

# THE LANCET

THE 2023 SERIES ON BREASTFEEDING

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**The marketing of commercial milk formula for use in the first 3 years of life has negatively altered the infant and young child feeding ecosystem**





**The 2023 Lancet Series on Breastfeeding is available from:**

<https://www.thelancet.com/series/breastfeeding-2023>



**The recording of the launch is available from:**

<https://www.who.int/news-room/events/detail/2023/02/08/default-calendar/launch-of-the-2023-lancet-series-on-breastfeeding--including-the-influence-of-commercial-milk-formula-marketing>



## The 2023 Lancet Series on Breastfeeding



“The marketing of commercial milk formula for use in the first 3 years of life has negatively altered the infant and young child feeding ecosystem”



## Authors:

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*With support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation*

*The authors alone are responsible for the views expressed in this Series paper and they do not necessarily represent the views, decisions, or policies of the institutions with which they are affiliated*

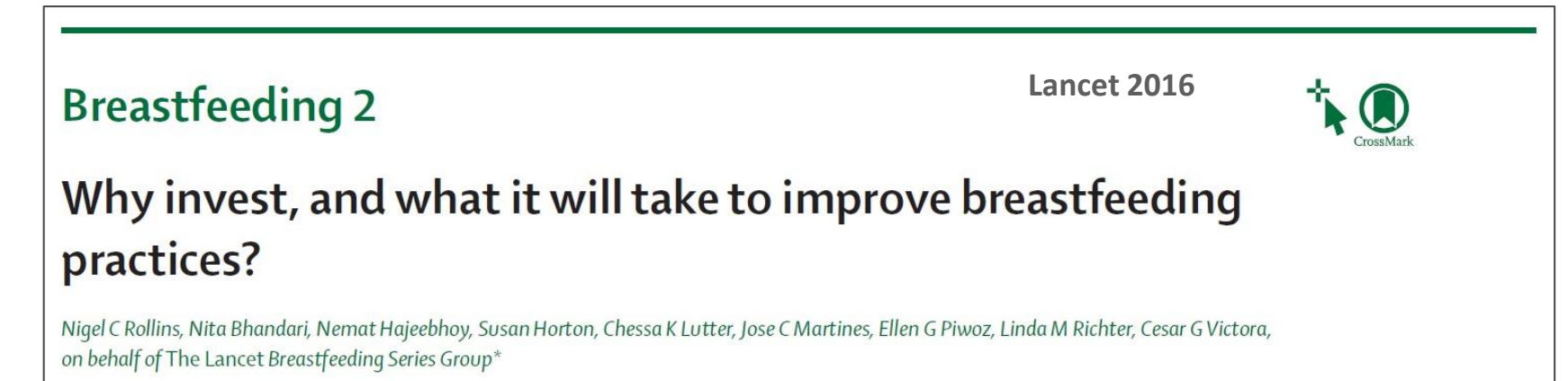
## The 2023 Lancet Series on Breastfeeding



“The marketing of commercial milk formula for use in the first 3 years of life has negatively altered the infant and young child feeding ecosystem”

# INFANT FEEDING MATTERS... AND BREASTFEEDING IS CRUCIALLY IMPORTANT

For those who don't know...



**Human  
biology**

**Lifelong  
health and  
development**

**Maternal  
health**

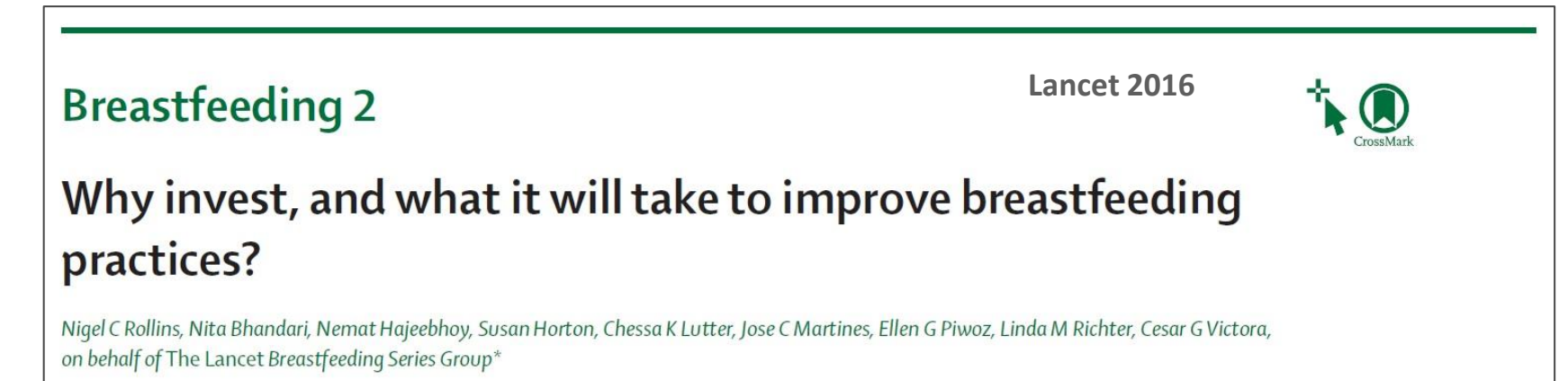
**Child  
survival**

**800,000** child deaths  
prevented each year



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**Child  
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**800,000** child deaths  
prevented each year

**But, over the past 20 years, practices have changed  
and, globally, fewer than half of all infants are fed according to WHO recommendations**

# TERMINOLOGY

## **Commercial Milk Formula instead of breast milk substitute**

- To highlight the artificial and ultra-processed nature of formula products
- ‘Substitute’ conveys the notion of equivalence

## **Marketing**

- Any form of commercial communication or activity that is “designed to, or has the effect of, increasing recognition, appeal and [or] consumption of particular products and services”
- Includes advertising, distribution, promotion, lobbying, and sponsorship, but excludes transportation and sales of the product itself

# SERIES MESSAGES

- Breastfeeding success is a collective responsibility that depends on multifaceted policy and societal responses – it is not the sole responsibility of women
- Infant behaviours e.g. sleep and crying, have normal trajectories – same as learning to walk or to speak – and can be misinterpreted as hunger etc. or re-framed as ‘abnormal’ to promote artificial solutions
- Commercial milk formula marketing influences our beliefs, values and practices – it has changed the infant feeding ecosystem – and, its extent and power has not been fully appreciated by most in health, civil society and government
- There are many constraints if a woman decides she wants to breastfeed. It is the responsibility of governments to implement structural interventions/policies to support breastfeeding and mitigate negative, undermining influences

# BREASTFEEDING 1

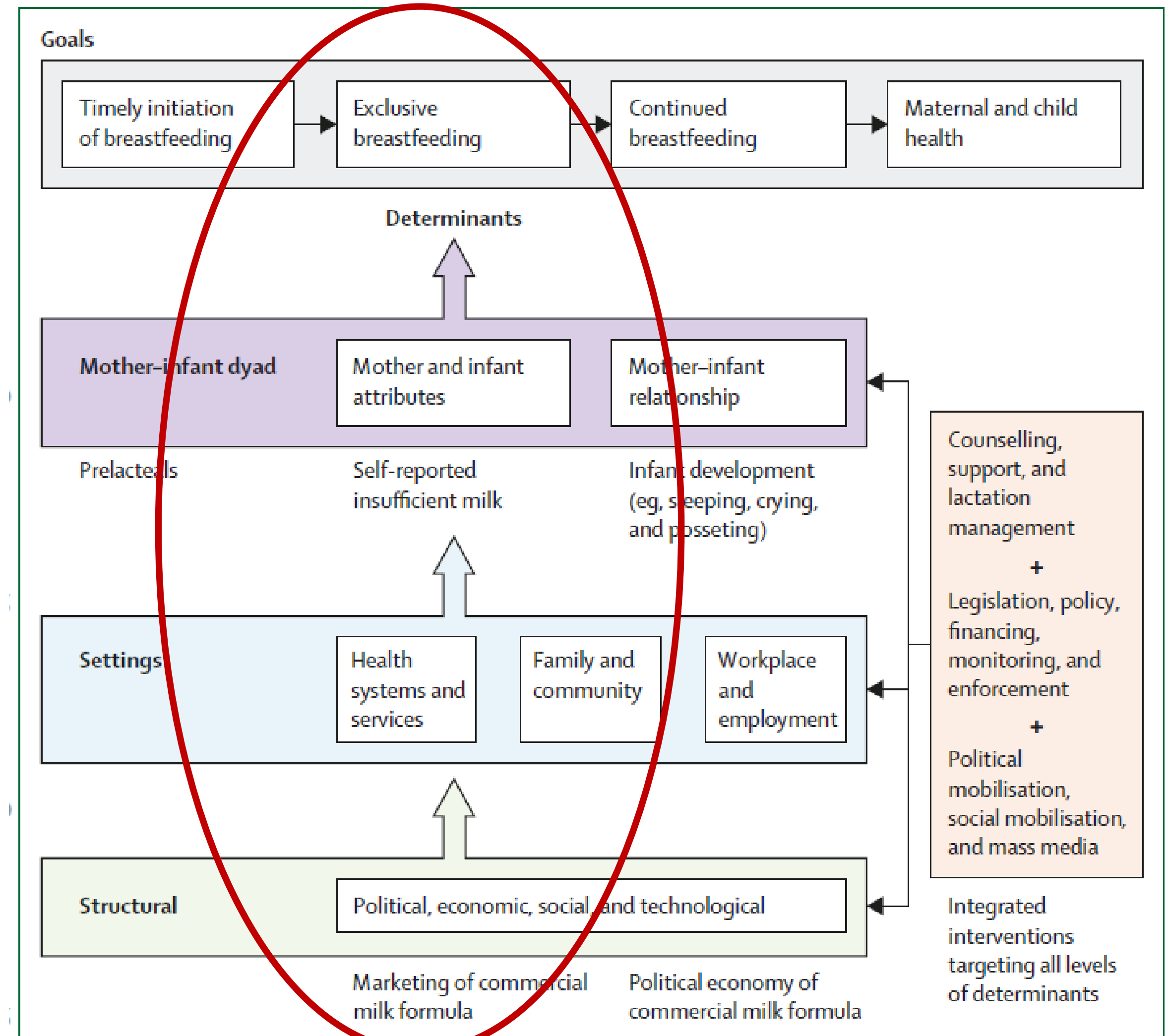
**Breastfeeding: crucially important,  
but increasingly challenged in a market-driven world**

