

Stocktake of UK aid for nutrition

FROM THE INTERNATIONAL COALITION FOR ADVOCACY
ON NUTRITION (ICAN UK)



RESULTS



Introduction

Malnutrition contributes to around half of all under-five deaths.ⁱ Malnutrition is a hurdle right at the start of a child's development. It can also be a huge barrier to a person's economic ability, stunting both their physical and cognitive development. Good nutrition builds strong immune systems, improves educational performance, unlocks economic potential and gives children the best chance at living their best possible life.

To deliver impact on malnutrition, it is essential that a broad package of nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive programmes have the resources required. The UK has played an active role in tackling malnutrition since founding the Nutrition for Growth (N4G) initiative, alongside Japan and Brazil, and hosting the first ever Nutrition for Growth summit in 2013.

This document is a stocktake analysis of the UK ODA spending and projects on nutrition interventions. The main findings show that:

- Nutrition financing was disproportionately impacted by the cut to UK ODA in 2021.
- If the UK's 2021 N4G Commitment is a ceiling, then future years will see further reductions in spending.
- If 0.7% GNI to ODA is restored and applied evenly across current portfolios, nutrition financing will still lag behind pre-cut disbursements.
- The UK ODA cut severely affected funding and amount of nutrition programmes, especially nutrition-specific interventions.

- Nutrition-sensitive spend is low across key sectors including climate, health, economic development, agriculture and WASH.
- There is a major gender gap between nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive programmes, despite malnutrition disproportionately affecting women and girls.ⁱⁱ

This stocktake builds on previous policy reports from the International Coalition for Advocacy on Nutrition (ICAN), setting recommendations to the UK Government.ⁱⁱⁱ

The UK's impact in tackling global malnutrition

UK leadership on nutrition

UK aid to nutrition helped to transform global approaches. By convening and leading the first Nutrition for Growth (N4G) Summit in 2013, it enabled widespread commitments from a range of actors, helping to raise £17 billion to combat malnutrition.^{iv}

The UK's own commitment led to an important increase in its ODA (Official Development Assistance) expenditure on nutrition. UK disbursements to nutrition-specific investments rose from \$56.6 million in 2012 to a peak of \$189.6 million in 2017. Nutrition-sensitive investments also rose from \$369.8 million in 2012, peaking in 2020 at \$1,018.6 million.^v Matching ODA disbursement with a commitment to reach over 50 million people with nutrition-relevant programming proved effective, with the target being met before its 2020 deadline.^{vi} In an independent assessment of its approach, conducted by the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI), DFID/FCDO was ranked as green/amber, with positive comments around the targeting and reach of programmes. ICAI also concluded that the DFID/FCDO approach was 'evidence-based with strong potential for impact.'^{vii}

UK aid cuts in 2020 have impacted UK leadership on this issue. The cuts have had a disproportionate impact on UK aid to nutrition, with 2021 disbursements to nutrition-specific investments below 2013 levels (see figure 2), setting progress and leadership back by a decade. This has come at the worst possible time. A combination of climate change-driven crises, economic crises, conflict and the lingering impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have fuelled a rise in hunger and malnutrition. Child wasting is currently impacting 45 million children,^{viii} with an ongoing hunger crisis in parts of East Africa bringing millions to the brink of famine potentially worsening this situation. Stalled progress on child stunting will hamstring future development efforts, with growing concern that the current combination of crises could have negative impacts for years to come.

The UK's N4G commitments

As part of the Tokyo Nutrition for Growth Summit in 2021, the UK Government renewed its nutrition commitment and outlined that it would:^{ix}

- Spend at least £1.5 billion from 2022 - 2030 on nutrition objectives, addressing the nutrition needs of mothers, babies and children, tackling malnutrition in humanitarian emergencies and making sure nutrition is central to the FCDO's wider work over the 8 years to 2030.¹
- Adopt the OECD DAC Nutrition Policy Marker at programme design phase.
- Integrate nutrition objectives across its non-nutrition portfolio.

