

# An Interview With Patti Rundall: A Passionate Activist, Full of Energy!

Journal of Human Lactation

00(0)–8

© The Author(s) 2021

Article reuse guidelines:

sagepub.com/journals-permissions

DOI: 10.1177/0890334420971552

journals.sagepub.com/home/jhl



Patti Rundall, OBE, Dip. AD<sup>1</sup> and Maryse Arendt, IBCLC, BSEd<sup>2</sup> 

## Abstract

Since 1980, alongside IBFAN partners, Patti Rundall has worked to build collaborative networks that help countries bring in legally binding controls based on the *International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes* and the *United Nations World Health Assembly (WHA) Resolutions*. Conflicts of interest and their impact on policymaking, research, education, and health systems has been a cross-cutting theme of her work, which has focused on the adoption and strengthening of the European Union's baby food legislation and the improvement of *Codex Global Trading Standards*. With IBFAN, she helped countries adopt many resolutions including WHA Resolution 49.15 [https://www.who.int/nutrition/topics/WHA49.15\\_ajcn\\_en.pdf?ua=1](https://www.who.int/nutrition/topics/WHA49.15_ajcn_en.pdf?ua=1) (1996) about conflicts of interest; she helped found and launch the *Conflicts of Interest Coalition* at the *UN General Assembly*. Patti is a founder of *Baby Feeding Law Group* (the alliance of 23 United Kingdom health professional and mother-support organizations), a member of the *Infant Feeding in Emergencies* core group and a leader in company campaigns (e.g., the Nestlé Boycott). She represented IBFAN on the *European Commission's Platform for Action on Diet and Physical Activity* from 2007 until 2019. In the year 2000 she was awarded the title *Officer of the British Empire (OBE)* for her service to infant nutrition. (This is a verbatim interview: MA = Maryse Arendt; PR = Patti Rundall.)

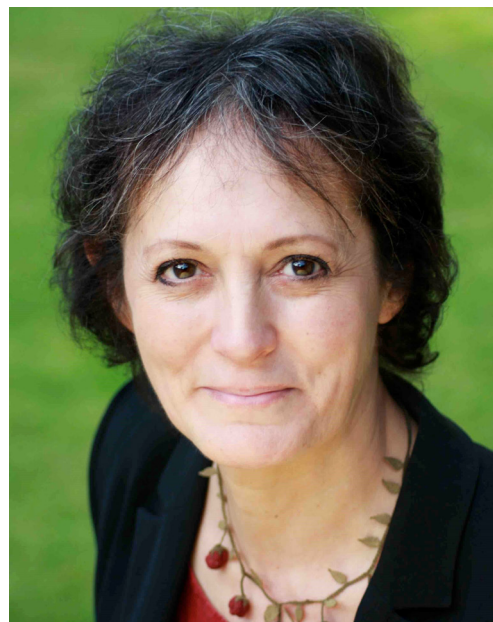
## Keywords

baby-friendly hospital initiative, breastfeeding, breastfeeding barriers, conflict of interest, infant formula, infant nutrition, International code of marketing of breastmilk substitutes, politics of breastfeeding

## Interview

**MA:** When did you first come in contact with breastfeeding issues?

**PR:** Well, that would be 1974 when I had my first child Nicholas. I was an art teacher and had always been interested in food and assumed that I would breastfeed. But something went wrong and he had a difficult birth, which cascaded from an epidural, to a general anesthetic and on to a Keilland's Rotation Forceps delivery. This was followed by complete separation for more than a day. Such was the lack of care about women's feelings, no one thought to let me see him, so I didn't even believe he existed. The staff seemed frantically busy



Patti Rundall

and couldn't tell me what had happened, and I was afraid of adding to their burden. I got congratulation cards in the post the next day before I was allowed to see him. My husband had been sent home ill during the birth and kept trying to reassure me. But I was devastated and wanted to die. It's impossible to describe what I felt when at last I was allowed to hold him.

Then the baby booklets and gifts started arriving, full of bad advice and samples. How could I ever achieve this new gold standard of 4 hourly feeds. After such a difficult birth I knew Nick must have had headaches and there was no way I could follow the advice from all sides to put my head under the pillow and leave him to cry. Thankfully I had good friends who helped me. I flung the booklets out and followed my instincts. Bliss.