*Rafael Pérez-Escamilla, Cecília Tomori, Sonia Hernández-Cordero, Phillip Baker, Alusio J D Barros, France Begin, Donna J Chapman, Laurence M Grummer-Strawn, David McCoy, Purnima Menon, Paulo Augusto Ribeiro Neves, Ellen Piwoz, Nigel Rollins, Cesar G Victora, Linda Richter, on behalf of the 2023 Lancet Breastfeeding Series Group\**



# OBJECTIVES

- Examine how mother and infant characteristics interact with breastfeeding determinants at all levels
- Document how these interactions drive breastfeeding outcomes, and
- Identify what policies and interventions are necessary to support optimal breastfeeding

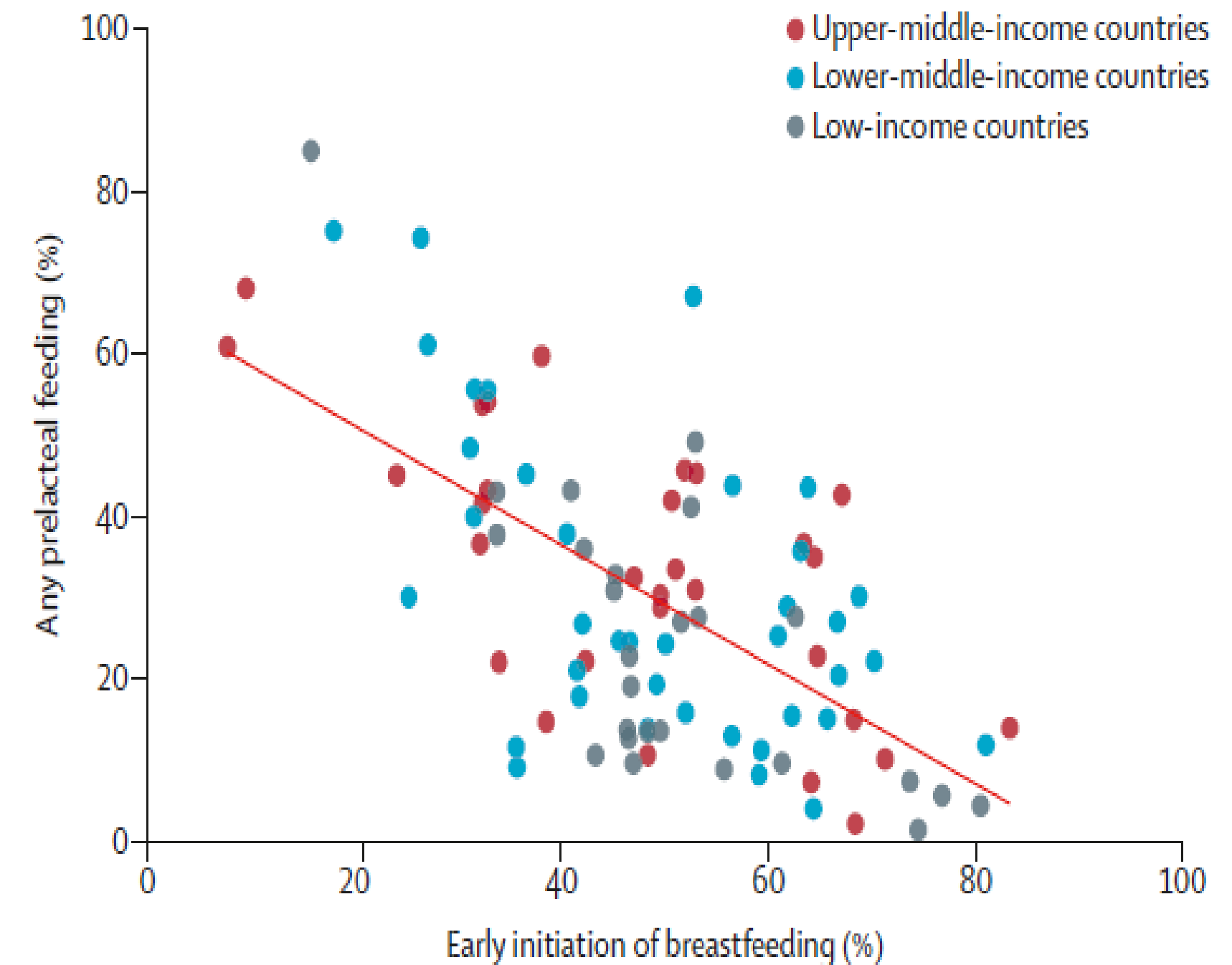
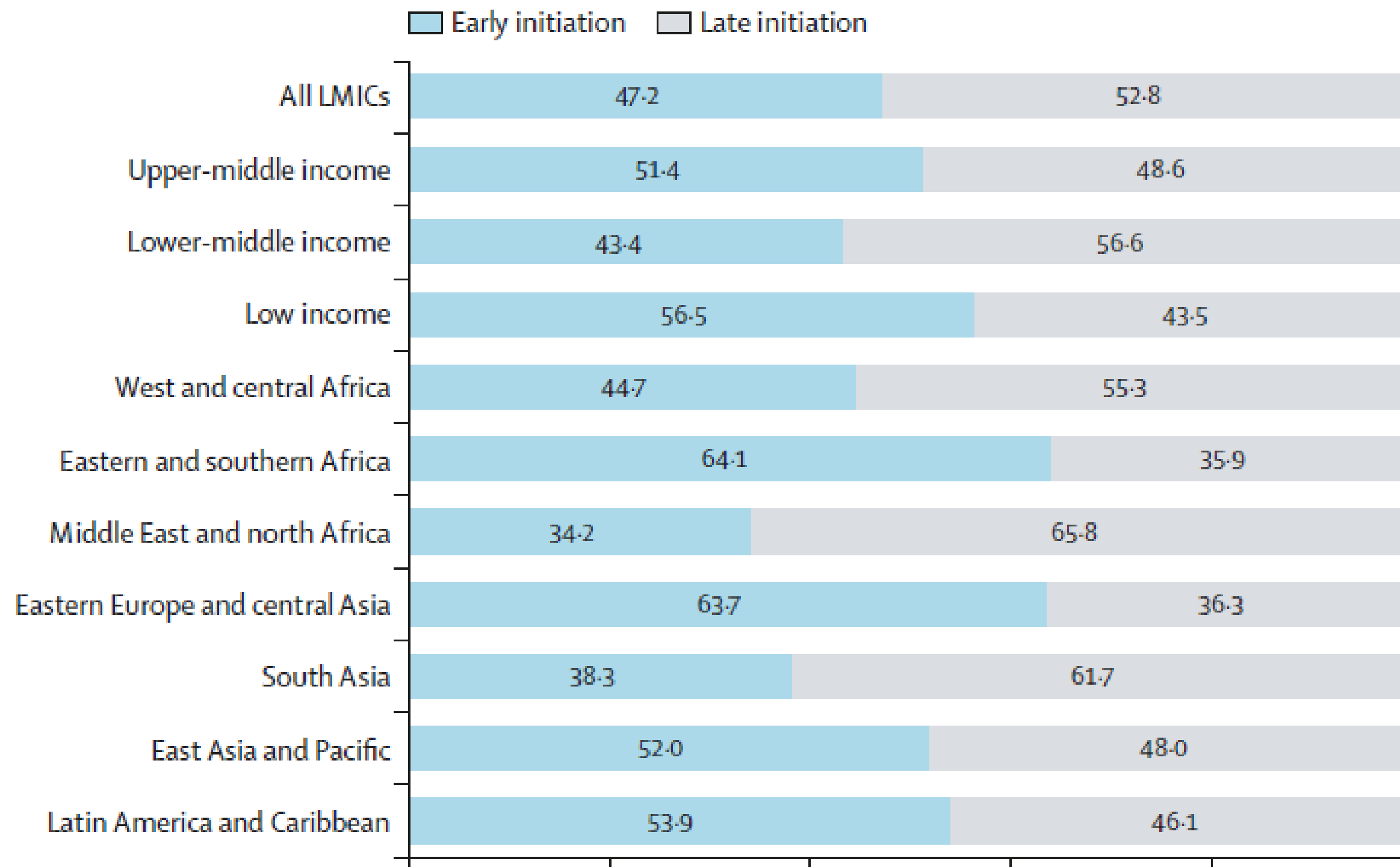