As evidenced by the below data (Figure 1), the UK's financial commitment was less than both its previous mean annual disbursement, as well as the suggested approach by ICAN UK.^x Whilst the commitment has demonstrated a sense of support for the issue, and provides an important accountability process, it lacked ambition by falling significantly below the aimed-for outcomes and prior spending patterns. It has also solidified the disproportionate impact of the 2020 ODA cuts on nutrition. The mean disbursement 2013-20, when adjusted for hypothetical ODA cuts, would have been approximately \$630.2 million. As of October 2023, that converts to £517.8 million. However, the commitment for the upcoming period is just £187.5 million per year.

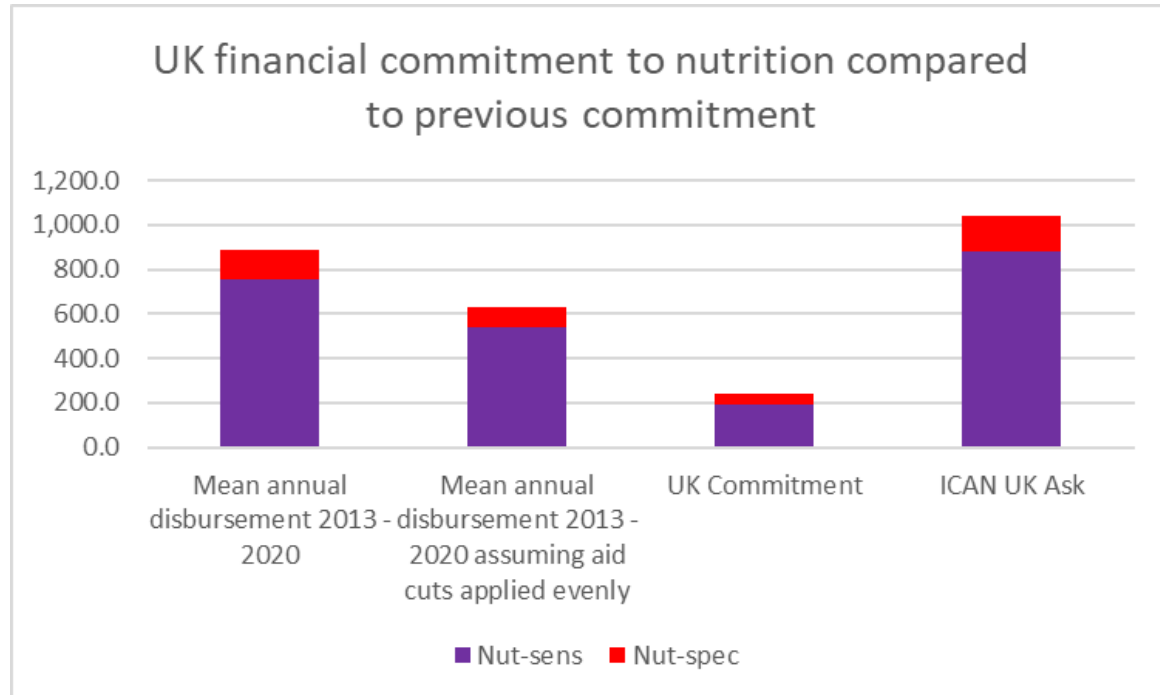


Figure 1: Total UK commitments to nutrition (US\$)

¹ The UK Government did not articulate a breakdown of their commitment between nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive. We have assumed at least 20% of their commitment would be nutrition-specific for the benefit of this analysis, aligned with ICAN UK best-practice approach.

UK ODA spending and projects on nutrition

ODA disbursement on nutrition

The UK's 2021 disbursement of ODA to nutrition was the first since the cuts had been applied. It led to a large decrease in disbursements based on previous years.