Many years later I met Margaret Kyenkyia who told me how disorienting the Nestlé booklets were for her in Uganda; the posh cot in a separate room, the clock, the emphasis on washing breasts. Later I read studies by Jean Rowe and Elisabet Helsing, showing that women had to fight the system if they wanted to breastfeed.

Although my separation was done for “medical” reasons, the rest was no casual mistake. It was a carefully thought out and cruel marketing strategy, designed to undermine breastfeeding. Today mothers are separated, for example prompted by Danone’s *Voice of the Expert* advising Indian mothers to keep 6 ft from her baby for fear of COVID transmission. While it’s right for women to decide on these matters, what worries me is industry’s influences (see Lancet series).

**MA:** When did you join *Baby Milk Action* and IBFAN?

**PR:** That was 1979. It’s impossible to list all the amazing people who have been involved in this work for so long. They have taught me so much—and did groundbreaking work before I even heard about this story such as the Kennedy hearing and the development of the Code. It wasn’t until 1979 when I moved to Cambridge that I met Gabrielle (Gay) Palmer at a friend’s house. She was working at Save the Children at the time and later wrote the marvelous book, *The Politics of Breastfeeding* (Palmer, 2009). After seeing an ad for the *War on Want* Booklet, Mike (1974) by Mike Muller, Gay couldn’t get the image of the malnourished baby out of her mind: “I had two healthy children and could not bear this injustice and trickery imposed on other mothers. Personal communication” She later contacted Sadru Keraj, a Cambridge student, about setting up the Baby Milk Action Coalition. When I saw the books and documentaries, *Bottle Babies* (1974) and Moyers (1978), I knew I’d never be able to sleep peacefully until I did at least something about it. A typical ex-Catholic, I felt personally responsible for the companies’ actions, especially the European ones on our patch.



Maryse Arendt

Oxfam and the *War on Want* were leading the action in the United Kingdom (UK) but were constrained by British charity laws. In order to get the Nestlé Boycott going in the UK a small group of people put money into a pot. We set about writing letters, organizing petitions, demonstrations, jumble sales with everything done on limited spare time with volunteers. People were generous and supportive. We got cross-party support from Jack Ashley, MP, and Health Minister George Young, who put forward one of the strongest positions in support of the Code at the 1981 World Health Assembly.

Gay left to do voluntary work in Mozambique during 1980. When she came back, we registered as a “Not-For-Profit Company Limited by Guarantee”

so that we could apply for grants from charities, such as Christian Aid and Oxfam. We learned how to fundraise through trial and error. We were at our richest in the 1990s when we got four 3-year grants from the EU Commission, one to develop an education package for teachers designed to encourage students (and teachers) to question the ethics of allowing corporations to fund education. As a teacher myself, I found it so wrong.

I think this was when you started working with IBFAN, Maryse? Someone must have liked what we were doing because our first draft proposal was rejected—it wasn’t campaigned enough! Nestlé was getting worried and asked for more details of our application and about what we were trying to do. The Commission rightly refused to share it!

**MA:** Yes, I remember, this was when we received a little seed grant from the German association, AGB/IBFAN, a partner in your project, to start working on the Code in Luxembourg.

**PR:** Although funding was crucial, our real effectiveness was because we were sincere and passionate campaigners. As I said before, I apologize for not being able to mention all the great people. They came from all walks of life and from so many countries; they were instrumental in keeping the work alive. I will mention two campaigners: Andrew Radford who, in 1991, built up our grassroots network of area contacts and wrote

<sup>1</sup>Policy Director, Baby Milk Action - IBFAN UK, Cambridge, UK

<sup>2</sup>Berufsverband vun de Laktationsberoderinnen zu Lëtzebuerg, Luxembourg, Luxembourg

Date submitted: October 10, 2020; Date accepted: October 15, 2020.

#### Corresponding Author:

Maryse Arendt, IBCLC, BSEd, Berufsverband vun de Laktationsberoderinnen zu Lëtzebuerg, Luxembourg L1328, Luxembourg.

