

# Nutrition for Growth: A Year of Action

Call on the UK to make aid programmes have greater impact on nutrition.

Good nutrition is essential for a healthy and productive life. Malnutrition significantly affects children's outcomes in life, impairing their development and health. It also contributes nearly half of all under-5 child deaths. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, rates of malnutrition are set to increase further as health and food systems have been severely disrupted. The UK has long been a respected donor for nutrition and a catalyst for action on nutrition. 2021 has been labelled the 'Nutrition for Growth Year of Action, yet at present, the UK's support for nutrition is in question, with no financial commitments having been made and the impact of the recent aid cuts unclear. This month, we're calling on the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) to recommit to reaching 50 million women and children with nutrition-relevant programmes by 2025, and for international development programmes to be designed to have more impact on malnutrition.

## What is nutrition and why it is important?

Good nutrition is essential for a healthy and productive life. But nearly half of all deaths of children under 5 are related to undernutrition, and children under 5 with severe acute malnutrition [are 9 times more likely to die from preventable diseases](#) than well-nourished children. Undernutrition can reduce immunity, and increase susceptibility to infectious diseases.

Early undernutrition can also affect children's cognitive development, harming their educational attainment and economic productivity. Because the effects of malnutrition are so far reaching, investments in nutrition are extremely cost-effective and have significant economic returns. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly disrupted healthcare systems and access to nutrition services. Food systems have also been disrupted and people have faced economic barriers to accessing nutritious food. Malnutrition could prove deadlier than COVID-19 itself and it is estimated that rates of malnutrition among under 5s may [increase by almost 40%](#). To make meaningful progress to end poverty, [champion the human right to nutrition](#) and reach the Sustainable Development Goals, urgent action is needed.

## Nutrition for Growth: A Year of Action

2021 marks the [Nutrition for Growth](#) (N4G) Year of Action, following a kick-off event in December 2020 where more than US \$3 billion was pledged to tackle

malnutrition. The N4G Year of Action marks a year-long effort to keep up momentum on action for nutrition in the run up to the N4G Summit in Japan in December 2021. It is an opportunity to galvanise financial and policy commitments to improving global nutrition.



The N4G Summit 2021 was originally planned for last year, but was postponed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Summit will come midway through the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition and will follow the G7 Summit and a UN Food Systems Summit in the autumn.

## The UK and nutrition funding

The UK co-hosted the first ever N4G Summit in 2013 and has been a leader in recognising the benefits of investing in nutrition. The UK has long been a well-respected donor, [pledging £1.25 billion to tackle malnutrition up until 2020](#). However, the UK made no commitments for tackling malnutrition at the N4G kick-off event in December 2020 and has made no commitment since.

## Nutrition and the aid cuts

The aid cuts [announced](#) by the Foreign Secretary on 21 April will disproportionately affect nutrition funding.

[Aid agencies in Somalia are fearing a 40% cut](#) which will mean health clinics offering nutrition services will be shut down and a similar scenario is likely in the [Democratic Republic of Congo, where aid agencies fear a 60% cut](#). Overall, however, [it is not yet possible to know](#) exactly what the cuts mean for the UK's nutrition financing.

### **Nutrition targets and commitments**

In 2015, the Department for International Development made a commitment to reach 50 million people with nutrition-relevant programmes by 2020. Having the target in place forced the Department to consider how each programme could help to reach people with nutrition interventions and contribute to meeting the goal. As a result, it increased the number of nutrition-specific programmes and improved the nutrition sensitivity of its work as a whole. The commitment was met early and the UK exceeded the target, reaching [50.6 million women and girls](#) with nutrition programmes between 2015 and 2020. Given this achievement, the UK must keep up the momentum and recommit to reaching over 50 million women and children with nutrition-relevant programmes from 2020 to 2025.

### **Effective nutrition programmes**

In light of the reduction to the aid budget, it is more important than ever to maximise the impact of the FCDO's work on nutrition. Along with programmes that directly target the reduction of malnutrition ('nutrition-specific'), integrating nutrition across other FCDO programmes will help to improve effectiveness, by tackling the underlying causes of malnutrition ('nutrition-sensitive'). Given the cross-over between nutrition and other issues in international development, such as education, or access to water and sanitation, improvements should be made to ensure that programme funding is more effective and reaches multiple targets. In particular, the FCDO must aim to do this through programmes focused on climate-sensitive

agriculture, food systems, health and education. A multi-sectoral approach, with a nutrition focus, would mean that nutrition is properly considered across all relevant programmes.

### **What can be done to improve programme quality?**

Mainstreaming nutrition in multiple sectors and increasing the impact of nutrition interventions can be best done if nutrition objectives are added to development programmes from the start. A checklist can be used to mark programmes against issue-specific criteria and check whether or not they are making an impact on a specific issue. Known as an '[OECD policy marker](#)', the checklist is used to measure how much a policy is put into practice. This forces programmes to consider issue-specific objectives and helps generate data on if and how programmes are tackling them. This means that programmes are designed in a more effective way, to take into account multiple issues.

### **How does the OECD policy marker work for nutrition?**

The OECD [nutrition policy marker](#) is used to identify, monitor and report on nutrition objectives across development activities. It aims to measure the impact of the FCDO's nutrition-sensitive programmes by checking if and how programmes meet nutrition objectives. Currently, the FCDO measures the nutrition sensitivity of its work by using the OECD policy marker in the evaluation stage, once programmes have concluded. The FCDO should instead use it when programmes are designed. This would encourage the department to proactively consider how all of their programmes could have an impact on nutrition and would act as an incentive for all programmes to consider and include nutrition objectives. As malnutrition has far-reaching effects, the OECD policy marker has a special potential for measuring the impact of nutrition-sensitive interventions. Given the likely reduction in nutrition funding, it is more vital than ever that the UK achieves maximal impact with the funding available.

#### **Take action**

**Please write to Rt. Hon. Wendy Morton MP**, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, whose responsibilities include global health and nutrition. Urge the UK to recommit to reaching 50 million women and children with nutrition programmes and implement the nutrition policy marker from the programme design stage.

Talking points and contact details can be found on [Background Sheet 1](#).