

# Unnecessary formula prescriptions hinder exclusive breastfeeding while community norms & Islamic teachings encourage it

## Barriers and Facilitators to Breastfeeding Support at Abs Hospital, Northern Yemen: A rapid qualitative assessment (25 January - 4 February 2025)

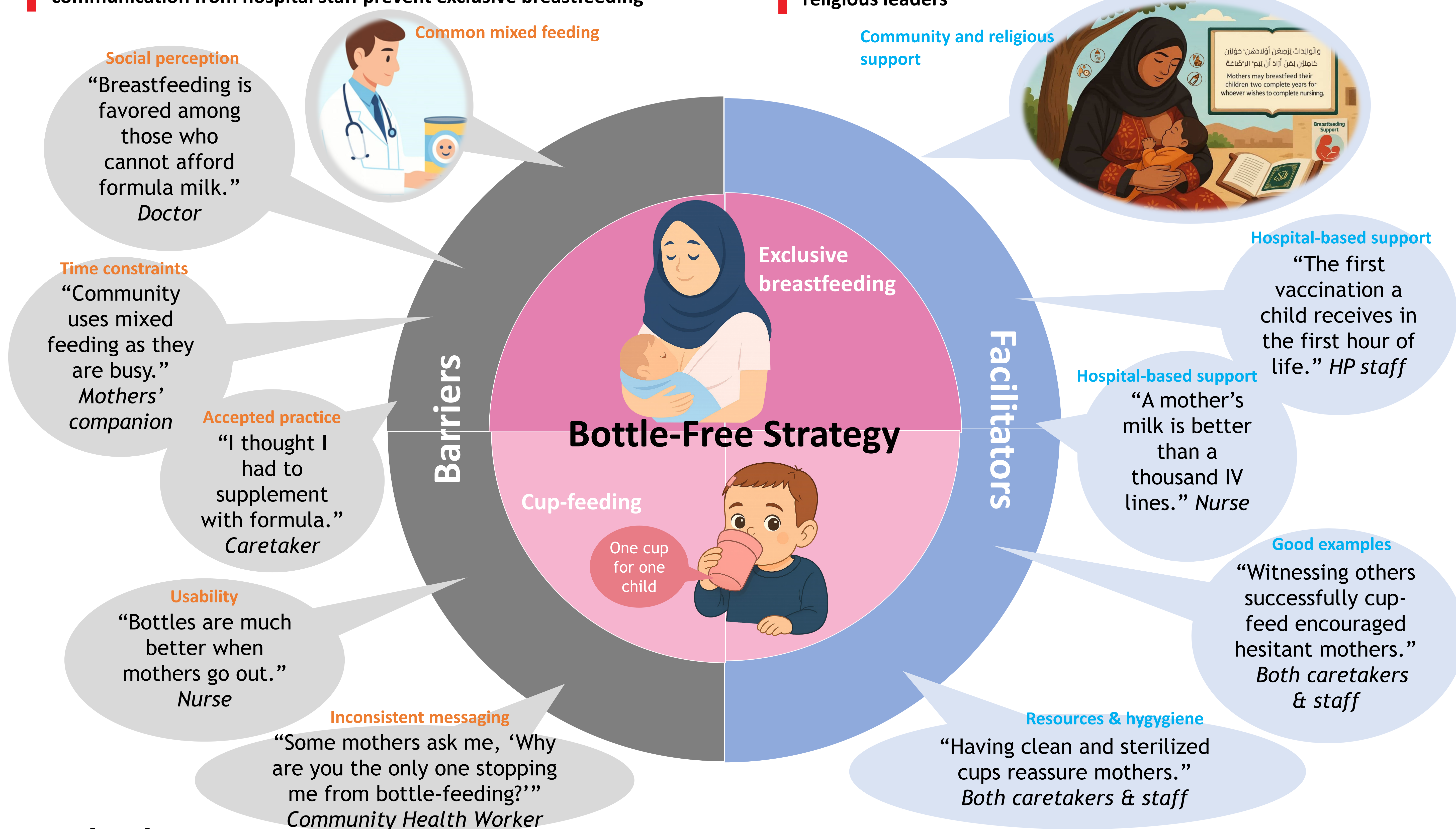
**Background:** Since 2015, MSF has supported Abs General Hospital’s Inpatient Therapeutic Feeding Centre for malnourished infants. In 2021, it introduced the Bottle-Free Strategy, encouraging mothers to exclusively breastfeed and, if milk supplementation is needed, to use cup-feeding instead of bottle-feeding. The strategy, however, has faced challenges. This assessment identified key barriers and facilitators for improvement.

**Why Bottle-Free Strategy?**  
Aims to reduce the risks of bottle feeding, especially in conflict-affected areas with poor sanitation. The rate of exclusive breastfeeding at 6 months was 0% in Hajjah governorate (UNICEF, 2023).



Unnecessary prescription of formula and inconsistent/contradictory communication from hospital staff prevent exclusive breastfeeding

Exclusive breastfeeding is strongly supported by the communities and religious leaders



## Methods

A rapid qualitative assessment was conducted at Abs General Hospital Inpatient Therapeutic Feeding Centre (ITFC) in January - February 2025, with an extension in May 2025 to include mothers' companions, following approval from the Hospital Director and the MSF-OCBA Medical Director. Semi-structured interviews were organized for 10 caretakers, 10 mothers' companions, and 13 medical/paramedical staff in the ITFC department. Data collection was conducted in Arabic with translation, concluded at thematic saturation, and analyzed using thematic framework analysis.

### Operational Recommendations

1. Deliver consistent, non-contradictory messages
2. Stop prescribing formula unless medically required
3. Provide training on breastfeeding and cup-feeding support to staff
4. Create safe and private spaces for mothers in hospital wards
5. Control admissions and improve ward conditions
6. Involve religious and community leaders to promote breastfeeding

**Limitations:** Findings are specific to Abs General Hospital and not statistically generalizable. Convenience sampling and social desirability bias may have influenced responses. Translation from Arabic to English may have caused loss of nuance. Some feeding practices were underrepresented, and most mothers' companions were unaware of the Bottle-Free strategy.