Email: maryse.arendt@pt.lu

the environmental booklet *The Environmental Impact of Artificial Feeding*, an issue that hardly anyone except Gay wrote about at that time. Mike Brady was another great campaigner who joined us 1996/7 and stayed for over 20 years. Lisa Woodburn came to the same meeting at Gay's in 1979 and finally retired last year at 81! But there are so many more fantastic people!

**MA:** What is your actual role in IBFAN?

**PR:** I have had various roles over the 40 years. I was Co-Chair at one time, Global Advocacy another. I currently sit on IBFAN's Global Council.

**MA:** What have been your main areas of work?

**PR:** My interest has always been the politics: legislation, WHA Resolutions and trading standards, building networks such as the Conflicts of Interest Coalition and the Baby Feeding Law Group. Indeed, funding and Conflicts of Interest (COI) have always been at the heart of it for me, not because of our lack of money—no, that probably rescued us from being diverted and silenced—but because COI go deep. I sometimes wonder if people have forgotten the Nestlé "milk nurses" of the 1970s and how easy it is to pretend that they only want to help the dying babies.

I'm not saying that all the agencies and NGOs that take money from corporations are BINGOs [Business Interest Non-Governmental Organizations]. Many longstanding charities were started for genuinely humanitarian reasons. Some recognized the risk, swallowed hard, and tried to make sure the funds from companies that would be considered dodgy today were put to good use. Obesity and the environment were not an issue until recently. Some believed that the companies might actually change. The problems start when companies are given too much power; they become "partners" with seats on Boards. After all 'Partnership' is not a benign term. Its valuable and not only gives 'image transfer - but implies shared governance.. I know many well intentioned people don't think about these things, but there really is no such thing as a free lunch. In my experience, it's not long before things go off course. The true BINGOs are started by industry for a specific purpose. I think this behavior is "astro-turfing"—masking the sponsors of a message or organization e.g., political, advertising, religious or public relations, to make it appear as though it originated from and is supported by grassroots participants. See how baby food industry tactics follow the tobacco playbook (Granheim et al., 2017).

**MA:** You have been a major activist in the campaigning for the Code in Europe. Could you give us some highlights?

**PR:** This is a long story that started soon after the Code. You can read more in the Chronology [see Baby Milk Action: IBFAN UK, 2018, but the first EU Directive

was adopted in 1991. Norway's Elisabet Helsing was elected as IBFAN's European Coordinator in 1981, but soon moved on to WHO [the World Health Organization]. In 1983, she visited numerous European countries to see what we were all doing about the Code. Her visit prompted us into action. Although many Brits tended to fall asleep at any mention of the EU, we did get strong support for this campaign with thousands of letters sent to the EU Commission. We got significant changes to the Directives (both for the internal market and for export). If we couldn't get the whole Code in, we at least wanted to make sure that member states were not blocked if they chose to do so. Since 1981, European Parliamentarians have voted several times to implement the Code, and the Plenary vote in 1986 brought in 33 strengthening amendments to what was a weak industry proposal. The issues went into "bureaucratic limbo" until 1991 and we had a big fight with the EU Commission to insert wording that "allowed" countries to prohibit advertising of Infant formula if they wanted to do so. We never managed to extend this to follow-on formula but have continued this work right up until today. The EU's strong position on food safety and on the precautionary principle has been very helpful in our Codex work.

**MA:** To what extent did COI play a role in the EU?

**PR:** A LOT. The body that advised the EU Commission, the Scientific Committee for Food (SCF) had no serious COI rules, and on our issue one influential member, a French pediatrician, refused to publicly declare his extensive funding from the baby food industry. With the help of a Glenys Kinnock, Member of the European Parliament, we mounted a campaign calling for more transparency. Eventually, in 2000, the EU shut the SCF down and set up an entirely new system—the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) with proper COI rules.

It pleases me that the shares that I used for many years to attend the Nestlé's Annual meeting would exclude me from sitting on an EFSA Panel. EFSA still needs watching and its COI still cause trouble; but this was certainly a result.

