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Save the Children Philippines hosts Policy Forum at the Senate to seek stronger legislative measures to promote breastfeeding

Save the Children Philippines raised concern on poor enforcement of Milk Code in the last three decades that requires exclusive breastfeeding for babies up to six months. The problem has contributed to rising cases of stunting and malnutrition among children, now at 3.3 Million and 850,000 respectively.

At the Policy Forum on Breastfeeding, Save the Children Philippines launched the research study titled: Barriers to Breastfeeding in the Philippines that showed a slight increase in the number of mothers who continue to breastfeed at 60 per cent in 2017 compared to 51 per cent in 2013 based on the 2018 National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) of the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

Dr. Amado Parawan, health and nutrition advisor of the Program Development Quality of Save the Children Philippines presented the study which showed strong influence of multinational Milk Companies in the country's health care system.

Save the Children Philippines welcomes initiatives of Senator Risa Hontiveros who filed Senate Resolution 681 seeking investigation of Milk Code violations by manufacturers of milk formula.

Also, the group supports Senate Bill 2051 or an Act Promoting Breastfeeding as an Essential Component of Responsible Parenthood filed by Senator Nancy Binay.

The 75-page research study shows that Milk companies spend an annual \$100 Million (P52.5 Billion at 52.5 to US\$1) on marketing and promotions of infant formula. Such spending translates into \$260 Million (P13.6 Billion at 52.5 to US\$1) worth of annual profits from Filipino families.

It added that strong advertising campaigns of Milk companies discourage mothers to breastfeed thinking that infant formula can equal the nutrients from breastmilk.

In the last three decades, there were blatant violations of Milk Code committed by manufacturers of milk formula, said the study.

Under the Milk Code, milk companies are prohibited to sponsor professional trainings and publications of health clinic materials such as baby book.

“But the practice of full sponsorship of doctors and midwives training and seminars continues,” said Dr. Parawan, citing results of the study.

Since doctors are highly regarded by Filipinos and listen to recommendations, milk companies build strong doctor-patient/parent relationships through sponsored seminars and giveaway samples.

“Doctors and midwives should be partners in building a society where infants achieve optimum growth and development through exclusive breastfeeding,” said Parawan.

Save the Children Philippines is hopeful that the First 1,000 Days Bill soon becoming a law by early December will strengthen campaign for the exclusive breastfeeding for babies for the first six months.

The bill promotes optimal infant and young child feeding practices. These practices include the early initiation of breastfeeding on the first hour after birth, exclusive breastfeeding during the first six months, complementary feeding starting at 6 months with continued breastfeeding, and extended breastfeeding for more than two years.

Exclusive breastfeeding of up to 6 months can prevent 1.3 million deaths of children under 5 years, according to a global study of UNICEF.

The Milk Code prohibits companies of breastmilk substitutes to advertise their products, or hand- out gifts or samples to lactating mothers.

However, research study showed that Milk companies advertise infant formula products containing breakthrough nutrients that are only found in breastmilk.

These include HMO or human milk oligosaccharides; DHA or docosahexanoic acid and ARA or arachidonic acid that are all essential fatty acids found in breastmilk.

“We trust that our esteemed physicians and health professionals will not be instruments of deception when it comes to telling mothers that only breastmilk contains the nutrients that can save lives of their children from various diseases and malnutrition,” said Parawan.

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