

Baby-Friendly Farms

Enabling Exclusive Breastfeeding in Sierra Leone



Photo: Lana Slezic

Baby-Friendly Farms Methodology

- Community designates a plot of land close to town for use by an EBF support group open to pregnant women and lactating mothers. Men and youth clear the land and provide labor.
- CRS provides improved seeds and basic tools including watering cans, machetes, hoes, shovels, and a wheelbarrow.
- CRS provides training in EBF and nutrition.
- Crops rich in iron and protein are grown such as potato and cassava leaves, groundnut, and beans. These are ideal foods for complementary feeding, as well as nutritious supplements for pregnant and lactating women.
- Pregnant women and women with children under three are welcome to join the farm. All women with infants six months and under are encouraged to practice exclusive breastfeeding.

How can we reduce infant morbidity and mortality in Sierra Leone?

While women in Sierra Leone breastfeed consistently and frequently, mothers often give their infants water and other substances. As they do not practice exclusive breastfeeding (EBF), their babies are more susceptible to disease and death.

Two major factors prevent women from practicing exclusive breastfeeding in Sierra Leone (based on June 2005 barrier analysis):

- 1) **Babies are generally left in the village with a grandmother while women go to work on their farms.** When the infants grow hungry, grandmothers often give them warm water or porridge.
- 2) Communities are still struggling to recover from the effects of war, and food insecurity is high; **women struggle to eat enough calories to sustain themselves and are simply too hungry to breastfeed exclusively.**

A solution: baby-friendly farms

- Baby-friendly farms are **community plots of land close to town** that pregnant women and lactating mothers can cultivate.
- **A nursery at the farm lets women keep their infants with them and breastfeed as necessary** if the plot is not close enough to allow the women to return home at intervals.

Outcomes

- In the 18 baby-friendly farms created in 2008, **all women practice exclusive breastfeeding.**
- Harvested crops have **nutrition and income benefits**, as they are used:
 - For food
 - For sale, producing additional household income
 - For contributions to positive deviance / HEARTH groups