**MA:** Could you explain your work at the WHA [World Health Assembly] and with WHO in the past?

**PR:** The Code was adopted by the WHA in 1981 with the key purpose of ending the unethical marketing of baby foods, so WHO, UNICEF [United Nations Children's Fund], the World Health Assembly and Codex, have been fundamental to everything IBFAN has done. All these agencies are grossly underfunded, so we have done whatever we can to ensure that member states recognize their importance and protect them all from commercial and undue political influence. The Code was the first attempt for the UN system to regulate an industry sector, so the Code was a challenge and a

game changer. In 1981, the International Tobacco Information Center was watching in the wings as events unfolded, and concluded that: “the infant formula experience has put back the multinational cause by 8–10 years...” Others say the baby feeding industry was badly prepared. IBFAN represented by IOCU, was described : “the organization was very good. It managed to ally groups as disparate as feminists and anti-abortionists and it certainly worked more effectively and in a more sophisticated way than the industry association (ICIFI)”.

Paterson John, (August 2008) Tobacco Industry Responses to International Statutory Regulation, Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Global Health and Public Policy Centre for International Public Health Policy School of Health in Social Science University of Edinburgh And “This WHA demonstrated.... main lessons for companies: (a) WHO is now firmly down the path of regulating businesses which affect human health (b)WHO soft regulations will gradually take on a hard character as long as the critics maintain their pressure” (IOMS, 1986).

One of the Code’s most important requirements is that governments must report back every 2 years, and we knew from the start that Assemblies were needed to keep member states up to date. Over the years we’ve helped the adoption of 19 subsequent relevant Resolutions that have corrected loopholes and moved the whole issue along. It’s not surprising that Nestlé and others ignore these resolutions and want the reporting back requirement ended (Nestlé, 2020).

There are many Resolutions that companies dislike, not least WHA 49.15, adopted in 1996. This went deeper than the Code—tackling not just *how* communications should be done but *who* should be allowed to fund it [sic]. There is so much worry today that legislation will force people to do this or that—the “Nanny State.” No one asks who gave these companies permission to encourage harmful practices. The Code and the Boycott were simply informing people about the risks of not paying attention. We have never said that these products should come off of the shelves.

WHA 63.23, adopted in 2010, is another key one that called for a ban on claims stated on all foods for infants and young children. Not surprisingly it was opposed by members of the Scaling Up Nutrition Initiative (SUN) and other corporate-linked nutrition initiatives. Claims are useful if you want to use market-led approaches for ultra-processed foods and supplements. These groups also promote commercially influenced monitoring, voluntary commitments, and Public Private Partnerships (Michèle et al., 2019). I remember a lead person in SUN telling me that no one thought about COI, till we raised it. Like the recent

*Breast Milk Substitutes Call to Action* (World Health Organization, 2020a), it relies on companies making promises to be “good” in the future, hoping that everyone will forget the harm that they have done to health and the planet. This is the essence of “(Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition [GAIN], 2008; Rundall, 2015) the Business of Malnutrition”—to make harmful practices look good.

**MA:** You mentioned a story about the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) that was completely unknown to me, a BFHI coordinator for Luxembourg since 1992. Please explain for our readers.

**PR:** These are just my recollections, so forgive any mistakes. I’m not sure how many people know how deeply BFHI was linked to the Boycott. It was launched in 1991 with the full support of IBFAN just when the Church of England was deciding whether to endorse the Boycott. As Boycott leaders, Marcos Arana (Mexico), Ines Fernandes (Philippines), and Idrian Resnick (USA) were invited to two meetings in New York City with UNICEF Executive Director, James Grant. When we arrived in New York in 1991, there was clear tension. One UNICEF staff person told us she was having nightmares that IBFAN was boycotting UNICEF Christmas cards. At the meeting we understood why.

Mr. Grant was intrigued with Ines’s presentation about the first mother-baby-friendly city and explained why, throughout the [19]80s, UNICEF had not been able to do as much as it wanted on breastfeeding because of the political situation in the United States and the opposition from corporations. He felt that the BFHI would be a major breakthrough and was sure that he could persuade companies to cooperate and end free supplies by the end of 1992.

