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LEGAL ASSISTANCE CENTRE

Recipient of the UNICEF Maurice Pate Human Rights Award – 1997
JP Karuaihe Human Rights Award – 2008 and 2010

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IN RECOGNITION OF WORLD BREASTFEEDING WEEK



The World Health Organisation recommends that mothers exclusively breastfeed their children for six months. However breastfeeding in Namibia is low - the percentage of mothers who exclusively breastfeed their children for 0-2 months is 53.6%, dropping to 22.9% for children aged 2-3 months and further dropping to 5.7% for children aged 4.5 months.

One contributing factor is the lack of public awareness about the advantages of exclusive breastfeeding for six months. Another contributing factor is that maternity leave is only three months, with one month taken before the birth of the child. The maternity leave provision is a push factor for many mothers to wean their children early.

The recently released government National Agenda for Children states that one of the government's priority strategies is to promote exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life; however the report does not make it clear how the government intends to balance this commitment with the Labour Act and Social Security Commission's current provision of three rather than six months maternity leave.

The Legal Assistance Centre calls on the government to review the law on maternity leave to consider the viability of allowing women six months maternity leave, or requiring employers to institute other measures to facilitate continued breastfeeding.

Data on breastfeeding taken from the *Namibia Demographic and Health Survey 2006-07*, Windhoek: Ministry of Health and Social Services, 2008 at 154.

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