- Analyses of nationally representative surveys of children under two years of age
- Systematic reviews
- Case studies





# INITIATION OF BF AND EFFECT OF PRE-LACTEALS



- Less than half of newborns are put to the breast within the first hour of life in LMICs
- Pre-lacteals are strongly associated with delayed initiation of breastfeeding, shorter duration of breastfeeding and increased consumption of formula products

# UNDERSTANDING NORMAL INFANT BEHAVIOUR

- Human babies are born in an immature state
- Post-birth adjustment and maturation
- Takes time and support to learn to feed, settle and sleep
- Normal sleep patterns of infants don't align with adult sleep patterns
- Newborns express their discomfort through crying, signalling the need for help and care
- Crying is adaptive and communicates many needs





# ... MISREADING THE CUES



**Systematic review: reports from 22 countries and different income levels**

- Distressing for parents
  - 50% of healthy infants 0-3 months have at least one episode of regurgitation/day
  - Mean time fussing or crying 2hrs/day
- Consistently undermines parental self-efficacy



# MISREADING CUES LEADS TO... SELF-REPORTED INSUFFICIENT MILK (SRIM)

- Perceived infant satiety & satisfaction shape self-assessment of milk supply
- Crying, fussiness and short sleep duration undermine confidence
- Partners, family members and health staff also misinterpret cues
- **SRIM is the reason given by**
  - 45% of mothers globally for introducing CMFs before 6 months
  - Third of mothers for stopping breastfeeding
- Yet, effective counselling and support helps parents understand infant cues and improve effective breastfeeding and breastmilk production





# REFRAMING 'NORMAL' AS A MARKETING OPPORTUNITY

- New parents may be concerned about maturing baby behaviours
- CMF marketing frames normal maturing behaviours as 'something is wrong' – pathological – or mothers are inadequate
  - "If you are not sure whether you have enough milk..."
  - "If your infant has a rash or cries or possets or is unsettled... maybe they have an allergy"and offer products as **solutions**
- "Selling peace of mind"... certainty of quantity of milk consumed
- Without skilled support and reassurance, parents change from breastfeeding to CMF – or from one CMF to another



# MULTILEVEL AND MULTISECTORAL INTERVENTIONS IMPROVE BREASTFEEDING AT SCALE

Case studies from 4 countries describe **INVESTMENTS** over the past decade that improved EBF rates

## Burkina Faso

BF training and multilevel programme delivery, including

1. Training of traditional leaders
2. **Creation of mother-to-mother support groups**
3. **Evidence-based social and behaviour change communication (SBCC)** programmes through partnerships between government, UNICEF, and ALIVE & THRIVE

## Mexico

A comprehensive national strategy to coordinate BF actions building on

1. **Landscape analysis** with the Becoming BF Friendly policy toolbox,
2. **Strong position statement** from the Mexican National Academy of Medicine
3. BF monitoring

## The Philippines

1. Incorporated BF into early essential newborn care
2. Train health providers on baby behaviours and BF
3. **Extended paid maternity leave**
4. Implemented an official database of Code violations

## USA

1. Expanded BFHI and WIC BF counselling
2. **Monitoring, surveillance, and programme evaluation**
3. Expanding the number of people with health insurance and requiring health insurers to cover lactation support services



# BREASTFEEDING 2

## Marketing of commercial milk formula: a system to capture parents, communities, science, and policy

*Nigel Rollins, Ellen Piwoz, Phillip Baker, Gilian Kingston, Kopano Matlwa Mabaso, David McCoy, Paulo Augusto Ribeiro Neves, Rafael Pérez-Escamilla, Linda Richter, Katheryn Russ, Gita Sen, Cecília Tomori, Cesar G Victora, Paul Zambrano, Gerard Hastings, on behalf of the 2023 Lancet Breastfeeding Series Group\**

### Acknowledgements and thanks

Jane Badham, Robert Boyle, Roger Mathisen, Marcus Stahlhofer, Kremlin Wickramasinghe, David Miller, Gerry Power and Mike Spencer. Peter Salama for his early encouragement and inspiration for doing what is right and important for children.

*Artwork is used to illustrate actual packaging that make or imply certain claims about improved health or development. Any resemblance to actual product packaging is coincidental.*

# OBJECTIVE AND METHODS

**Objective:** to describe the CMF marketing playbook and its influence on families, health professionals, science, and policy processes

**Multiple methods including:**

- Systematic and scoping reviews of public health and CMF industry literature and business reports
- Analyses of national CMF sales and infant feeding survey data
- Examination of marketing expenditures
- Two multi-country studies documenting women's experiences of marketing and scope of digital marketing
- Case studies describing CMF industry interference of national and international regulatory processes



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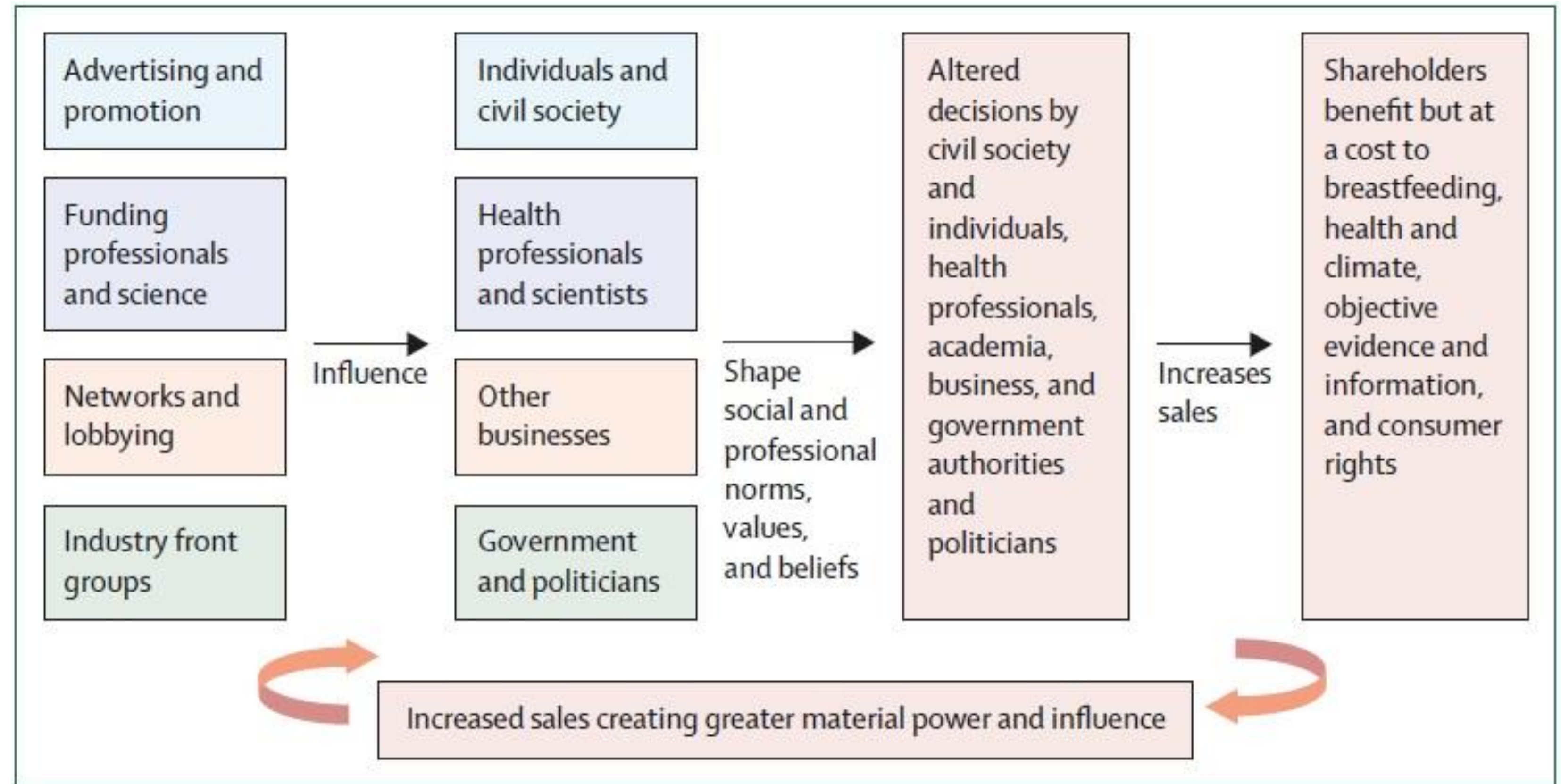
## What we have learned ...

