

Mother-Baby Friendly Initiative *Plus*: A model for human milk banking in Kenya

Helping every Kenyan baby receive human milk

PRIORITIZING HUMAN MILK TO SAVE LIVES

Kenya has made significant strides in child health over the past decade. Each year, however, more than 100,000 children under the age of five still die from causes that can be prevented. An estimated 40,000 of these deaths occur in the first month of life.¹ Of all child health interventions, increased access to and intake of human milk has the greatest potential impact on child survival. For example, optimal breastfeeding can prevent an estimated 823,000 annual deaths in children younger than five years worldwide.² However, due to maternal illness, death, or abandonment, or simply because some mothers are unable to breastfeed, a significant proportion of infants miss out on the opportunity to begin life at their mother's breast. Without help, they cannot benefit from the critical nutrition and immune support that human milk provides.

DONATED HUMAN MILK: A LIFESAVING ALTERNATIVE

When breastfeeding is not an option, the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends donated human milk as a lifesaving alternative for vulnerable infants.³ Compared to infant formula, donor human milk (DHM) is associated with decreased risk of diarrhea, feeding intolerance, necrotizing enterocolitis, sepsis and other infections, particularly in premature and low-birthweight infants.⁴ Human milk banks (HMBs) collect, pasteurize, test, and store safe, donated milk from lactating mothers and provide it to infants in need, ensuring that even if babies cannot breastfeed, they still receive human milk as soon as possible. Importantly, HMBs are also key to protecting, promoting, and supporting breastfeeding.

HUMAN MILK BANKING IN KENYA

Following the WHO recommendations, the Kenya Ministry of Health (MOH) has included DHM in their policy guidelines as the next best alternative to mother's own milk.⁵ This is not currently feasible,



PATH/Amy MacIver

however, because Kenya does not have human milk banking facilities that can provide safe, pasteurized DHM. Closing the gap requires a sustainable and effective model to guide implementation and make sure new banks provide consistent, safe, and high-quality services. Establishing such a model has been identified as a key first step.

PATH IN KENYA: PARTNERING TO PROVIDE HUMAN MILK TO EVERY BABY

PATH, an international health nonprofit, is an established partner of the MOH. Our long history of collaboration has resulted in a variety of successful efforts, including the Baby-Friendly Community Initiative and new national policy guidelines to improve nutrition for mothers, infants, and children.

Globally recognized for its work to strengthen HMBs, PATH is building on lessons from our ongoing human

milk banking activities in Brazil (the global leader in human milk banking), India, Vietnam, and South Africa and is drawing on previously developed toolkit “Strengthening Human Milk Banking: A Global Implementation Framework”⁶ to help ministries of health and policymakers worldwide implement integrated HMB programs.

Together with the African Population and Health Research Center, a Kenya-based nonprofit research organization, and with funding from the UK Department for International Development and other partners, PATH is supporting Kenyan partners to adapt our existing human milk banking model, called the **Mother-Baby Friendly Initiative Plus (MBFI+)**, to meet the country’s needs. MBFI+ is an integrated human milk banking platform. It focuses on aligning HMBs within other key aspects of newborn care: combining banking, breastfeeding promotion, and Kangaroo Mother Care (an effective method for infant survival that involves providing skin-to-skin contact to low-birthweight infants).

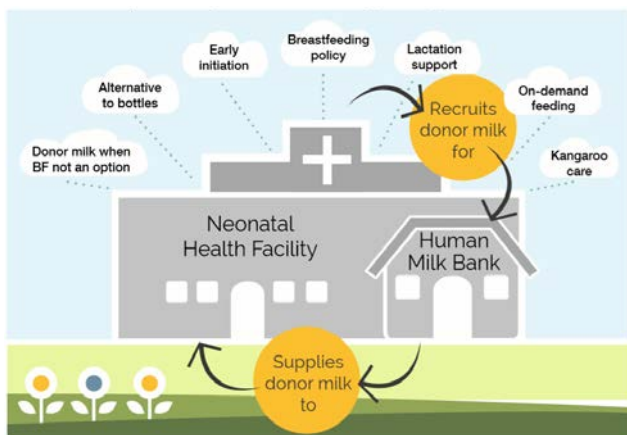


FIGURE 1. Using the innovative MBFI+ model, HMBs become integrated hubs for infant nutrition and survival.

COORDINATED ACTIVITIES TO REACH FURTHER

Because strong, country-appropriate guidelines are a critical first step before implementation, we work with countries around the world to tailor MBFI+ to their unique needs. Current work in Kenya includes:

- **Conducting assessments to identify barriers and drivers of the MBFI+ model.** These will serve to generate demand for MBFI+, instill ownership, and inform a culturally-appropriate model.
- **Building MBFI+ capacity through learning exchanges and trainings with leaders using successful integrated HMB models around the world.** These events will help Kenyan stakeholders adapt the model and foster long-term engagement between Kenya and other regions with a long history of human milk banking.
- **Establishing Kenya-specific strategies and guidance for effective MBFI+ implementation.** Together with technical, clinical, and policy leaders, we will develop guidance and mechanisms for developing and incorporating an MBFI+ model into current policies and programming.

OUR VISION: LIFESAVING NUTRITION FOR EVERY BABY

Our long-term vision is to establish Kenya as a center of excellence for human milk banking in the region, promoting and providing access to human milk for all infants to survive and thrive.

References

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- 3 World Health Organization. Guidelines on optimal feeding of low birth-weight infants in low-and middle-income countries. *Geneva WHO*. 2011:16-45.
- 4 Boyd CA, Quigley MA, Brocklehurst P. Donor breast milk versus infant formula for preterm infants: systematic review and meta-analysis. *Archives of Disease in Childhood Fetal and Neonatal Edition*. 2007;92(3):F169-F175.
- 5 Maternal Infant and Young Child Nutrition - National Operational Guidelines for Health Workers. Division of Nutrition, Ministry of Health, Kenya 2013.
- 6 PATH. *Strengthening Human Milk Banking: A Global Implementation Framework*. Version 1. Seattle: Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Grand Challenges Initiative, PATH; 2013.



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PATH is the leader in global health innovation. An international nonprofit organization, we save lives and improve health, especially among women and children. We accelerate innovation across five platforms—vaccines, drugs, diagnostics, devices, and system and service innovations—that harness our entrepreneurial insight, scientific and public health expertise, and passion for health equity. By mobilizing partners around the world, we take innovation to scale, working alongside countries primarily in Africa and Asia to tackle their greatest health needs. Together, we deliver measurable results that disrupt the cycle of poor health. Learn more at www.path.org.

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