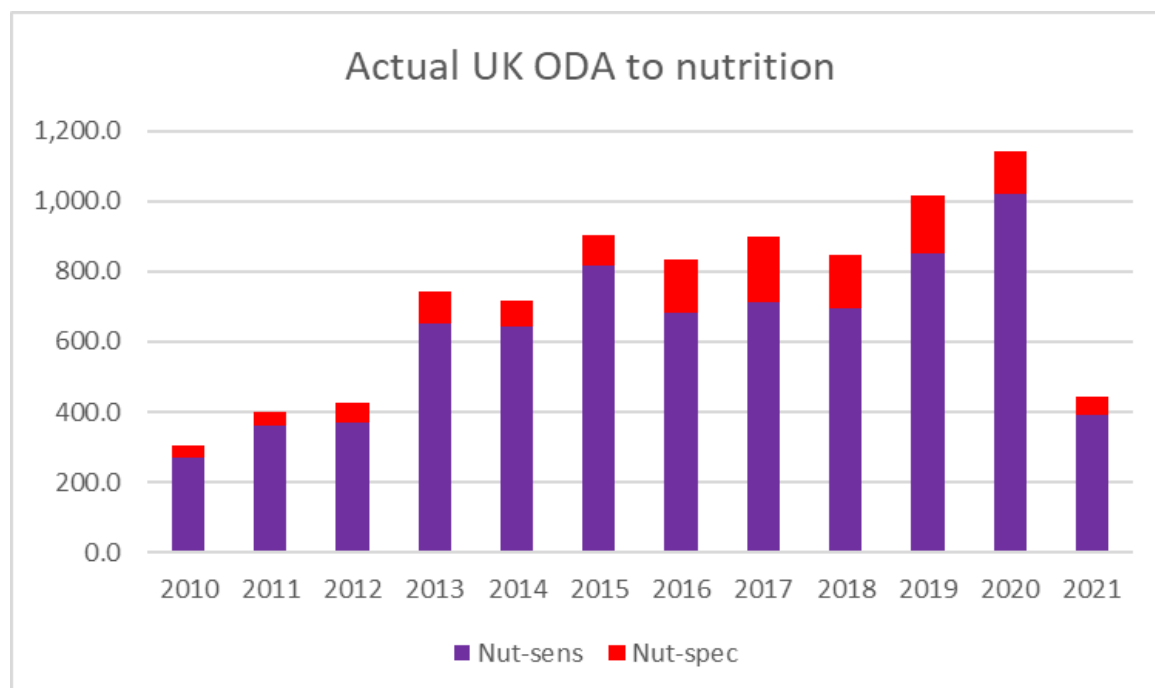


Figure 2: UK ODA to nutrition 2010-2021 (US\$)^{xi}

However, as well as the clear decline in disbursements, further analysis shows that aid cuts were not evenly applied across portfolios, and nutrition was disproportionately impacted (Figure 3).