We warned that the industry couldn’t be trusted. We had agreed to meet the International Association of Infant Food Manufacturers (IFM), representing 80% of the world formula industry, the day before because they said they had an important policy development to discuss. I remember not eating any of the lunch they offered but asking them directly whether they were really going to stop free supplies voluntarily. They said that Grant hadn’t asked them to do that, and that they only agreed to end them if they were forced to by legislation. So, it was all part of a scam that they were using to mislead the Church leaders and everyone else.

At some point in the meeting a Nestlé/UNICEF/BFHI branded envelope from Mexico came out and we were told that IFM had given UNICEF \$1,000,000 for BFHI. We were all shocked and quite frankly terrified: UNICEF was an important ally. I could feel my head pounding and time was running out—my plane was leaving soon. I said that for the last decade IBFAN

had been advising health workers to throw industry branded materials into the waste bin. How could we now have anything do with a Nestlé-linked campaign? If he [Mr. Grant] wanted our support, he would have to send the money back and send a message to UNICEF offices making it clear that collaborations and sponsorship of BFHI by baby food companies was inappropriate. You could hear a pin drop. Urban Jonsson sitting next to me muttered in support quietly. Grant agreed and wrote an Ex Dir [executive directive] to all the UNICEF offices. I'm not sure what happened to the money. It was a sign of his genuine concern that Grant was not only willing to meet with us but was prepared to change his mind. How many other dangerous plans have gone ahead because such wisdom is lacking?

**MA:** In May 2019 the third joint report by WHO, UNICEF, and IBFAN (WHO, 2020a) monitoring the implementation of the International Code was launched. Could you mention some major points?

**PR:** This was the third report on the Code done jointly with WHO and UNICEF (WHO, 2020a). It contains much good information about conflicts of interest and [the] medical profession, with tables showing that 136 (70%) of the 194 countries analyzed have in place some form of legal measures related to the Code. Forty-four have improved their laws within the last 2 years. Although this is far from good enough, it's important to recognize how these laws protect health and why we should not change tack and opt for voluntary commitments [as stated in CTA (2020)].

I hope it will be useful for governments and the public to understand how useful laws are. The launch was excellent.

**MA:** What is the role of IBFAN in monitoring companies' behavior related to the Code? Is this still needed if countries are taking up *NetCode*? Or if companies sign the *Breast Milk Substitutes Call to Action* (WHO, 2020b)?

**PR:** The International Code Monitoring Center (ICDC) has trained hundreds of policymakers and published many of IBFAN's Breaking the Rules monitoring reports for decades. Now the IBFAN monitoring is done on a regional basis. IBFAN is a founding member of Netcode and are [sic] pleased that WHO and UNICEF are doing this work. However, I hope that my answers explain why IBFAN's independence is needed and that Netcode must watch out for COI. This is especially important following the launch of the *Breast Milk Substitutes Call to Action* ([CTA]; CTA, 2020)—just a few weeks after the launch of the Code Report (WHO, 2020a), which was launched without any consultation from IBFAN and no approval by the WHA. We saw a host of problems with it that are outlined in our Counter Call (Baby Milk Action: IBFAN UK, 2020a). We see it as an attempt to sideline the WHA

and Resolutions, especially the eight that have called for COI safeguards since 1996. We see the CTA opening the door to risky partnerships with some of the most dangerous baby food companies, and yet more industry influence on policy programming. This undermines children's rights to food and health, allowing industry 10 years' license to continue harmful practices.

To make matters worse, the CTA refers to the commercially influenced Access to Nutrition Initiative (ATNI) for advice. ATNI was designed from the outset to whitewash company activities and encourage investments. It integrates "the perspectives and expertise of companies" (Access to Nutrition Foundation, 2020) into its methodology and the presentation of its results. Again, as the saying goes, "letting the fox design the chicken coop." The CTA follows previous Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) initiatives that we consider violate conflicts of interest principles, such as the 2016 *Global Monitoring Mechanism* (GMM) proposed to involve corporations as funders, partners, and monitors (Loffredo & Greenstein, 2020). We are grateful to the many UNICEF individuals who are expressing their concerns about the CTA.

