

Keep our commitment to healthy lives!

Help urge the UK Government to maintain its resolve in the fight against malnutrition.

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 (around 3 million children each year). Poor nutrition in early childhood impairs proper child development and learning, irreversibly reduces resistance to disease, and stops children from reaching their full potential.

The UK has played a big role in the global fight against malnutrition. In 2013, then Prime Minister David Cameron established the 'Nutrition for Growth' ('N4G') agenda, which raised \$23 billion for nutrition programmes. But five years on, there is still much to be done. The financial pledges made in 2013 are insufficient to meet global nutrition targets, and new money is needed. Yet nutrition is severely underfunded, with international donors now spending less than 0.5% of Official Development Assistance (ODA) on nutrition. 2020 will be an important year as the UK's 2013 pledge, and that of other governments, will be coming to an end.

The Department for International Development (DFID) has a strong record of funding nutrition programmes. But UK aid priorities are changing to focus more on security and economic development, creating a real risk that human development programmes, like those that address malnutrition, will be cut. It is critical that changes to global health and nutrition funding do not reverse the progress that has been made on nutrition, and UK leadership on nutrition must continue.

What is malnutrition?

Undernutrition plays a role in the deaths of nearly half of all children under five (around 3 million children each year). It also hinders the growth and development of at least 200 million more. Poor nutrition harms almost every aspect of children's early development, making them more susceptible to diseases, and reducing their ability to learn and to earn a living later in life. And it disproportionately affects women and girls.

The [2017 Global Nutrition Report](#) showed that, despite progress, 155 million children globally are too short for their age ('stunted'), often due to lack of nutrients, impairing their physical and mental development. 52 million are too thin for their height (wasted). And anaemia, often a result of iron deficiency, affected 613 million women of a reproductive age in 2016, bringing with it health issues for women and new-born children.

Nutrition is severely under-funded

The world is off track to meet internationally agreed nutrition targets, and financing to tackle malnutrition has been alarmingly low. Donors spent under 0.5% of overseas aid on nutrition in 2016 (though DFID's spend on nutrition is much higher), and countries allocate between one and two percent of their health budgets to the issue. Undernutrition costs the global economy around \$3.5 trillion each year. To transform the lives of millions of women and children worldwide, and to

promote economic prosperity, we need to increase investments in nutrition now.

How can malnutrition be prevented?

Malnutrition is preventable and treatable. Nutrition is about more than just having enough to eat, but having a varied, balanced diet, particularly in [the first 1,000 days of life](#). The solutions to undernutrition are varied, including fortification of food products with minerals and vitamins, educating mothers about healthy diets, and changing crop varieties. Malnutrition is a complex issue that can only be addressed by tackling both its direct and underlying causes. But investing in nutrition makes economic sense: every £1 invested in nutrition can yield over £16 in return. Nutrition is key to achieving progress on at least 12 of the 17 Global Goals, including on health, education, gender, and equality.

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 \$4 billion in nutrition-specific funding (interventions which directly tackle malnutrition, such as vitamin or mineral supplements) and \$19 billion in nutrition-sensitive funding (programmes such as water, sanitation and hygiene or agriculture programmes, which indirectly aid nutrition). The current government has made a

further commitment to improve nutrition for 50 million people by 2020, a target it is on track to achieve.

At an N4G event in Milan in 2017, the UK Government pledged to spend all its 2013 commitments by 2020; however, it committed no additional money. Overall, international donors pledged US \$3.4 billion in Milan, but this leaves a lot more to be done. 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 current funding pledges from 2013 come to an end. This will be an important opportunity for the UK to increase its funding commitments to address malnutrition and to ensure that the world is serious about ending malnutrition by 2030.

DFID's nutrition programmes

The UK is a leading global donor for nutrition. At the 2013 N4G Summit, the UK government committed an additional £375 million for nutrition-specific programmes up until 2020, bringing its total nutrition-specific spending to £855 million. It also committed an increase to its nutrition-sensitive spending by £604 million, bringing the total to £2.127 billion by 2020. In October 2017, DFID published its [Global Nutrition position paper](#) setting out how these resources would be used. From this and other recent DFID publications such as its [Economic Development Strategy](#) and [Bilateral Development Review](#), it is clear that nutrition continues to be a priority.

However, there is a risk that the proportion of money spend on DFID's bilateral (government-to-government) nutrition programmes could reduce. Nutrition is being integrated into programmes that also address other aspects of poverty reduction, including agriculture, education, and broader health services. While a holistic view of tackling poverty is to be applauded, it is vital that the quality and focus of nutrition programmes could suffer.

Changing priorities for UK Aid

Wider changes in the Government's approach to international development could also make a focus on nutrition harder to achieve. As Brexit looms, the Government has been seeking to define the role of 'Global Britain' on a world stage, and as part of this, reconsidering what UK aid is for. Last month, Prime Minister Theresa May [said that aid must be in the UK's national interest](#), supporting countries to grow their economies, create jobs and fight insecurity. However, it is no-one's interest if aid does not stay focused on poverty eradication, and on reaching those with the worst access to health and nutrition. The Government will set out its plans at its Spending Review in January 2019. The Prime Minister described her new priorities as "a fundamental strategic shift in the way we use our aid programme". This poses a real risk that vital human development programmes, like those that address malnutrition, could be cut.

What must happen now?

It is therefore vital that, as the new spending priorities of Government and of DFID are decided, the Secretary of State Penny Mordaunt maintains its strong focus on human development, including its nutrition programmes. To ensure that the UK Government maintains its resolve in the fight against malnutrition, public support and political pressure will be needed, both now, as spending plans are being developed, and in the run-up to 2020.

Parliamentarians must understand the risks posed to effective nutrition programmes by changing UK aid priorities. This month, we would like you to visit your MP and ask them to urge the Secretary of State to ensure that sufficient funding is provided to deliver DFID's specific commitments on nutrition. DFID must fully disburse its 2013 N4G pledge by 2020 and also be prepared to substantially increase its resources for nutrition in 2020.

Take action

Please arrange to visit your MP this month. Explain why nutrition is so important for child development, and how nutrition programmes and Government priorities are changing. Please ask your MP to write to Secretary of State Penny Mordaunt, urging her to ensure that DFID continues to provide adequate funding to meet global nutrition goals.

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