- CMF marketing practices are multi-faceted, sophisticated, well-resourced and are therefore a powerful system of influence made even more influential through digital systems
- CMF marketing playbook is similar to marketing of other products but what's different is, it impacts lifelong health, development and rights of children and their mothers, and violates a Code of Marketing agreed by the UN WHA
- CMF marketing has been very successful over the decades in reshaping individual, societal and medical norms and values

# CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

## Demonstrating it is...

- Multi-faceted
- Sophisticated
- Agile
- Well-resourced (powerful)
- Sustained
- Self-reinforcing





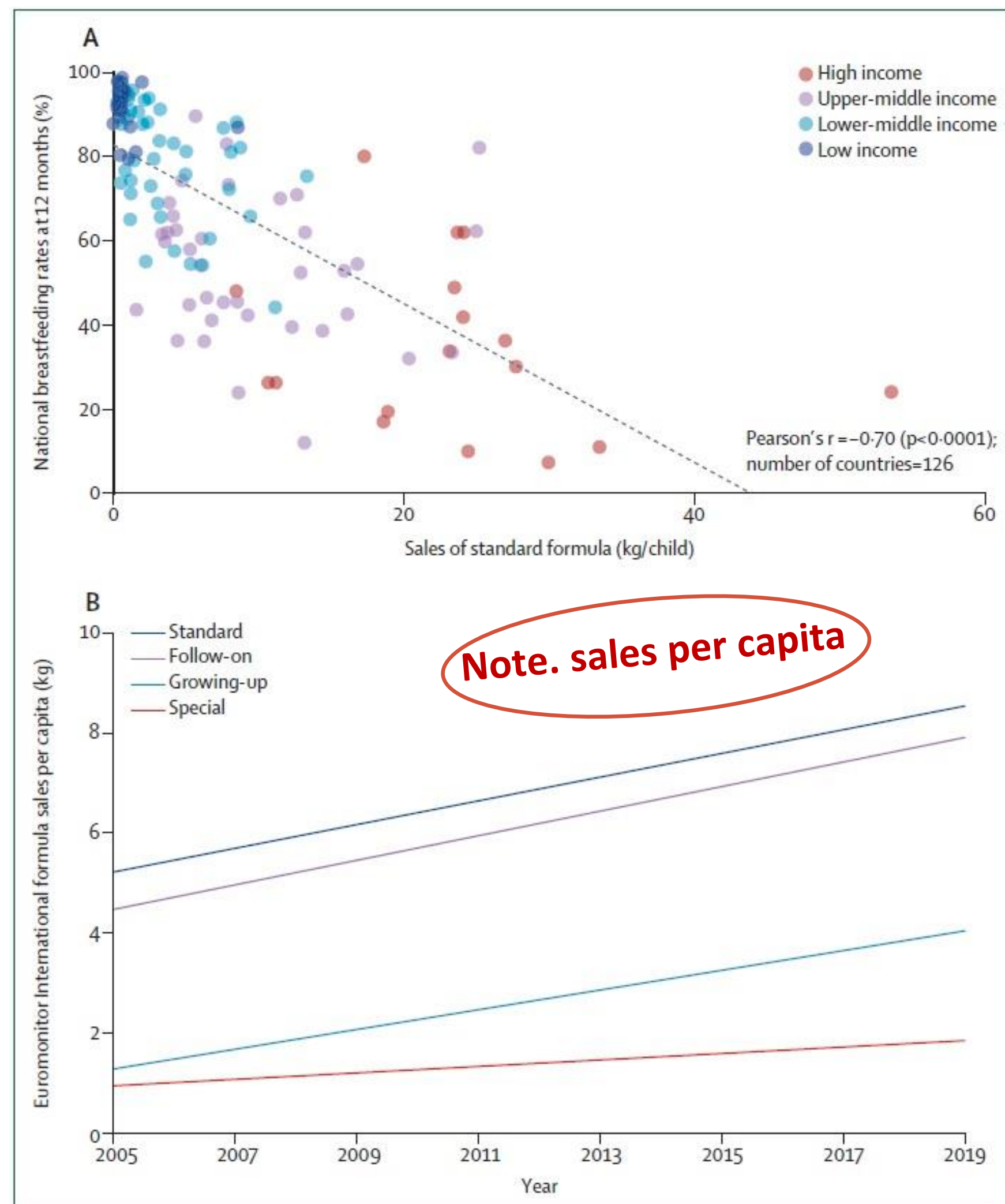


Figure 2: Rate of national breastfeeding at 12 months vs per capita sales of standard CMF by country income category and the sales of CMF per capita, 2005-19

As a result, commercial milk formula ...

- **\$55.6 bn sales in 2019**

Many reasons for these changes ...

- Preference, work constraints, perceived insufficient milk, poor support
- But also marketing
  - 4.3-6.8% annual sales spent on marketing  
= **US\$ 2.6-3.5 billion per year**
  - But this is an underestimate – does not include lobbying, social media, sponsorship of health workers

## Marketing of Commercial Milk Formula: a system to **capture parents and communities**, science and policy and... **shape societal and professional norms, values and beliefs to alter decisions**

“ all those scientific acronyms like DHA. You don't know what it is, but it sounds cool. It is supposed to be a nutrient that goes directly to the baby's brain for stimulation ”

- Mother, Guadalajara, Mexico

“ the benefits my baby will get... if I want to promote brain development, height, or digestive system, I will find respective formulas ”

- Mother, Hanoi, Viet Nam

“ I actually like that premium brand, I love the colour, I love that expensive look...the gold gives it that expensive taste as if it's procured the best quality and it's something unique and different ”

- Mother, Johannesburg, South Africa

“ we were looking online and that little [advert for] brand Z milk popped up. With these cookies, they must know we're looking at baby stuff, and it's popped up out of nowhere ”

- Mother, London, United Kingdom



**Marketing of Commercial Milk Formula:** a system to **capture parents and communities**, science and policy and... **shape societal and professional norms, values and beliefs to alter decisions**



**2017, Vitafoods. CEO**

“...infant nutrition wasn’t necessarily about the ingredients or innovation”.

