

Political Will Gear

Have policy makers expressed commitment to scale up in-country breastfeeding efforts?

Background

Political will “exists when a sufficient set of decision makers with a common understanding of a particular problem on the formal agenda is committed to supporting a commonly perceived, potentially effective policy solution”.¹ According to Post et al.¹, this complex, multifactorial phenomenon is comprised of three factors, which help conceptualize political will:

- a) the distribution of preferences of policymakers (i.e. what are the preferences of acting politicians and will others accept the policies);
- b) the authority, capacity, and legitimacy of key decision makers or reformers (i.e. political will is only strong if political power and resources are available); and
- c) commitment to preferences (i.e. how a policymaker stands up for his/her beliefs; how resources and other efforts are allocated; what incentives/disincentives are provided to the policymaker for adopting a position).

The BFGM posits that the *Political Will Gear* results when advocacy is strong enough to generate momentum that elicits political commitment from policy makers to protect, promote and support breastfeeding. In turn, strong political will is needed to enact legislation and policies to protect, promote and support breastfeeding.² Only when “expressed commitment” (i.e. “verbal declarations of support for an issue by high-level, influential political leaders”), “institutional commitment” (i.e. policies and organizational infrastructure), and “budgetary commitment” (i.e. monies have been allocated towards a particular cause) are present is there full and complete political commitment towards a cause, such as breastfeeding.³

Measuring political will is complex and indirect, typically by examining the political commitment of decision makers. While political commitment is comprised of “expressed commitment”, “institutional commitment” and “budgetary commitment”³, these reflect separate gears within the BFGM corresponding to “political will”, “legislation and policies”, and “funding & resources” respectively. Thus, measuring political will for the BFGM consists of

evaluating the level of *expressed commitment* policymakers have towards scaling-up breastfeeding.

Themes and Benchmarks

The theme for the Political Will Gear measures expressed commitment by the government to protect, promote and support breastfeeding scaling up efforts. This one theme, expressed commitment, is assessed by three benchmarks. All benchmarks are referenced to “the past year” unless otherwise noted.

1. Expressed Commitment Theme

[Benchmark PWG1: High level political officials have publicly expressed their commitment to breastfeeding action.](#)

Description: This benchmark assesses whether there has been any public expression of commitment or promise by at least two government officials to move forward with implementing breastfeeding activities. High level political officials can be within the federal and/or state government. “Public expression” refers to verbally expressing commitment to furthering breastfeeding activities to the public and it captures substantial media attention. “High level political official” means someone who has the capacity to influence policy decisions at the national levels including the country leader, first lady/spouse, policy makers etc. “Breastfeeding action” refers to activities that protect, promote and support breastfeeding.

Example: First Lady Michelle Obama launched a breastfeeding campaign to support nursing mothers. The campaign recognizes the health benefits of breastfeeding and identifies its association with lowering the risks of childhood obesity, which coincides with Mrs. Obama’s “Let’s Move!” initiative. Mrs. Obama said that early intervention, including breastfeeding, was key in preventing obesity. She cited needing more breastfeeding education, specifically for women in predominately black communities, according to Mrs. Obama, “40% of [black] babies never get breastfed at all.” She also has pushed for more hospitals to be certified as “Baby Friendly” and more flexible workplace rules for breastfeeding. Mrs. Obama has been very open about breastfeeding her own children and this is generally recognize to be the first person in the US with the First Lady’s stature or power that has embraced breastfeeding so publicly.

Possible data sources: Media data sources may be the best source to evaluate this benchmark. Media sources can include social media announcements or articles (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.), newspaper articles, radio or TV stories, transcripts, etc.

How to score: The scoring for this benchmark reflects the number of times high level political officials have expressed their commitment to breastfeeding action **within past year**.

- No progress:** High level political officials have not publicly expressed their commitment to breastfeeding action at all.
- Minimal progress:** High level political officials have publicly spoken about breastfeeding but have not expressed their commitment for action.
- Partial progress:** High level political officials have publicly expressed their commitment to breastfeeding action **once**.
- Major progress:** High level political officials have publicly expressed their commitment to breastfeeding action **at least twice**.

Benchmark PWG2: Government initiatives have been implemented to create an enabling environment that promotes breastfeeding.

Description: An enabling environment that promotes breastfeeding is essential to successful scaling up of breastfeeding. This enabling environment refers to an atmosphere that encourages breastfeeding and discourages alternative feeding methods. This benchmark assesses whether national government initiatives (such as agenda setting, policy development and program(s) support events) have been implemented to foster an enabling environment for successful scaling up of breastfeeding programs. Government led initiatives can cross multiple sectors including training, legislation, promotion, etc.

Possible data sources: To assess this benchmark, interviews with government sources familiar with breastfeeding or infant/young child feeding initiatives can generate the information needed to score this benchmark. Written reports, guides, program descriptions from government agencies and NGOs working in maternal and child nutrition can also provide valid information to assess this benchmark. Any written materials need to be linked to initiatives that have been started within the past year.

