**Exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months has far reaching benefits for infants in SSA**

By Rachael Nagaddya, 20th August 2025.

WHO recommends exclusive breastfeeding (EBF) for the first six months; meaning the infant only receives breast milk. No other liquids, or solids are given except oral rehydration solution, or drops/syrups of vitamins, minerals or medicines. The advantages of breastmilk are far reaching; from providing essential, irreplaceable nutrition which is a cornerstone of child survival and health, providing protection from respiratory infections, diarrhoea, to protecting against obesity and certain noncommunicable diseases later in life.

[Globally](https://www.unicef.org/documents/global-breastfeeding-scorecard-2023), as of 2023, 48 percent of infants aged 0 to 6 months are exclusively breastfed which is an indication that breastfeeding is often practiced as supplementary feeding rather than exclusively. This is against the global breast-feeding collective target of 70 percent by 2030. With the median EBF duration in Mali as little as less than 2 months to 5 months in Rwanda, all of which is below what is recommended means that millions of children across SSA are not optimally getting the required nutrients and health benefits from breastmilk.