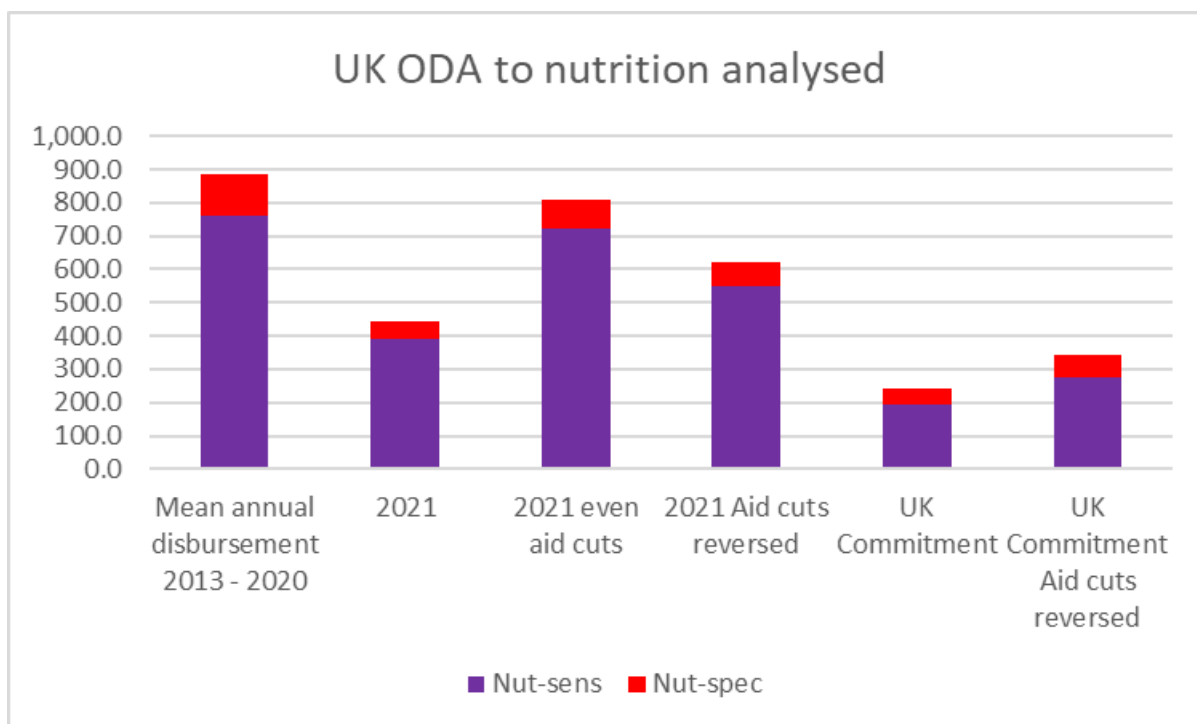


Figure 3: UK ODA to nutrition (US\$)

Key to the above graph

Mean annual disbursements 2013-2020 (US\$): The mean annual disbursement from previous N4G period (2013 - 2020).

2021: The actual ODA disbursement in 2021 (US\$).

2021 even aid cuts: 2020 disbursement multiplied by 0.71 (to reflect drop from 0.7% to 0.5% ODA) to demonstrate what the UK would have disbursed in 2021 if the cut to UK aid were applied evenly across portfolios.

2021 aid cuts reversed: Actual 2021 disbursement divided by 0.71 (to reflect hypothetical return to 0.7%) to demonstrate an even increase would leave nutrition behind pre-cut disbursements.

UK Commitment: The UK commitment made at N4G 2021 for period 2022 - 2030 (mean annual budget).²

UK commitment aid cuts reversed: The UK commitment divided by 0.71 (to reflect hypothetical return to 0.7%) to demonstrate an even increase would leave nutrition commitment below previous disbursements.

² The UK Government did not articulate a breakdown of their commitment between nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive. We have assumed at least 20% of their commitment would be nutrition-specific for the benefit of this analysis, aligned with ICAN UK best-practice approach.

Nutrition financing was disproportionately impacted by UK aid cuts:

Had the aid cuts been applied evenly, the 2021 disbursements would have been approximately \$732.2 million based on the 2020 disbursement (\$1,018.6 million).³ The actual disbursement of \$389.4 million represents a shortfall of around \$333.8 million.

Even if 0.7% GNI to ODA is restored, nutrition financing will still lag behind previous years:

Unless the UK focuses potential increased ODA resources on nutrition, the spending will be lower than previous years demonstrating a need for focused attention.

Future years are likely to see further reductions in spending:

Despite being an overwhelming drop from 2020 levels, the 2021 disbursement was above the average annual spend committed for 2022-2030 at N4G in 2021. This suggests that a further decline in spending is likely unless the UK recommits increased finances at future moments.

There are opportunities to make the UK's current approach more effective. Policy commitments to mainstream nutrition could be impactful, and using the OECD marker more consistently could unlock a greater focus on nutrition-sensitive areas. Both provide an opportunity to increase the quantity and quality of nutrition-sensitive spend. The commitment in itself is an important tool demonstrating a focus on the issue and ensuring accountability is possible. The related openness in data is hugely valuable and allows for detailed analysis, which aids more informed policy.

However, the overall size of the financial commitment is concerning. A further concern is the lack of clarity on nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive spend within the commitment. Towards the end of the previous commitment, FCDO was spending around 18% of its nutrition expenditure on nutrition-specific investments. However, the 2021 disbursement was just 12%. There is a need to increase nutrition-specific spend as well as broaden the impact of nutrition-sensitive investment.

