromise the advancements made over the past decades and further increase dependency on artificial substitutes and their health, social, and environmental impacts [5].

The consolidation of economic and environmental data, such as that provided by the Green Feeding Toolbox and Mothers' Milk Tool, is essential for public managers, healthcare professionals, and civil society to understand that breastfeeding is not merely an individual decision but a profoundly political, economic, and ecological action [2–4].

In this context, it is recommended that:

- Brazil incorporates the tools from the [greenfeeding.org](https://greenfeeding.org) platform into its strategies for assessing and formulating public policies aimed at maternal and child health [4];

- The NBCAL be effectively monitored and improved, with the allocation of public resources for oversight, educational campaigns, and training of primary care professionals [5];

- There be greater recognition and institutional support for IBFAN Brazil, including its acknowledgment as an entity of strategic national public interest, given its historical role in protecting breastfeeding and public health [5].

## Conclusion

Breastfeeding should be promoted and valued not only as an act of individual care but as a practice aligned with social justice, health equity, food sovereignty, and climate change mitigation.

In times of climate crisis, food insecurity, and overloaded healthcare systems, promoting breastfeeding is promoting the future. Not breastfeeding represents a collective failure with impacts that extend beyond the individual sphere—affecting public health, the national economy, and environmental balance.

Brazil has an exemplary track record in protecting breastfeeding, built on scientific evidence, consistent public policies, and civil society mobilization. It is now essential to strengthen and expand these advancements by incorporating economic and environmental data [1–7],

ensuring social justice, food sovereignty, and an intergenerational commitment to life.

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