

# The best we can possibly be

Help the UK to ensure its nutrition programmes are as effective as possible.

Good nutrition is critical for a healthy and productive life. However, undernutrition plays a role in the deaths of nearly half of all children under five, and poor nutrition in early childhood impairs proper child development and learning, reduces resistance to disease, and stops children from reaching their full potential. Since 2013, the UK has played a big role in the global fight against malnutrition, helping to establish the 'Nutrition for Growth' ('N4G') agenda, which raised \$23 billion for nutrition programmes. But the money pledged in 2013 is insufficient to meet global nutrition targets. 2020 will be an important year as existing resourcing is coming to an end, and significant new resources are needed. The Department for International Development (DFID) has a strong record of funding nutrition programmes. Alongside the need for financial resources, there is more to be done to ensure that the UK's nutrition programmes are as effective as they can possibly be. DFID must ensure that its programmes address all forms of malnutrition; that they 'leave no one behind'; that they strengthen countries' own capacity to address malnutrition and are based on evidence of what is needed; and that they include communities in holding their governments to account for efforts to tackle malnutrition. This month, please ask your MP to write to DFID Minister Alistair Burt to ask him to ensure these principles guide all DFID's nutrition programmes worldwide.

## The scale and impact of malnutrition

Millions of lives around the world are [blighted by malnutrition](#). Around half of all under-five deaths are linked to malnutrition, and those children who survive often have permanent effects such as stunted growth and mental development, and are more susceptible to disease and illness. In 2017, 151 million children (22.2%) under the age of five were stunted, 52 million were wasted, and 38.3 million were overweight. Malnutrition also disproportionately affects women and girls. Anaemia, often resulting from iron deficiency, affected 613 million women of reproductive age in 2016, bringing with it health issues for women and their children – a figure that has got worse.

Unless we tackle malnutrition in all its forms, the world will not be able to achieve the aim of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) or the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Malnutrition also affects the wider society. Undernourished children have reduced educational and employment prospects, holding back the economic development of communities and countries. [It is estimated](#) that undernutrition in childhood reduces an individual's earning potential by 10% and has a total global economic cost of \$3.5 trillion.

## Prevention and treatment

There are many kinds of interventions that can help tackle malnutrition. These include '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, which indirectly aid nutrition. SDG2 aims to 'end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition'. Indicator 2.2 aims to 'by 2030, end all forms of malnutrition'. This requires the achievement of the [2025 WHO targets for nutrition](#), agreed in 2012, including a 40% reduction in the number of under-fives who are stunted and a 50% reduction of anaemia in women of reproductive age. The SDGs have also identified improving nutrition for vulnerable groups as a priority. To achieve these aims, we need more resources for nutrition, integrated approaches across different kinds of development intervention, and greater accountability by governments for their commitments.

## Nutrition is severely under-funded

The world is off track to meet the WHO targets, and financing to tackle malnutrition has been alarmingly low. Donor support for nutrition has stayed low at around 1% of total aid, and governments only spend just over 1% of their national budgets on it. To transform the lives of millions of women and children worldwide, and to promote economic prosperity, an increase in investments in nutrition is needed now. This will require considerable new resources, and also high levels of political leadership.

## The Nutrition for Growth (N4G) agenda

In June 2013, then Prime Minister David Cameron established the 'Nutrition for Growth' ('N4G') agenda, leading efforts to bring together governments, businesses, scientists and civil society to raise US \$4

billion in nutrition-specific funding and \$19 billion in nutrition-sensitive funding. The current government made a further commitment to improve nutrition for 50 million people by 2020, a target it is on track to achieve.

The [World Bank has estimated](#) that an extra US \$7 billion is needed each year to address stunting, wasting, anaemia and breastfeeding through nutrition-specific interventions by 2025. The next N4G moment will come in 2020, when funding pledges from 2013 come to an end. This will be an important opportunity for the UK to increase its funding for nutrition helping to end malnutrition by 2030. We will ask you take action on the UK's financial support for nutrition later in the year.

### **DFID's nutrition programmes**

The UK is a leading global donor for nutrition. At the 2013 N4G Summit, the UK government committed an extra £375 million for nutrition-specific programmes and an extra £604 million for nutrition-sensitive programmes up until 2020. In October 2017, DFID published its [Global Nutrition position paper](#) setting out how these resources would be used. As well as providing funding, DFID must ensure its programmes around the world are of sufficient quality and focus resources as effectively as possible on achieving global nutrition targets. To make this happen, RESULTS believes that a number of principles must be followed:

#### **1. Address all forms of malnutrition**

No country is free of malnutrition, and almost all countries suffer from multiple forms of undernutrition (stunting, wasting, and micronutrient deficiencies) and overweight and obesity. The UK's investments in nutrition must aim to target all forms of malnutrition.

#### **2. Leave no one behind**

All nutrition investments and programmes must focus on those who are most vulnerable to malnutrition and its consequences, and those most marginalised – geographically, as well as based on age, gender, and disability.

**3. Strengthen national capacity.** Sustainable improvements in nutrition will be impossible if it relies only on donors, though donors have a role to play in encouraging and complementing countries' own efforts and building their capacity.

**4. Be evidence-based, and promote high-intensity impact through multi-sectoral action.** Tackling malnutrition effectively needs an integrated package of nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive investments. Substantial evidence exists on interventions that are high-impact and offer excellent value for money. But more evidence is needed on specific interventions that should be scaled up and what this will cost.

**5. Support people to have a say in tackling malnutrition in their own country.** It is vital to involve communities in efforts to tackle malnutrition, and for them to be able to hold their governments to account for achieving their commitments, as well as to push them to make ambitious commitments for increased funding. This will involve working in partnership with local communities and organisations.

### **Take action!**

If you contacted your MP in October to ask the Secretary of State Penny Mordaunt to prioritise nutrition programmes, thank you! Several of you have shared replies from DFID Minister Alistair Burt MP, who has responsibility for health, expressing the UK's strong support for combating malnutrition. It will be vital that the UK's nutrition commitments are, in the words of Penny Mordaunt, 'not just well spent, but could not be spent better.' Please ask your MP to write to Alistair Burt (or to write back, if they have already heard from him following the October action), explaining why the effective of nutrition programmes is as important as the level of resources made available. Please explain why DFID's nutrition programmes must be of high quality, referring to any of the guiding principles mentioned above in order to achieve the SDGs by 2030.

### **Take action**

**Please contact your MP, explaining why the UK's support for tackling malnutrition must be about the quality as well as the extent of its nutrition programmes.** Explain some of the principles for effective nutrition programmes, and ask him or her to write to DFID Minister Rt. Hon. Alistair Burt MP, asking for the UK Government to further improve its work on nutrition in line with these principles.

You can find your MP's contact details on [Parliament's website](#); you may also want to see these [talking points and case studies](#) on nutrition, and this handy [nutrition glossary](#). Thank you if you are able to take action!