A cut to nutrition spend in the most fragile regions

Fragile and Conflict Affected Contexts (FCAC) present some of the highest rates of malnutrition globally. The FCDO has increasingly prioritised FCAC within nutrition funding between 2018 and 2021. Of the first ten priority countries receiving the most

³ These figures do not take into account inflation and price rises. The purchasing power of each £ has likely decreased meaning the fall in funding is an understatement.

nutrition funding from the FCDO, six were FCAC between 2018 and 2019, eight in 2020 and nine in 2021.^{xii}

The decrease of nutrition funding in 2021 has however considerably reduced FCDO’s support for nutrition interventions in the most vulnerable and fragile contexts affected by conflicts and the consequences of climate change. For instance, the region of Sub-Saharan Africa received the majority of FCDO’s nutrition ODA between 2019 and 2021, but this decreased by 65% between 2020 and 2021.^{xiii}

A general decrease in nutrition projects

From 2017, the FCDO has significantly decreased the number of nutrition programmes, compared to the level of interventions supported by DFID since 2010. In 2018 alone, the number of nutrition-related programmes fell by 15, which represented at the time the greatest annual decrease since 2010.^{xiv} This notable reduction of nutrition programmes continued until 2021, with a total reduction of 61 fewer projects between 2017 and 2021 (Figure 4). Despite an increase of overall spending from 2018, the FCDO has been working on a smaller number of nutrition programmes, while increasing the budget allocated for new and existing projects.

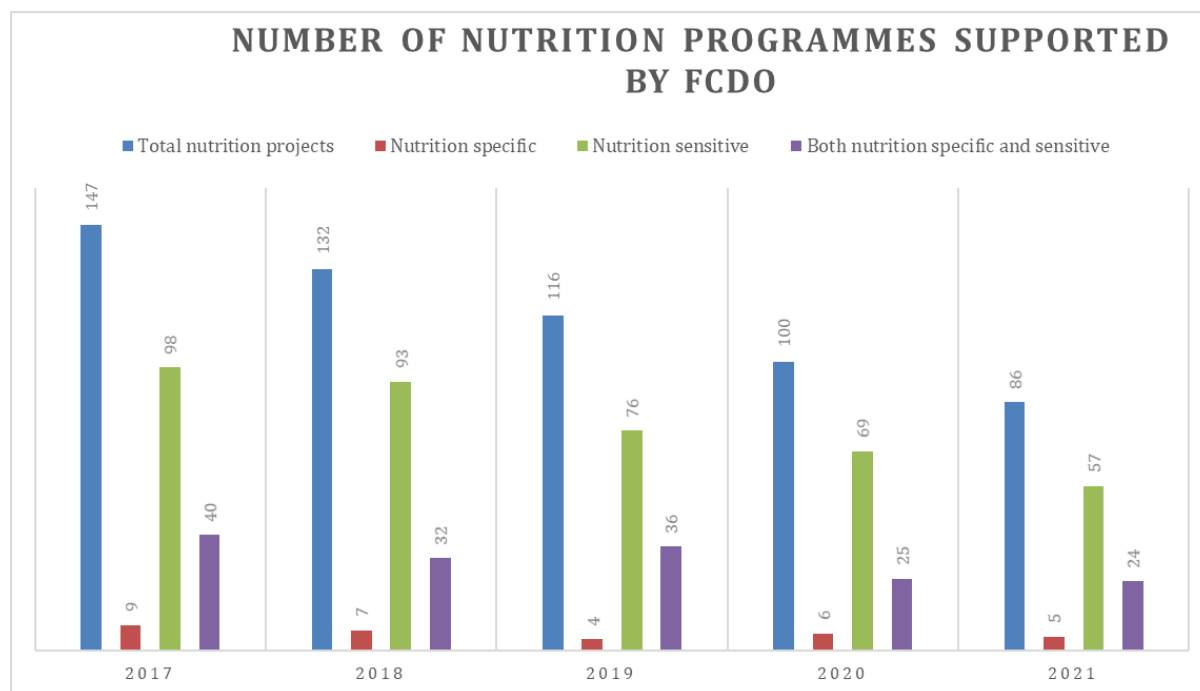


Figure 4. Number of nutrition programmes supported by FCDO^{xv}

Furthermore, the UK ODA cut in 2021 had significant impacts on the level of disbursement to nutrition programmes and resulted in even fewer nutrition programmes supported by the FCDO. In 2021 alone, the total number of nutrition

programmes supported by FCDO and the level of funding both decreased to the lowest number since 2010,^{xvi} marking a concerning step back in the UK Government's leadership in tackling global malnutrition.

