

Making Money from the Poorest

News:

Formula milk companies are continuing to use aggressive, clandestine and often illegal methods to target mothers in the poorest parts of the world to encourage them to choose powdered milk over breastfeeding, a new investigation shows.

A Guardian/Save the Children investigation in some of the most deprived areas of the Philippines found that Nestlé and three other companies were offering doctors, midwives and local health workers free trips to lavish conferences, meals, tickets to shows and the cinema and even gambling chips, earning their loyalty. This is a clear violation of Philippine law. (Source: *The Guardian*, 27/2/2018)

Comment:

Targeting with blatant lies is not a shock when we think of the motives of multinationals who work to make maximum profits throughout the world. To make money, it is seen as acceptable to make claims that do not always ring true.

What we can see is that companies that operate on a global scale treat their consumers in the West and those in the less developed world differently. Despite there being a global market, treatment of consumers is very different.

Powdered milk is expensive and for many of those targeting in the developing world it is simply not affordable, yet the market is there due to population growth and companies can cash in on the lack of knowledge locals have when they make choices for their children. This is not a new phenomenon when it comes to formula milk.

In 1973, *The New Internationalist* published an exposé on Nestlé's marketing practices, "Babies Mean Business," which described how the company got mothers in the less developed world hooked on baby formula.

Nestlé accomplished this in three ways, and this is the predominant model of capitalism:

- Creating a need where none existed.
- Convincing consumers the products were indispensable.
- Linking products with the most desirable and unattainable concepts—then giving a sample.

In 1974 "The Baby Killer," was published by London's War on Want organization. This exposed the baby formula industry, and led to boycott of Nestle products by ethically conscious consumers. The booklet highlighted the details of underhanded practices, yet Nestle still won a law suit and was simply asked to modify its marketing practices.

So, many years later, we still see there is much change needed in how this product is sold. In the past the best way was to show that the Western mode of living as the ideal and bottle feeding was liberating for mothers. All women the world over should aspire to be like Western women, even if their reality was oceans apart. Today, cashing in on the fears linked to poverty, claims are made that powdered milk can boost intelligence. An educated child is assumed to have more chances to escape from the cycle of poverty endured by many mothers. As with all mothers, providing the best is naturally aspired for, even when you do not know what the best actually is.

The Guardian interviewed one mother who explained, *“I didn’t eat just so I could feed the baby. There were some days when I didn’t eat anything. And Nestogen is expensive so I could not always give it to my baby when she was hungry; I only gave her half bottles, four times a day.”*

lcawat’s house – made of discarded plywood, corrugated iron and plastic sheets – sits on stilts above rubbish-infested waters. She does not have running water or electricity and admitted she found it difficult to sterilise bottles and make up the milk powder, which needs to be mixed with very hot water to be safe.” (27/2/2018)

Whilst it is the duty of a state to protect citizens, we can see the multinationals can override laws and cleverly market themselves to consumers who have less access to making informed choices. If a Doctor or Midwife is an expert, yet they are influenced through money, how can mothers and children be protected?

Islam is the only way of life that recognizes human nature correctly and does not see a dollar sign with every life, but rather human potential. Taking advantage of poverty and further compounding it with the most vulnerable is truly despicable!

Laws and controls alone will not rectify this problem, as shown by the Nestle law suit, but rather a complete overhaul of the system is needed. Firstly, to recognize that life itself is from Allah (swt) and we cannot distort the way Allah provides in the best way for all children. Anyone who provides consumables for people has to be regulated by his or her taqwa and not manipulate to make money. Islam’s economic system is not based on false claims or false needs, but honest trade itself a form of worship and can be used to improve living standards not to further add to people’s misery.

The Prophet (saw) told us «التاجر الصدوق الأمين مع النبيين والصديقين والشهداء» **“The honest and trustworthy traders will be resurrected with the Prophets, the honest men, and the martyrs.”** (Narrated by Tirmidhi)

We can look forward to health and well being for all under the system of Islam, the Khilafah (Caliphate) on the methodology of the Prophethood, inshaAllah.

**Written for the Central Media Office of Hizb Ut Tahrir by
Nazia Rehman**