

# NUTRITION FOR GROWTH:

THE INTERNATIONAL COALITION FOR ADVOCACY ON NUTRITION (ICAN) UK'S RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE UK GOVERNMENT



## Introduction

Nearly half of all deaths of children under five are attributable to undernutrition.<sup>1</sup> Malnutrition is a hurdle right at the start of a child's development. By getting the right nutrients, children grow their bodies and brains. Good nutrition builds strong immune systems, improves educational performance, unlocks economic potential and gives children the best chance at living their best possible life. The 2020 Global Nutrition Report describes how 'malnutrition persists at unacceptably high levels on a global scale'.<sup>2</sup> Prior to the pandemic, despite some good progress, 144 million children under the age of five were stunted (too short for their age), which causes irreversible physical and cognitive damage to children and 47 million children were wasted (too thin for their height).<sup>3</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic is likely to slow progress and risks pushing more children into malnourishment. Despite a strong position as a global leader in tackling malnutrition, the UK government's current commitment to nutrition expires in 2020. There is no commitment for 2021 onwards. The International Coalition for Advocacy on Nutrition (ICAN) UK recommends that the UK government makes a renewed financial commitment to nutrition in advance of the Tokyo Nutrition for Growth 2021 Summit. This document reflects an update to ICAN UK's '*Nutrition: The Key to Unlocking UK Aid's Impact*'. The policy recommendations in that document remain current.<sup>4</sup>

## The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the risk to progress

The global COVID-19 pandemic is having a severe impact on rates of malnutrition. While data collection is difficult, it is estimated that between 14 and 80 million people may become malnourished due to the impacts of the pandemic.<sup>5</sup> An additional 6.7 million children may suffer from wasting, with those children concentrated in areas already struggling with a high burden of malnutrition such as south Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>6</sup> Up to 487 more children per day are predicted to die of wasting in 2020 than was predicted before the pandemic.<sup>7</sup>

The World Food Programme projects the number of those experiencing food insecurity, which contributes to hunger and malnutrition, could almost double this year to around 265 million due to the indirect impacts of COVID-19 on the production, distribution, access and affordability of food.<sup>8</sup> This risks a hunger crisis developing and further and future impacts on malnutrition.

It is clear that action to tackle malnutrition is more crucial than ever. The UK government has been quick to address emerging crises through announcing an aid package to ensure the world's poorest are protected from coronavirus and famine on the first day of the new Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO).<sup>9</sup> Whilst responding to crises is vital, to have long-term impact the UK must ensure there is sustained and predictable investment in nutrition in order to build resilience – this essential building block will help prevent future crises and ensure maximum value for the UK aid budget.



Display of nutritious produce by farmers in Mashonaland Central, Zimbabwe as part of DFID/ FAO Livelihood and Food Security Programme. Photo: World Vision 2016



Children playing in Katala, North Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo.  
Photo: Kieran McConville / Concern Worldwide

## UK legacy and leadership

UK aid has an excellent record for improving children's health and saving lives through an evidence and value for money based approach, such as funding access for the most vulnerable to high impact nutrition services.<sup>10</sup>

In 2013, the UK hosted the first Nutrition for Growth (N4G) Summit, leading other governments, philanthropists and civil society to raise £17 billion — of which the UK contributed £1.25 billion in new investments — to combat malnutrition.<sup>11</sup> This summit galvanised world leaders to generate a lasting legacy to build a safer, healthier and more prosperous world by spearheading global action to tackle malnutrition.

UK leadership has also brought others to the table and catalysed commitments from donor governments and the governments of countries with a high burden of malnutrition, as well as actors across the private sector and civil society.

Globally, the UK is among the most respected donors to nutrition with a strong track record of impact. The Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) confirmed that the UK surpassed its goal to reach 50 million people by 2020 through its nutrition programmes and that in countries where UK aid is working on nutrition, long term decreases in stunting have been made.<sup>12</sup> This significant achievement would not have been realised without strong and sustained financing for proven high impact nutrition interventions. Despite the UK's legacy, recent reductions in financing for nutrition are concerning.<sup>13</sup> With COVID-19 set to undo years of progress, the UK government must not drop the ball now.

## Tokyo Nutrition for Growth (N4G) – The Opportunity

The UK began the N4G initiative alongside Japan and Brazil in 2012, hosting the inaugural summit the following year. In 2017, Japan committed to host the next N4G Summit in Tokyo in 2020 but COVID-19 has forced the postponement of the Summit to December 2021. The summit provides a crucial opportunity to galvanise world leaders, including the UK government, to end the human and economic catastrophe of malnutrition and to take action to meet global targets outlined in the SDGs<sup>14</sup> and the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition.

For the global ambition of N4G to be realised, and in order to encourage other stakeholders to recommit to tackling malnutrition, the UK should look to pledge in advance of the main summit. It has played a crucial role in the establishment of the process and supported the Government of Japan to create the momentum and framework for N4G 2021. A strong UK commitment, in line with ICAN UK's recommendation (set out below), would ensure the UK continues to lead and encourage other donors, national governments and other stakeholders – extending further the impact of UK investment. Moreover, with the UK's nutrition commitment expiring in 2020, there is a cliff-edge in financing. An early commitment would enable the continuation of investments, without a break in funding cycles, to ensure efficient delivery of FCDO's nutrition programming.

An ambitious UK commitment in advance of the N4G summit provides an opportunity to build on critical moments for human development before and throughout 2021.

Nutrition is essential to further the returns from the UK’s investment in, for example, Gavi, the Food Systems Summit and the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26). These areas are mutually dependent – none of them will deliver sustainable change without each of the others being well funded and supported.