Examples:

- The New Zealand Ministry of Health contracted the Women’s Health Action Trust to develop and manage the Breastfeeding Friendly Workplaces initiative.

- Australian government changed policies allowing female politicians to breastfeed their infants in chambers.
- The Brazil MOH established an initiative to implement special rooms to support breastfeeding. The Breastfeeding Support's room is a space within companies where women can express her milk. This milk is kept in a freezer at a controlled temperature until the end of the day. At the end of the day, the woman can take your milk home to be offered to the child or she can donate it to a Human Milk Bank.

How to score: The scoring of this benchmark reflects the level of implementation and the quality of the enabling environment.

- No progress:** No government initiatives have been implemented to create an enabling environment that promotes breastfeeding.
- Minimal progress:** A few government initiatives have been implemented but they do not create an enabling environment that promotes breastfeeding at the national level.
- Partial progress:** Several government initiatives have been implemented and they have started to create an enabling environment that promotes breastfeeding at the national level, i.e. for the government initiatives being implemented, some are beginning to create an enabling environment.
- Major progress:** Several government initiatives have been implemented and they have created a strong enabling environment that protects, promotes and supports breastfeeding at the national level.

Benchmark PWG3: *An individual within the government has been especially influential in promoting, developing, or designing breastfeeding policy.*

Description: This benchmark assesses whether there is an individual within the government (which includes all individuals working within the government regardless of being elected, appointed, or hired on a temporary basis) who has been the driving force behind promoting, developing, or designing breastfeeding policy.

Promoting means introducing and supporting the creation of breastfeeding policy.

Developing refers to the active involvement in the generation of a breastfeeding policy.

Designing refers to the active involvement in the writing of the breastfeeding policy.

Example: Senator Cayetano of the Philippines is an example of a breastfeeding champion who has used her position in the national government to protect, promote, and support women's right to breastfeed. She was the principal author of the Expanded Breastfeeding Promotion Act and sponsored the Expanded Maternity Leave Bill, developed by the Senate Committee on Women, of whom she is Chair. She also: a) sponsored a bill to ensure there is

one midwife in every health station per 5,000 people, in order to help the Philippines reach its Millennium Development Goal of improving maternal and neonatal health outcomes, b) a resolution asking the legislature to launch an inquiry into Milk Code violations and c) succeeded in getting “gender provisions’ into the ‘Philippine Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act of 2010’.

Data sources: To assess this benchmark, interviews with government sources familiar with breastfeeding or infant/young child feeding initiatives can generate the information needed to score this benchmark. Written reports, guides, program descriptions from government agencies and NGOs working in maternal and child nutrition can also provide valid information to assess this benchmark.

How to score: The scoring for this benchmark reflects the existence and the level of influence a government individual or a collective group of individuals has in promoting, developing, or designing breastfeeding policy. The first step would be to map all the individuals who have been working on the breastfeeding policy. Then, map the activities or the collective activities they have been working on towards on promoting, developing, or designing breastfeeding policy. For this benchmark, *minimally influential* means the individual or a collective group of individuals has had only a little impact on the promotion, development, or design of breastfeeding policy over the past year. In this situation, breastfeeding policy is being promoted, but it hasn’t been developed. *Partially influential* means the individual or a collective group of individuals has had more impact on the promotion, development, or design of breastfeeding policy over the past year. In this situation, breastfeeding policy has been promoted and developed but not implemented. *Strongly influential* means the individual or a collective group of individuals has had a strong impact on the promotion, development, or design of breastfeeding policy over the past year. In this situation, the breastfeeding policy has been promoted, developed and implemented.

- No progress:** There is no individual or collective group of individuals within the government who have been influential in promoting, developing, or designing breastfeeding policy.
- Minimal progress:** There is an individual within the government or a collective group of individuals who have been **minimally** influential in promoting, developing, or designing breastfeeding policy.
- Partial progress:** There is an individual within the government or a collective group of individuals who have been **partially** influential in promoting, developing, or designing breastfeeding policy.

Major progress: There is an individual within the government or a collective group of individuals who have been **strongly** influential in promoting, developing, or designing breastfeeding policy

¹ Post LA, Raile ANW, Raile ED. Defining Political Will. *Politics & Policy*. 2010;38:653-676.

²Perez-Escamilla R, Curry L, Minhas D, Taylor L, Bradley E. Scaling up of breastfeeding promotion programs in low- and middle-income countries: the "breastfeeding gear" model. *Adv Nutr*. 2012;3:790-800.

³Fox AM, Balarajan Y, Cheng C, Reich MR. Measuring political commitment and opportunities to advance food and nutrition security: piloting a rapid assessment tool. *Health Policy Plan*. 2015;30:566-578.