**MA:** We have been working for many years side by side in Codex Alimentarius meetings, myself representing ILCA [International Lactation Consultant Association] and you as a representative of a consumer organization in support of the IBFAN delegation. What is the point of your participation?

**PR:** Maryse, ever since 1995 when the World Trade Organization was formed and Codex assumed much more importance as the benchmark used in trade disputes, together with Betty Sterken, we have been trying to bring Codex standards into line—at least with the Code. We all know that governments have a duty to implement the Code but in reality this is not easy, and they are likely to face challenges from industry and the powerful exporting countries if Codex standards were weaker than the Code. So, I think although the world food system is broken and heading in entirely the wrong direction, we have done what we can to safeguard child health, and now are doing more to get other issues onto the agenda. Now people are recognizing the harm caused by the trade of ultra-processed foods (UPFs). I think we need to get Codex to make special rules to stop UPF promotion. So, let's say "NO" to all claims and "NO" to promotions of all harmful UPFs.

Baby Milk Action worked a bit on the 1987 follow-on formula Codex standard after Wyeth/SMA's launched a £500,000 marketing campaign in the UK. I didn't really understand Codex then and realize now that we should have focused on scrapping the idea of a standard. Not only did it excuse the products from the

marketing restrictions of the Code, but it legitimized their global trade. We continue to see the consequences today as the market for these unnecessary milks grows and causes havoc to health, biodiversity, and the planet.

**MA:** You have already mentioned the Boycott but please explain more.

**PR:** I see the Boycott as a people's response to what they consider to be outrageous behavior. The Nestlé Boycott was basically in two sections: 1978–[19]84 and from 1988 to today. It is deeply entwined with the formation and adoption of the Code, though this fact is starting to be left out of accounts. It's been written about extensively by people on both sides of the argument, so it's important to understand who's writing!

The first Boycott ended in 1984 for several reasons, including that some US leaders felt that Nestlé's promises were an opportunity not to be missed and that Nestlé would do nothing if we were not "reasonable." Many of us in Europe—especially France—were worried and felt that it was premature to stop, but we did so in solidarity. The minutes of the meetings show that Nestlé promised far more than it was actually prepared to put into practice. Indeed, the negotiations were seen by Nestlé as a PR solution. It was clearly a *bad* mistake that Nestlé has exploited ever since, causing media to repeatedly refer to the Boycott as a thing of the long past.

Thankfully, in 1988, INFACT published a devastating 10-minute video, *Bottle Feeding in Asia*. This showed that we had to relaunch the Boycott, which we did in 1989, this time in 18 countries. The new International Boycott Committee included Philippines, the Republic of Mauritius, and Mexico (IBFAN as a whole never stopped). We had learned our lesson and from then on promises would never be enough, 18 months worldwide monitoring, followed by a legally binding agreement, would be needed to prove compliance. We were also wary of big-name endorsers, the target of Nestlé's lobbying and sometimes funding. By now we knew it would take years to get good laws adopted and independently monitored in every country, so we were ready for the long haul.

The endorsement of the General Synod of the Church of England in 1991 took us by surprise and was truly a "bottom-up" action, called for by a parishioner and a Curate in Leicester. Save the Children was a tremendous support, at one time writing to all Synod members to counter a misleading Nestlé text. Ex-UNICEF synod member, Dr Susan Cole-King, was hoping to make her maiden speech on women priests, so rang UNICEF's nutrition advisor in New York, Peter Greaves. Peter is a scrupulously honest and fair person—so all I can say is, "thank heavens for that call!" I was on stage to supporting Tom Butler, the

Bishop of Leicester, and was astonished to see all the hands go up in favor of the motion! The Boycott made it onto BBC news three times that week and later we were told there was 3% sales drop in Nescafé sales at the same time as a big leap in Nescafé advertising.