**“What we are selling is actually sleep...If the baby doesn’t sleep for three nights and the mother is exhausted ...”**

**“selling peace of mind”**

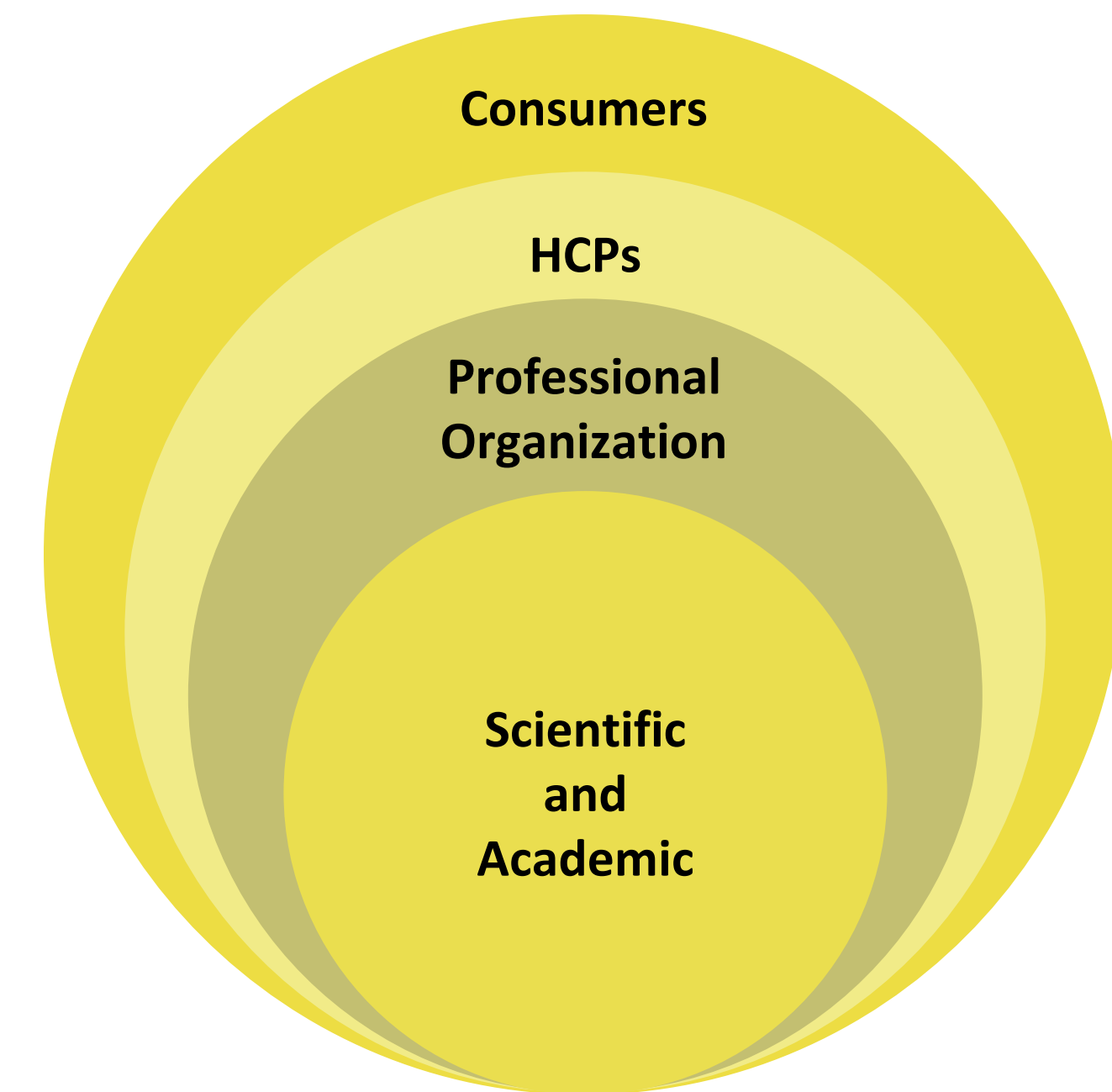
**Marketing of Commercial Milk Formula:** a system to **capture** parents, communities, **science and health workers** and policy and... shape societal and professional norms, values and beliefs and to alter decisions

**Why are health workers and their Associations so important?... Category Entry Points**

- Sponsorship
- Research
- Guideline groups

 **Conflicts of Interest**

## The Echo Chamber



SSC  
Stakeholder mapping  
South Africa

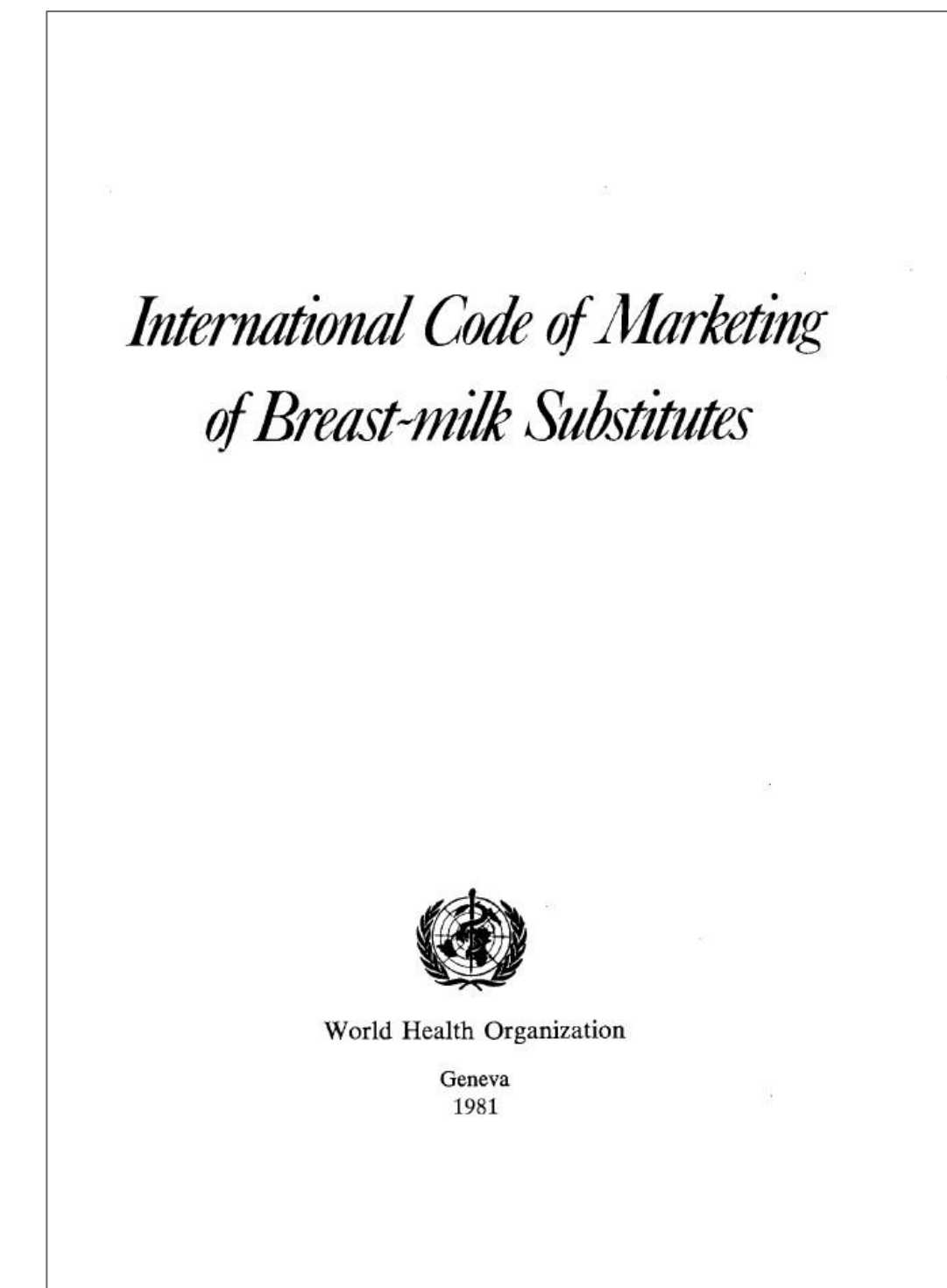


**Marketing of Commercial Milk Formula:** a system to **capture** parents, communities, science and **policy and international recommendations** and... **shape societal and professional norms, values and beliefs and to alter decisions**

