

A big risk to global nutrition

Help ensure the UK's support for global nutrition programmes is maintained.

Malnutrition is a cause of around half of all under-five deaths globally; in 2019, almost 3 million child deaths could have been prevented through improved nutrition. 144 million children under five are also chronically undernourished, affecting their long term development. The situation could worsen significantly in 2020 due to COVID-19, with the economic and social impacts of the pandemic increasing food insecurity and hunger, making efforts to prevent and treat malnutrition more important than ever.

Investing in nutrition is critical to ending preventable child deaths, as well as strengthening global health and pandemic preparedness. In 2013, the UK hosted the first ever Nutrition for Growth Summit and galvanised international action to tackle malnutrition that raised \$23 billion over 7 years for nutrition programmes. Since 2015, 50.6 million women and girls have been reached through the UK's nutrition programmes alone. But the money pledged in 2013 runs out at the end of 2020, and the world is still a long way from meeting global nutrition targets, even without the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Unless new money is available in the next few months, nutrition programmes could have to be cut just when they are needed most. The UK Government must therefore work with other leading donors and pledge new funding for nutrition programmes. At a time when Britain faces an economic downturn and our overseas aid budget will be reduced, it is vital that investments in nutrition are continued. Please write to the Secretary of State for International Development Anne-Marie Trevelyan, and the Foreign Secretary, Dominic Rabb, who will shortly be taking over responsibility for the UK's aid spending, urging them to pledge financial support now to maintain current levels of nutrition programmes.

The scale and impact of malnutrition

Millions of lives around the world are [blighted by malnutrition](#), caused by people not having enough to eat, not eating enough of the right foods, or being unable to absorb nutrients from food. Malnutrition is a cause of around half of all under-five deaths globally; in 2019 almost 3 million child deaths could have been prevented through improved nutrition. 144 million children under five are also chronically undernourished (stunted), affecting their long term development. This situation [is likely to worsen significantly](#) in 2020 due to COVID-19, with the economic and social impacts of the pandemic increasing food insecurity and hunger, making efforts to prevent and treat malnutrition more important than ever.

Poor nutrition has a big impact on a child's learning potential and ability to thrive in life. Well-nourished people [have stronger immune systems and respond better to vaccines](#), also boosting the efficacy of investments in vaccination such as Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance. And poor nutrition is a big risk factor for diseases such as TB. Investing in nutrition is critical to ending preventable child deaths as well as strengthening global health and pandemic preparedness.

The [cost of malnutrition](#) to the global economy is US \$3.5 trillion annually, holding back the ability of countries to build strong, resilient economies. And yet, nutrition investment is a best-buy, with [every £1 invested yielding on average a £16 return](#).

Prevention and treatment

There are many kinds of interventions that can help tackle malnutrition, including "nutrition specific" interventions which directly tackle malnutrition, such as vitamin or mineral supplements, and 'nutrition sensitive' programmes such as water, sanitation and hygiene or agriculture programmes that indirectly aid nutrition as well as achieving other development objectives. The [World Bank has estimated](#) that an extra US \$7 billion is needed each year to address stunting, wasting, anaemia and the need for increases breastfeeding through nutrition-specific interventions by 2025. The recent [Global Nutrition Report](#) highlights that "the vast majority of people today simply cannot access or afford a healthy diet". The report shows how agriculture systems and emergency support often focus disproportionately on staple grains like rice and wheat rather than a broader range of healthier foods, such as fruits, nuts and vegetables.

The Nutrition for Growth ('N4G') agenda

In 2013, the UK hosted the first ever Nutrition for Growth Summit, galvanising international action to tackle malnutrition that raised \$23 billion over 7 years for nutrition programmes, increasing nutrition spending worldwide by 33%. Since the 2013 summit, the number of children whose physical or cognitive growth is stunted by malnutrition has reduced by over 12 million. But despite this progress, nutrition remains one of the most pressing issues in global development.

But the money pledged in 2013 runs out at the end of 2020, and the world is still a long way from meeting global nutrition targets, even without the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is making the situation far worse. Many of the world's poorest people cannot work from home. Most governments cannot support furlough schemes, and food prices are soaring. For most people, the threat of hunger and malnutrition is far [greater than the risk from the virus](#) itself.

Continued UK leadership is needed

With a global recession widely predicted, scenarios of millions more malnourished children and an undoing of more than five years of progress are a real possibility. For example, [The Lancet reports](#) that an additional 6.7 million children could be affected by [wasting](#) because of the economic impacts of COVID-19; and the [UN predicts](#) an additional 0.7 million children affected by stunting per percentage drop in global GDP.

Unless new money is allocated in the next few months, nutrition programmes could have to be cut just when they are needed most. The UK Government must therefore work with other leading donors to nutrition programmes, such as Canada and Japan, and pledge new funding immediately. At a time when Britain faces

an economic downturn because of COVID and our overseas aid budget (0.7% of our national income) [is being cut](#), it is vital that nutrition funding, which has such a huge impact on poverty and human development, continues.

The UK can play a critical role in galvanising the international community ahead of the Nutrition for Growth Summit, hosted by Japan, which is now due to take place in December 2021 (it was originally to have been around the Olympics in July 2020 but was postponed owing to the COVID-19 pandemic). An early signal of UK support will demonstrate our leadership, help ensure a successful summit, and ensure that funding for nutrition doesn't nose-dive after 2020.

With the shortcomings of our current food, health and economic systems so nakedly on show, the COVID-19 crisis has given unexpected clarity on what the N4G agenda must address. If progress is to continue, it is vital that the UK once again takes the lead by pledging funds to at least the same level as has been the case since 2013 for the period 2021-2025.

What can I do now?

If you've already taken an action on nutrition over the last year, thank you! Now, please write to the Secretary of State for International Development Anne-Marie Trevelyan, and the Foreign Secretary, Dominic Rabb, who will shortly be taking over responsibility for the UK's aid spending, urging them to make a financial pledge to support nutrition programmes post-2020, to maintain the current level of resourcing over the next 5 years.

Thank you if you are able to take action!

Take action

Please write to the Secretary of State for International Development Anne-Marie Trevelyan, and the Foreign Secretary, Dominic Rabb, who will shortly be taking over responsibility for the UK's aid spending, urging them to make a financial pledge to support for nutrition programmes over the next 5 years.

Contact details:

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Please let us know that you've taken action by emailing Dela at delanderson@results.org.uk.