Nestlé was determined to end the Church support and grabbed the opportunity when Boycott supporters in Oxford called for a better-written motion, but one that included a disinvestment clause. Church investments are a big and complex issue that involve pensions and many other considerations. The company threw everything at it, flying in a PR team, including from Sri Lanka. They redecorated, relit and re-carpeted their hired room at York University, put up huge posters, and lied about HIV and so many other things. It was a truly nasty, but impressive, show. I learned another lesson: Some people find it hard to believe that nice PR people could lie so blatantly. We lost by 12 votes and I had to do loads of interviews afterwards, holding back the tears. Not because we lost—but because it was so dishonest. I sort of lost confidence in Church campaigning after that!

Recently the boycott was boosted by the movie film *Tigers* (Tanovic & Paterson, 2014) based on the life of Syed Aamir Raza, the Nestlé salesman from Pakistan who turned whistleblower. It's a fantastic story and our thanks to Andy Paterson, Danis Tanovic and all those who never gave up trying to make this film a reality. I think it's imperative that health workers see it. Along with this documentary, we've worked on many documentaries and dramas over the years, each one led by people who, like me, just can't sleep at night until they have done something.

**MA:** IBFAN is very active in protecting breastfeeding in emergencies. What was the tipping point to get involved?

**PR:** An important part of our work has been to watch out for the exploitation of emergencies. From the [19]80s onwards, IBFAN, with its groups in so many countries, saw how emergencies are used as entry points for companies who want to establish markets. The 1994 Bosnian appeal sponsored by Cow & Gate (1994) is a good example of what *not* to do. This kick-started a group of development agencies (OXFAM, Save the Children, Feed the Children, and others) to harmonize the guidance used all over the world. In 1999, together with many UN agencies, the Infant Feeding in Emergencies Group (IFE) was formed. The *Operational Guidance on Infant and Young Child Feeding in Emergencies* (World Health Organization, 2017) is now available in its third version and in many languages, and helps to protect babies in emergencies, if put into practice. Last year we helped establish a COI policy in order to protect IFE's essential work.

**MA:** Do you have another recent example [of] how BMS producers exploit emergencies or a pandemic?

**PR:** Flouting UN *Guidance on Breastfeeding and COVID-19*, which is excellent and the Indian Law, Danone created an advice channel, *Voice of Experts*, instructing COVID-positive mothers to stay 6 ft away from their babies. This section was removed when exposed by our fantastic group in India, the Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India (BPNI). Danone said the views expressed by the medical experts “are their own.” Companies are also promoting webinars, training courses for medical students and distributing free formula, supplements, and unhealthy ultra-processed foods—just look at the Nestlé *NANGROW3* targeting babies over 12 months, claiming their human milk oligosaccharides provide immunity! Meanwhile, in Brazil, Nestlé has been training thousands of medical students. These companies are determined to take over this role as they did in the beginning of this story. I only hope that all our partners recognize how dangerous this is.

**MA:** Could you mention another successful recent campaign of IBFAN where you were involved?

**PR:** *Zero Separation* is a campaign launched by the European Foundation for the Care of Newborn Infants (EFCNI). The campaign calls for mothers and babies to be kept together—something we would all support. However, a closer look reveals that the US baby food company, Abbott, was its first funder in 2008, followed by the Nestlé Nutrition Institute, DSM, Prolacta Bioscience® Inc., and others who push fortifiers, bottles etcetera (Baby Milk Action: IBFAN UK, 2020b). The EFCNI Funding Policy is misleading and falsely reassuring:

“The EFCNI ... will not enter into initiatives which contravene [the Code] ...”

EFCNI accepts financial donations from milk manufacturers. EFCNI will not provide direct endorsement of infant milk products e.g. logo on packaging or promotions which promote infant formula instead of breastfeeding (EFCNI, 2019).

We’re glad that the Global Breastfeeding Collective agreed not to promote *Zero Separation* during World Breastfeeding Week.

**MA:** Thank you for this interesting inside information on your work and IBFAN’s work to protect babies from harmful marketing practices.