**International policy frameworks are being manipulated to decrease their effectiveness**

**Systematic reviews, case studies and analyses of public access information demonstrate...**

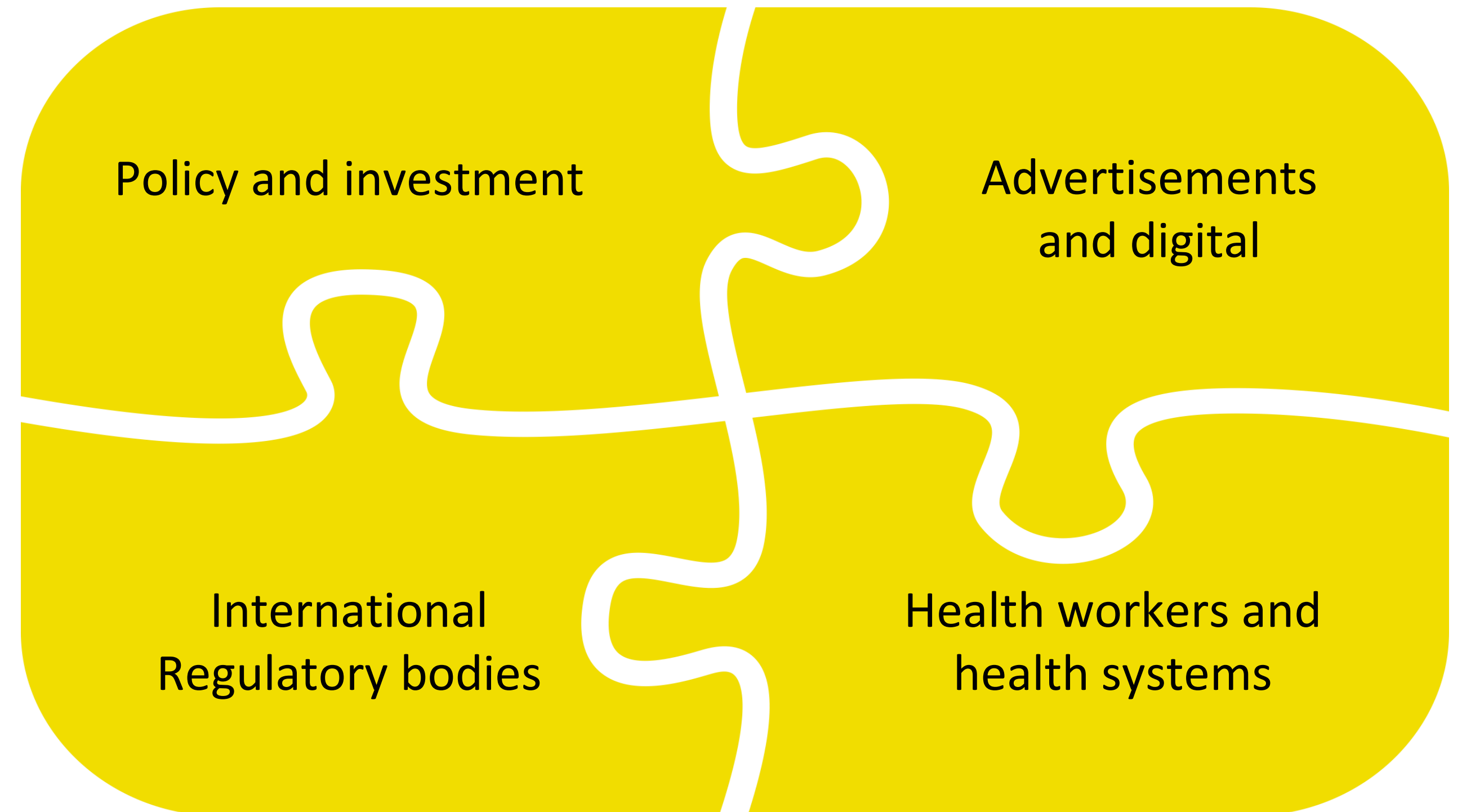
- The Code is blocked, reinterpreted, circumvented and ignored
- Codex Alimentarius is manipulated to establish weak standards that become a ceiling for regulation of CMF marketing
- Industry capitalizes on the lack of implementation of maternity leave conventions protecting breastfeeding
- Industry lobby groups are numerous and influence policy environments in favour of CMF industry and their shareholders



# IN A NUTSHELL...

- Marketing is not inherently bad
- Nor is this anti-profit
- Criticism of industry and marketing is not criticism of women, their decisions or circumstances
- CMF industry deploys a system that is sophisticated, agile, sustained, resourced to turn the birth of an infant and the care of parents into a business opportunity...
- ... and undermines breastfeeding and human rights

## A fragmented understanding of marketing





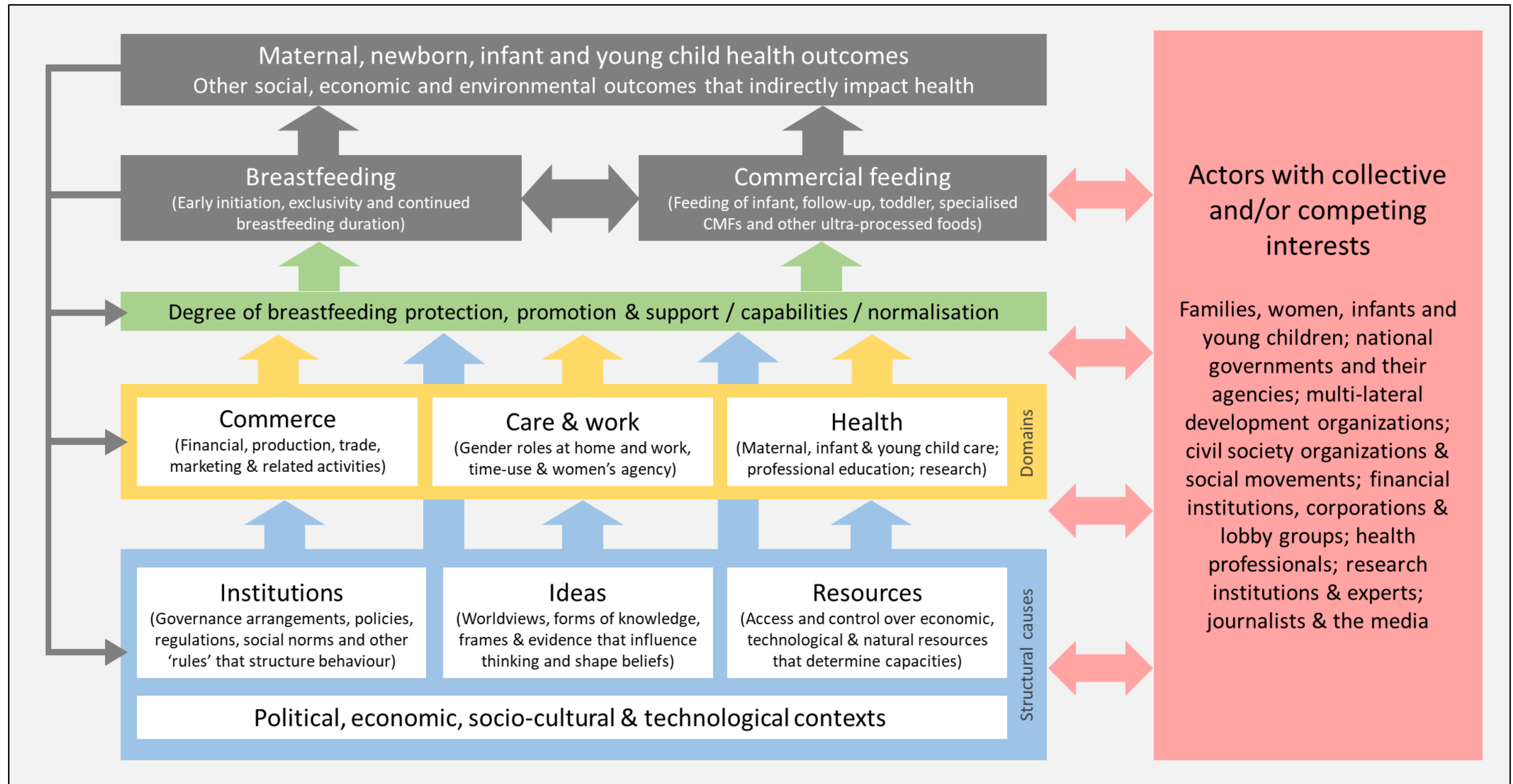
# BREASTFEEDING 3

## The political economy of infant and young child feeding: confronting corporate power, overcoming structural barriers, and accelerating progress

*Philip Baker, Julie P Smith, Amandine Garde, Laurence M Grummer-Strawn, Benjamin Wood, Gita Sen, Gerard Hastings, Rafael Pérez-Escamilla, Chee Yoke Ling, Nigel Rollins, David McCoy, on behalf of the 2023 Lancet Breastfeeding Series Group\**

### Acknowledgements and thanks

Jane Badham, Roger Mathisen, Patti Rundall, Mary Renfrew, David Clark, Anuradha Narayan, and Suying Chang for reviewing drafts of the manuscript and providing suggestions. Annelies Allain for providing access to archival documents at the International Code Documentation Centre (IBFAN Penang, Malaysia).





# METHODS AND ASSOCIATED RESEARCH

## The CMF industry, markets and food systems

Received: 3 July 2020 | Revised: 25 September 2020 | Accepted: 27 September 2020  
DOI: 10.1111/mcn.13097

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Maternal & Child Nutrition WILEY

First-food systems transformations and the ultra-processing of infant and young child diets: The determinants, dynamics and consequences of the global rise in commercial milk formula consumption

Baker et al. *Globalization and Health* (2021) 17:58  
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12992-021-00708-1>

Globalization and Health

Phillip Baker<sup>1</sup>, Julie S. David<sup>2</sup>, Katherine Slevert<sup>3</sup>, Cherie Russell<sup>4</sup>, and David McCoy<sup>1</sup>

RESEARCH Open Access

Globalization, first-foods systems transformations and corporate power: a synthesis of the global commercial milk formula industry

Baker et al. *Globalization and Health* (2021) 17:125  
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12992-021-00774-5>

Globalization and Health

Phillip Baker<sup>1</sup>, Gillian Kings<sup>2</sup>, Katherine Slevert<sup>3</sup>, Cherie Russell<sup>4</sup>, and David McCoy<sup>1</sup>

RESEARCH Open Access

Breastfeeding, first-food systems and corporate power: a case study on the market and political practices of the transnational baby food industry and public health resistance in the Philippines

Phillip Baker<sup>1</sup>, Paul Zambrano<sup>2</sup>, Roger Mathisen<sup>3</sup>, Maria Rosario Singh-Vergel<sup>4</sup>, Ana Epefania Escobar<sup>4</sup>, Melissa Mialon<sup>5</sup>, Mark Lawrence<sup>6</sup>, Katherine Slevert<sup>3</sup>, Cherie Russell<sup>4</sup>, and David McCoy<sup>1</sup>

Abstract

**Background:** The aggressive marketing of breastmilk substitutes (BMS) reduces breastfeeding, and harms child and maternal health globally. Yet forty years after the World Health Assembly adopted the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes (The Code), many countries are still to fully implement its provisions into national law. Furthermore, despite The Code, commercial milk formula (CMF) markets have markedly expanded. In this paper, we adopt the Philippines as a case study to understand the battle for national Code implementation. In particular, we investigate the market and political strategies used by the baby food industry to shape the country's 'first-food system', and in doing so, promote and sustain CMF consumption. We further investigate how breastfeeding coalitions and advocates have resisted these strategies, and generated political commitment for a world-leading breastfeeding policy framework and protection law (the 'Milk Code'). We used a case study design and process tracing method, drawing from documentary and interview data.