A bold nutrition pledge is crucial to unlock the health, development and economic potential of millions of people living in poverty worldwide, while multiplying the impact of the FCDO’s wider international development and diplomacy agenda.

### The International Coalition for Advocacy on Nutrition (ICAN) UK’s recommendations to the UK government for N4G

#### Nutrition-Specific

The UK should commit to continue its ambitious, impactful and effective nutrition specific programming between 2021 and 2025. This means investing, at a minimum, £600 million over the same period, equivalent to a minimum of £120 million per year. This funding would go to programmes that directly target the reduction of malnutrition and include:

- The prevention of micronutrient deficiencies through supplementation, fortification and deworming.
- Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) including prioritising, protecting and promoting breastfeeding and relevant complementary feeding.

- The prevention and treatment of acute malnutrition including through equitable access to Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Foods (RUTF), and integrated and simplified treatment protocols.
- Integrated and coherent efforts to prevent overweight, obesity and Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs).

These ‘best buy’ interventions considerably improve nutrition at the critical windows of opportunity to promote survival, growth and development throughout the lifecycle.

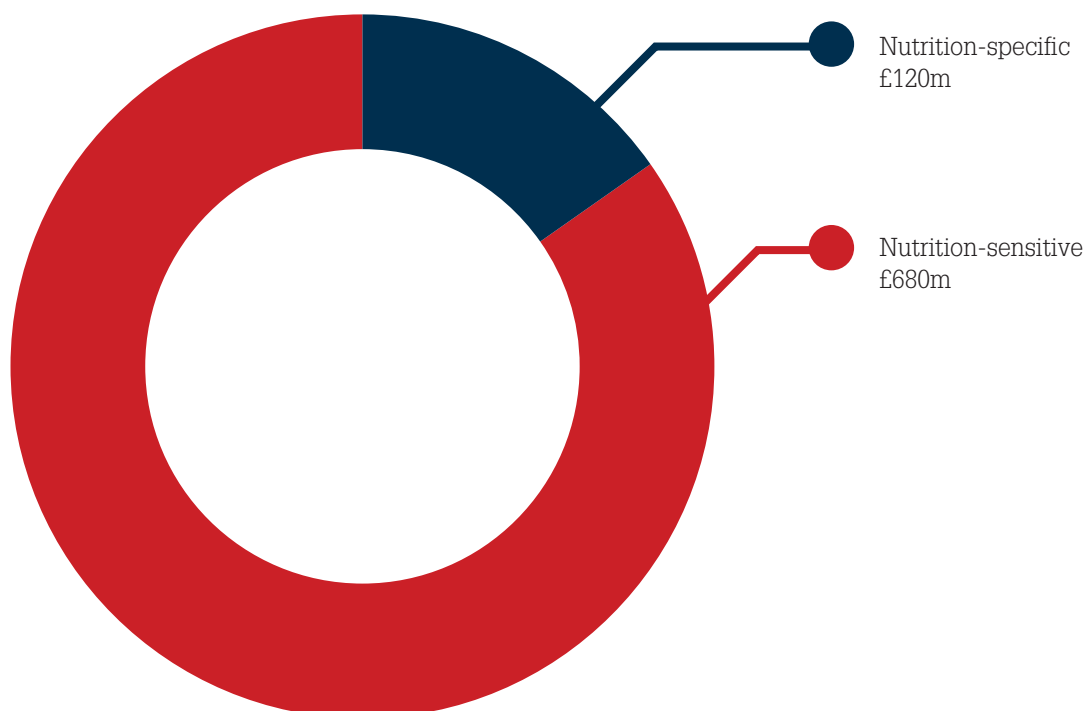
#### Nutrition-Sensitive

Along with this vital focus on nutrition programming, fully integrating nutrition across other FCDO programming will help to accelerate impact. It should ensure that, at a minimum, £3.4 billion of nutrition relevant programming is tailored to tackle the underlying causes of malnutrition (equivalent to £680million per year). This is money already being spent on other Official Development Assistance (ODA) objectives that can be more impactful if nutrition objectives are added. In particular, the FCDO should look to do this through programmes focused on climate-sensitive food systems, health, economic development, education and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). This can be done through the adoption of the policy marker for nutrition across the FCDO’s portfolio, the technical leadership of FCDO Nutrition Team, the development of a needs and evidence-based nutrition-sensitive investment case.

#### Impact

The UK should recommit to reach over 50 million children, women, and adolescent girls with nutrition relevant programmes by 2025, in line with the impact achieved to date on current spend.

Nutrition spend per year between 2021-2025 in millions





Women and children during a nutrition class in Sylhet, Bangladesh. This work was funded by UK-Aid. Photo: Tom Merilion / Save the Children

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**The International Coalition for Advocacy on Nutrition (ICAN) was established in 2013 following the first Nutrition for Growth (N4G) Summit. It includes a broad array of international NGOs, advocacy organisations and foundations united around the shared goal to save and improve lives through better nutrition. Through ICAN, member organisations collaborate on advocacy efforts focused on securing political and financial commitments to end malnutrition in all its forms everywhere. The UK working group of ICAN (ICAN UK) focuses specifically on improving the UK's role in addressing global malnutrition.**

**Cover photo:** Mehamed's family only had barley to grow their farm, which limited their income as well as their diets. Now, thanks to Concern, they grow potatoes, as well as apples, and earn enough for Mehamed and his siblings to go to school. Photo: Jennifer Nolan / Concern Worldwide