## References

- Access to Nutrition Foundation. (2020). *Methodology for the Global Index 2021*. Utrecht, The Netherlands. <https://accesstonutrition.org/news/methodology-for-the-global-index-2021-now-online/>
- Baby Milk Action: IBFAN UK. (2018). *Baby-Milk-Action-IBFAN-UK-EU-Chronology*. [www.babymilkaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Baby-Milk-Action-IBFAN-UK-EU-Chronology.pdf](http://www.babymilkaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Baby-Milk-Action-IBFAN-UK-EU-Chronology.pdf)
- Baby Milk Action: IBFAN UK. (2020a). IBFAN’s counter-call to WHO and UNICEF to STOP 10 year-license to harm children. <https://www.babymilkaction.org/archives/25260>
- Baby Milk Action: IBFAN UK. (2020b). Is ZeroSeparation Astrourfing? How business groups use babies to recruit allies. <http://www.babymilkaction.org/archives/25523>
- Cow & Gate. (1994). Cow&Gate sponsored appeal for Bosnia (1994). <https://www.dropbox.com/home/1%20Movies/2%20M4v%20work%20%20films?preview=1994+Cow%26+Gate+Bosnia.m4v>
- CTA. (2020). Breastmilk substitutes (BMS) call to action. <https://www.bmscalltoaction.info>
- European Foundation for the Care of Newborn Infants. (2019). Policy for the cooperation and acceptancy of gifts and donations: Baby milk industry. <https://www.efcni.org/transparency/#policy-of-acceptance-gifts-donations>
- Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN). (2008). Business and malnutrition: opportunities and challenges for the food industry in reaching the poor, world bank Institute (WBI). <https://www.gainhealth.org/resources/reports-and-publications/business-and-malnutrition-opportunities-and-challenges-food>
- Granheim, S. I., Engelhardt, K., Rundall, P., Bialous, S., Iellamo, A., & Margetts, B. (2017). Interference in public health policy: Baby food and Tobacco tactics. *World Nutrition*, (8)2, 288–310. doi:<https://doi.org/10.26596/wn.201782288-310>
- IOMS. (1986). Consumer Protection - World Health Organization - Results of the 1986 World Health Assembly. 23 May. British American Tobacco. <http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/cjr76a99>
- Loffredo, J., & Greenstein, M. (2020). Why the Bill Gates global health empire promises more empire and less public health. *The Gray Zone [Newsletter]*. <https://thegrayzone.com/2020/07/08/bill-gates-global-health-policy/>
- Michéle, L., Prato, S., Rundall, P., & Valente, F. (2019). When the ‘SUN’ casts a shadow. The human rights risks of multi-stakeholder partnerships: The case of ‘Scaling up Nutrition’ (SUN). Food First Information and Action Network International, IBFAN and Society for International Development (SID). [https://www.fian.org/files/files/WhenTheSunCastsAShadow\\_En.pdf](https://www.fian.org/files/files/WhenTheSunCastsAShadow_En.pdf)
- Mike, M. (1974). The Baby Killer. <https://waronwant.org/resources/baby-killer>
- Moyers, B. D., & CBS News, Churches of the City of New York. (1978). Into the mouths of babes. <https://www.worldcat.org/title/into-the-mouths-of-babes/oclc/6224560/editions?referer=di&editionsView=true>

## ORCID iD

Maryse Arendt, IBCLC, BSEd  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0523-3837>

- Nestlé. (2020). What is the WHO Code? <https://www.Nestlé.com/ask-Nestlé/health-nutrition/answers/who-code>
- Palmer, G. (2009). *The politics of breastfeeding: When breasts are bad for business* (3rd ed). Pinter & Martin Ltd.
- Rundall, P. (2015). The 'Business of Malnutrition': the Perfect Public Relations Cover for Big Food. Right to Food and Nutrition Watch 2015/Issue 7. People's Nutrition is not a Business. <http://www.babymilkaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Business-of-Malnutrition-RTF.pdf>
- Tanovic, D., & Paterson, A. (2014). Tigers [film]. ZEE 5.com. <http://www.babymilkaction.org/tigers>
- World Health Organization. (2017). Operational guidance on infant and young child feeding in emergencies. <https://www.who.int/nutrition/publications/emergencies/operationalguidance-2017/en/>
- World Health Organization. (2020a). Marketing of breast-milk substitutes: National implementation of the International Code, Status Report 2020. <https://www.unicef.org/reports/marketing-of-breast-milk-substitutes-status-report-2020>