

Figure 13. IBFAN is a network, a love affair, not marriage.

**IBFAN: fast,
flexible and
furious**

IBFAN is said to be biased – and so it is. But it is biased in favour of the protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding as called for by UNICEF and WHO. If companies use different tactics or invent new products to get around the Code, IBFAN denounces these. And if a government wants help to draft a law that will protect breastfeeding now and in the future, IBFAN will try its utmost to make sure that the law is sound and covers all products that undermine breastfeeding. But meanwhile, in its monitoring work, IBFAN's Code Documentation Centre makes absolutely sure that all the violations it publicises relate to the actual provisions of the Code or subsequent Resolutions.

The Network has survived 25 years of hard work with little money. Although understaffed, overworked and having to deal with a huge number of sub-issues, IBFAN has actually come out stronger than ever before. IBFANers have been called all kinds of names: Nestlé-bashers, Code-pushers, fanatics, breastfeeding ideologists, even Marxists, but on the whole, the Network's credibility has never been higher and the people working in IBFAN have shown that unity in diversity is possible and practicable. In both the North and the South, groups have become skilled at tracking down Code violations and advocating for strong and legally binding measures. For more than 20 years, the Network has pushed WHO and UNICEF to keep the Code alive and on their agendas, and to remember there is an active movement for greater corporate accountability.

Decentralisation, democracy and sharing are the basis for IBFAN's expansion. There are no fees or membership criteria other than agreement to seven principles, all aimed at better child health all over the world. Groups nowadays are asked to sign a pledge that they will not take money or any kind of sponsorship from infant food and related industries. Despite pressures from within and from the outside to change its structure, IBFAN has maintained a 'flat' structure, like a fishing net, without 'head' or toe.

At every planning meeting there are suggestions that we start having a central office, that we change in order to get into consultative status with some UN body or other, and every time IBFAN ends up sticking to the fishing net as the best structure for what we need to do. If the UN wants IBFAN to join, it had better change its rules to allow for networks. The existing rules are rigidly drafted to allow only for 'organisations' with a bureaucratic hierarchy at one single address.⁴⁸

This won't work for IBFAN. At most we can give five or six addresses for the regional offices and even they change from time to time. The more active affiliates are, the more involved they become in running the network.

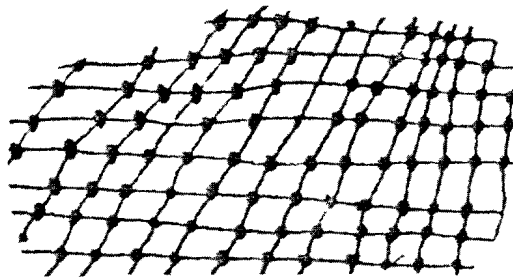


Figure 14. IBFAN's flat structure resembles a fishing net: as strong as its weakest link.

Flexible networking structures have the advantage of allowing many groups, organisations and even individuals to join in activities, each in their own way, and to a greater or lesser degree. Modern communication technology allows for *fast* email networking. Knowing what we know about breastfeeding and its contribution to child health, company practices that undermine it need to be increasingly seen as human rights abuses. That these abuses still continue makes all IBFANers at least a little bit *furious*. That fury may well be one of the most important things that keeps IBFAN together without any strong framework.