**Results:** The decline in breastfeeding in the Philippines in the mid-twentieth Century associated with intensive BMS marketing via health systems and consumer advertising. As regulations tightened, the industry more aggressively promoted CMFs for older infants and young children, thereby 'marketing around' the Milk Code. It established front groups to implement political strategies intended to weaken the country's breastfeeding policy framework while also fostering a favourable image. This included lobbying government officials and international organizations, emphasising its economic importance and threats to foreign investment and trade, direct litigation against the government, messaging that framed marketing in terms of women's choice and empowerment, and forging partnerships. A resurgence in breastfeeding from the mid-1980s onwards reflected strengthening political commitment for a national breastfeeding policy framework and Milk Code, resulting in-turn, from collective actions by breastfeeding coalitions, advocates and mothers.

## Trade policy, regulation and Corporate lobbying

<http://ijhpm.com>  
Int J Health Policy Manag 2021, x(x), 1–15

doi: 10.34172/ijhpm.2021.109

Original Article

What You Don't Know About the Codex Can Hurt You: How Trade Policy Trumps Global Health Governance in Infant and Young Child Nutrition

Katheryn N. Russ<sup>1</sup>, Phillip Baker<sup>2</sup>, Manho Kang<sup>3</sup>, and David McCoy<sup>1</sup>

Abstract

**Background:** Country context, commercial milk formulas, have Codex Alimentarius be strongly cos Codex standard actors frame a Methods: We and international Nutrition and inputs during Results: High Industry repre stakeholders (public health). Conclusion: C of civil society, support for the influences on f Keywords: Be Commercial I Copyright: © distributed un by/4.0), which properly cited. Citation: Russ et al. Int J Health Policy Manag 2021, x(x), 1–15.

Original Article

The Politics of Regulating Foods for Infants and Young Children: A Case Study on the Framing and Contestation of Codex Standard-Setting Processes on Breast-Milk Substitutes

Monique Bo Baker<sup>1</sup>

Abstract

**Background:** We and international Nutrition and inputs during Results: High Industry repre stakeholders (public health). Conclusion: C of civil society, support for the influences on f Keywords: Be Commercial I Copyright: © distributed un by/4.0), which properly cited. Citation: Russ et al. Int J Health Policy Manag 2021, x(x), 1–15.

Original Article

CORPORATE LOBBYING ON US POSITIONS TOWARD THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION: EVIDENCE OF INTENSIFICATION AND CROSS-INDUSTRY COORDINATION

Katheryn N. Russ, Phillip Baker, Manho Kang, and David McCoy

This is the first comprehensive study of expenditures on lobbying of the US federal government linked to discussions seeking to shape US policy toward, funding of, and participation in the World Health Organization (WHO). We link corporate lobbying expenditures and coinciding public statements to legislative proposals and other actions to restrict funding to, censure, and undermine confidence in the WHO. We uncover evidence of an intensifying and coordinated effort within a newly organized alliance across producers of commercial milk formulas, other ultra-processed foods, alcoholic beverages, biotechnology and pharmaceuticals, chemicals, plastics, and electronic gaming. Lobbying by the coalition occurs simultaneously with tobacco interests. Targets include WHO global health initiatives to address non-communicable diseases and access to medicines, as well as WHO protocols limiting private sector participation to mitigate conflicts of interest in health policy-making processes. The coalition characterizes its activities in terms of 'advocacy for WHO reform' or similar. In 2021, it argued such reforms are necessary for future pandemic response, indicating use of the Covid-19 crisis as leverage. Overall, these findings indicate corporate lobbying not only targets specific WHO processes that conflict with commercial interests, but also works to cast doubt on the integrity and narrow the operational capacities of the global health governance system itself.

## Environmental impacts

International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health MDPI

Review

Examining the Environmental Impacts of the Dairy and Baby Food Industries: Are First-Food Systems a Crucial Missing Part of the Healthy and Sustainable Food Systems Agenda Now Underway?

Daniel H. Pope<sup>1,\*</sup>, Johan O. Karlsson<sup>2</sup>, Phillip Baker<sup>3,4</sup> and David McCoy<sup>1</sup>

Citation: Pope, D.H.; Karlsson, J.O.; Baker, P.; McCoy, D. Examining the Environmental Impacts of the Dairy and Baby Food Industries: Are First-Food Systems a Crucial Missing Part of the Healthy and Sustainable Food Systems Agenda Now Underway? *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* **2021**, *18*, 12678. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph182312678>

Academic Editors: Carlos Corvalan and Paul B. Tchounwou

Abstract: Food systems are increasingly being understood as driving various crises and their transformation is recognised as a key opportunity for planetary systems represent an underexplored aspect of this transformation. Despite the optimal source of infant nutrition, use of commercial milk formula (CMF) rapidly. In this review, we examine the impact of CMF use on planet particular its effects on climate change, water use and pollution and effects for human health. Milk is the main ingredient in the production of the dairy sector a key area of attention. We find that CMF use has two breastfeeding, while 1 kg of CMF has a blue water footprint of 699 L; harmful environmental impact. Facilitation and protection of breastfeeding of developing sustainable first-food systems and has huge potential benefits for health.


**Keywords:** breast milk; commercial milk formula; climate change; environment

## Economic impacts

TWN Third World Network DEAKIN UNIVERSITY UNU-HIGH

Who benefits from undermining breastfeeding?

Exploring the global commercial milk formula industry's generation and distribution of wealth and income





# THE DOMAIN OF COMMERCE

## CMF markets are concentrated and highly profitable

- Abbott, Danone, Feihe, Friesland Campina, Nestlé and Reckitt (including Mead Johnson) in 2021 collectively controlled 60% of CMF sales
- Research points to profit margins in excess of 20%



# THE DOMAIN OF COMMERCE

## CMF companies are large and powerful

### Abbott, Danone, Nestlé and Reckitt (including Mead Johnson) together...

Generated US\$187 billion in revenue (2022)

equivalent to 62<sup>nd</sup> largest country by GDP

Owned US\$316 billion in assets (2022)

> private wealth held in every African country bar South Africa

Employed >535,000 people globally (2018)

> health workforce of South Africa, Zimbabwe and Lesotho combined



# THE DOMAIN OF COMMERCE

**Economic power permits a powerful and sophisticated political strategy**

Two faces of corporate power:

- Public facing: benevolent and socially-responsible
- Hidden: intended to co-opt opponents, undermine the Code and curtail public-interest regulation