This cut to nutrition funding in 2021 seriously affected the possibility of designing, implementing and even continuing existing projects. With a 57.3% reduction to ODA spending on nutrition-specific projects and a 61.8% reduction in nutrition-sensitive projects in 2021, only 12 new nutrition programmes started receiving funding that year.⁴

If the ODA nutrition budget is not restored, this could affect in the long-term what the UK Government has already achieved with its nutrition programmes. Between 2015 and 2020, the UK has successfully reached more than 50 million women, adolescents and children, which the UK Government targeted with nutrition services.^{xvii} An increased in funding to delivery to nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive programmes is needed to sustain this success, and reach those who are the most vulnerable to malnutrition.

Level of disbursement between nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive programmes

This section explores the differences in funding level and number of projects among programmes aimed at tackling the underlying causes of malnutrition (nutrition-sensitive), and nutrition programmes aimed at directly preventing and treating malnutrition (nutrition-specific). The data collected from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) for nutrition programmes offer an additional level of detail about the aim of spending, by categorising nutrition projects with purpose codes. This gives further details on the nature of the FCDO's nutrition-sensitive spending across sectors, including humanitarian, basic health care, water supply, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), emergency food assistance, agricultural development, primary education and others. Due to the cross-sectoral nature of nutrition-sensitive projects, these programmes aim to achieve multi-sectoral objectives, and therefore include several purpose codes.

a) A significant decline in nutrition-specific programmes

There is a considerable disparity of funding between programmes coded as nutrition-specific and programmes coded as nutrition-sensitive (Figure 4). During the period 2019-2020, when the FCDO was spending more on fewer nutrition projects, nutrition-sensitive programmes received an additional US \$284.2 million, while only US\$ 5.7

⁴ According to Development Initiatives, in 2021 there were four new programmes with nutrition-specific components that disbursed funding and eight new programmes with nutrition-sensitive components that disbursed funding.

million was allocated to nutrition-specific programmes.^{xviii} In 2020, spending on nutrition-specific programmes decreased by a quarter, but spending on nutrition-sensitive interventions increased by 19.5% in the same year.⁵ In total, nutrition-sensitive programmes represented 89.3% of overall nutrition spending by the FCDO in 2020. This significant contrast is also reflected in the number of nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive programmes supported by the FCDO (Figure 4).

Nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions are both foundational investments to end preventable deaths and support human capital development. To meet its commitments made in the Ending Preventable Death (EPD) approach paper,^{xix} the FCDO should deliver a greater amount of programmes that directly prevent and treat malnutrition, and therefore increase funding to its nutrition-specific programmes. This includes increasing funding to essential nutrition health services such as supporting breastfeeding, dietary counselling, prevention and management of acute malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies to local communities through Primary Health Care (PHC) services. FCDO has a strong value-add and experience in these areas and the scale up of nutrition-specific interventions would improve the nutrition outcomes of those who are the most likely to become malnourished.

b) A major gap of funding among nutrition-sensitive sectors

Since 2010, nutrition-sensitive spending has principally been coded by the FCDO as humanitarian interventions. In 2020 alone, the majority of the FCDO's nutrition-sensitive spending by sector was allocated to humanitarian interventions, equal to 52.6% of the FCDO's total nutrition-sensitive spending.^{xx} Between 2019 and 2020, funding for humanitarian projects have increased, with US\$ 136.8 million additional fund in 2019 and US\$ 577.1 million additional fund in 2020.^{xxi}

2021 was the first year with a decrease in humanitarian spending since 2012, due to the UK ODA cut.^{xxii} A large proportion of the reduction in total nutrition-sensitive funding between 2020 and 2021 was due to the decrease in nutrition-sensitive spending on both humanitarian and health programmes. However, the OECD DAC's purpose codes give limited visibility to the nutrition-specific aspects of certain humanitarian programmes receiving nutrition-sensitive funding. This limits the possibility to evaluate how humanitarian interventions operated by the FCDO also have an impact on nutrition outcomes.