# THE DOMAIN OF COMMERCE

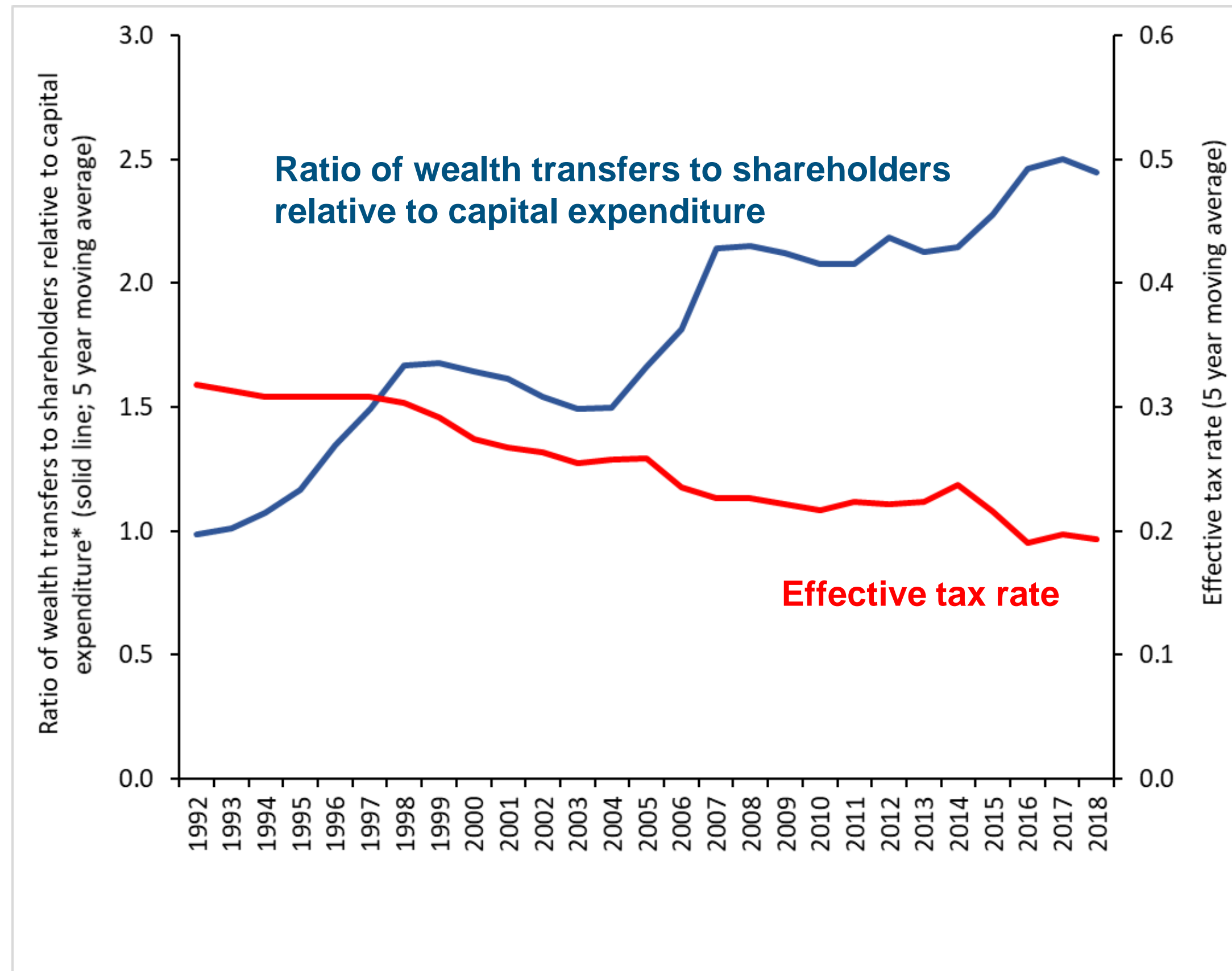
## Sources of corporate power

- Neoliberal globalisation
  - Deregulation at the expense of public health
  - More parts of life commodified and marketised
  - Power of finance capital expanded
- Tax avoidance and ineffective anti-trust measures
- Externalisation of costs





# THE DOMAIN OF COMMERCE



A novel economic analysis shows an increasing share of profits accompanied by declining tax contributions.

Profits mostly end up in HICs while harms disproportionately burden people in LMICs



# THE DOMAIN OF WOMEN, CARE AND WORK

## Economic value of care work unrecognised

- Unpaid care work equivalent to 20 - 40% of GDP
- Breastfeeding not counted in GDP, but CMF sales are
- Monetary value of the milk produced by breastfeeding women globally: ~\$US3.6 trillion





# THE DOMAIN OF WOMEN, CARE AND WORK

Inadequate maternity rights protection and poor working conditions make it difficult or impossible for vast numbers of mothers to be able to breastfeed

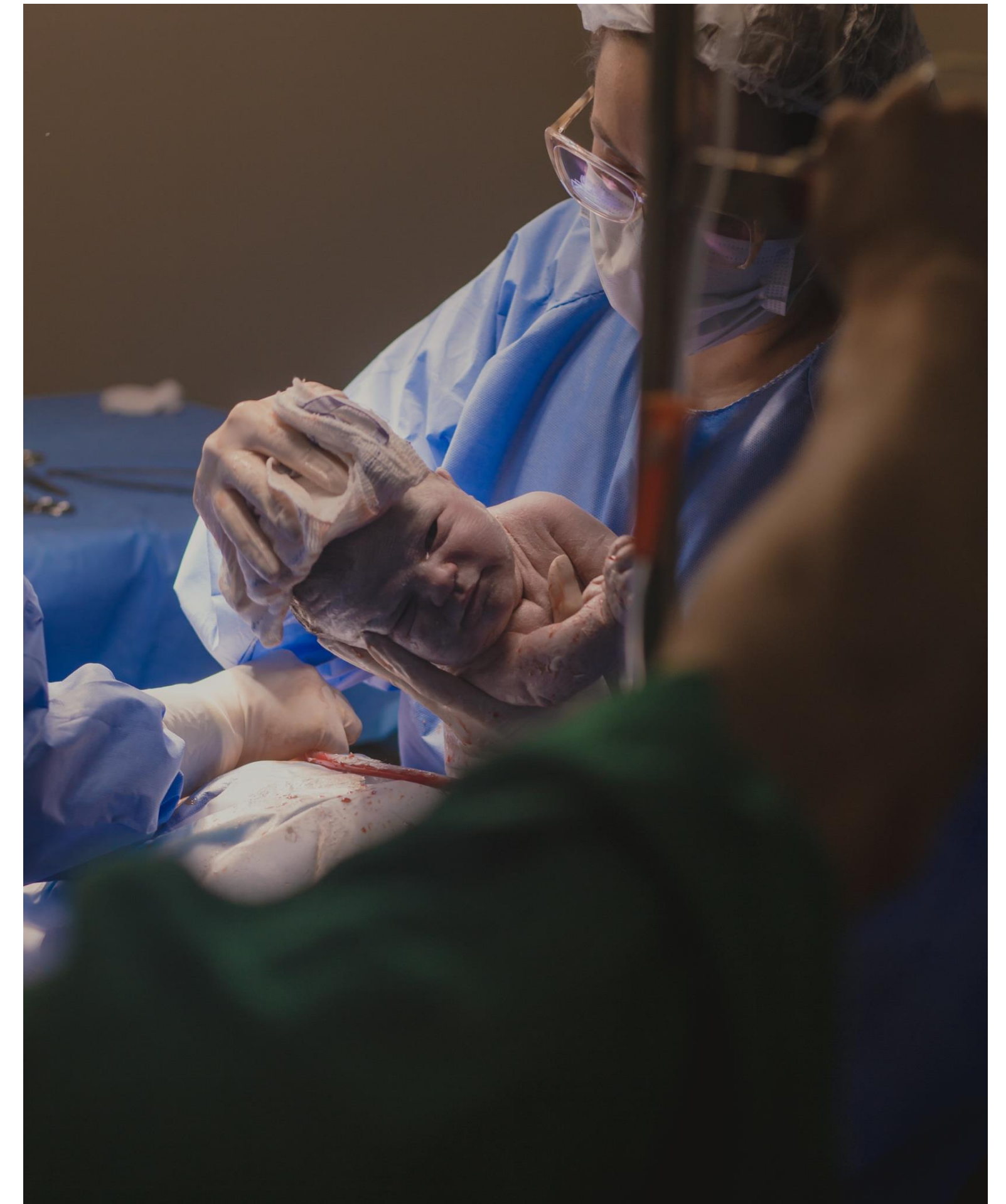
This is compounded by the rising amount of precarious and underpaid work in both the formal and informal sectors





# THE HEALTH DOMAIN

- Patriarchal and biomedical cultures
- Normalisation of public-private-partnerships and healthcare commercialisation and privatisation that fosters an acceptance of industry sponsorship and influence
- Economic ideas and policies that unnecessarily constrain public finance and investment



# RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Governments must provide accurate and timely information about breastfeeding and infant behaviours, better support, and skills development for health professionals, parents and communities
2. A legal global treaty to end the marketing of CMF while continuing to strengthen national Code legislation
3. Civil society, health professionals and politicians must have a better understanding of the CMF industry's marketing and political strategies and how they perform economically with respect to tax and externalities
4. Health systems must deliver women-centred maternity care = investment and an empowered health force plus end undue formula milk industry influence over research, training and other professional activities
5. Governments and society must recognize and value care work – incorporating it into economic accounting systems and policy – and properly invest in maternity protection
6. **Unless the imbalance in power between private commercial interests and those with a duty and mandate to protect the rights and needs of children and mothers is corrected, then nothing will change** = Stronger defences against corporate capture of regulation, policy, health providers and systems, and communities



It's not just about infant and young child feeding – it's about the impact of commercial interests on child development and society more generally. It's about the economic power used by the formula industry and the detriment to health and rights

**Our vision:** a world where parents and families are supported in the care of their infants, and for breastfeeding to be robustly promoted and supported, and protected at all levels