Nevertheless, there is a major difference of funding allocation between humanitarian programmes and other key nutrition-sensitive sectors, such as agricultural development, WASH and social services. This funding gap has been further exacerbated by the UK ODA cut in 2021. For instance, programmes coded as agriculture and food security received US\$ 85.8 million in 2019 and only US\$ 18 million

⁵ FCDO's spending on nutrition-sensitive interventions increased from US\$872.7 million in 2019 to US\$979.5 million in 2020.

in 2021 (Figure 5). This alarming decrease of funding allocated to these essential programmes will severely impact the FCDO’s progress in successfully ending all forms of malnutrition by 2030.

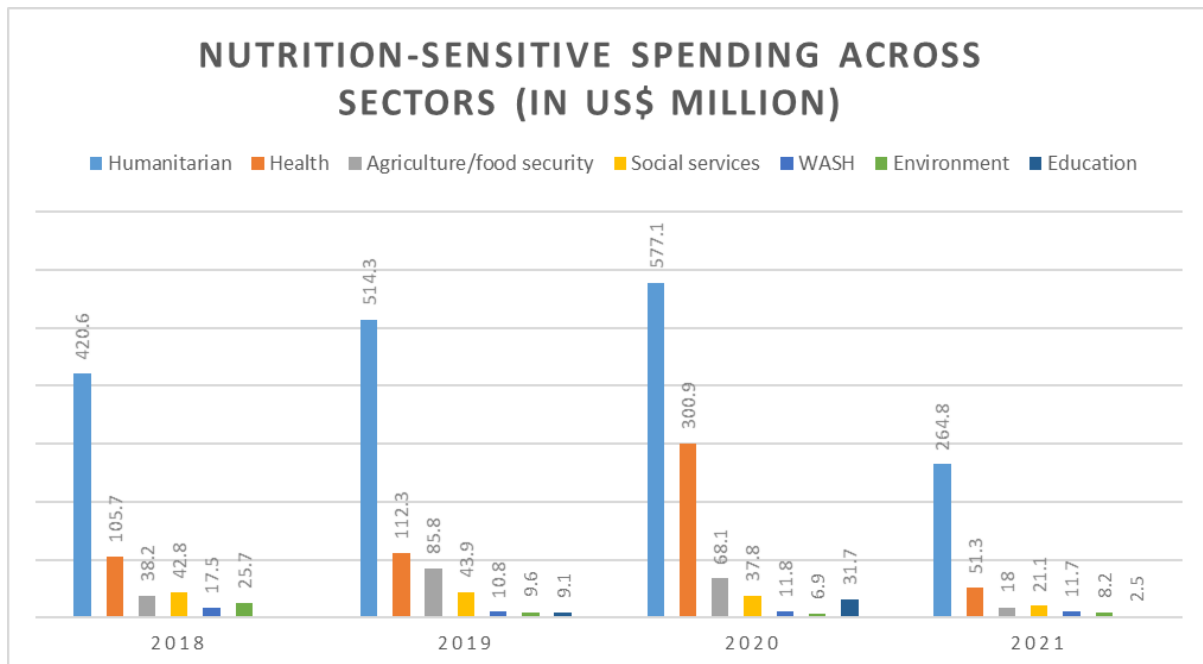


Figure 5: Nutrition-sensitive spending by the FCDO across development sectors (in US\$ million)^{xxiii}

Moreover, given the impact of climate change on nutrition outcomes, ensuring that climate change adaptation programmes are nutrition-sensitive is paramount for tackling a major cause of malnutrition. Between 2010 and 2021, 17% of FCDO’s programmes with International Climate Financing (ICF) spend were also nutrition related, but only 5% of FCDO’s ICF spend contained nutrition objectives in 2021.^{xxiv} The Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) has recommended that the FCDO ensures that all agriculture programmes and investments are monitored for nutritional outcomes and have an integral focus on climate change.^{xxv}

Nutrition-sensitive programmes across development sectors recommended by ICAN UK^{xxvi} (including climate, health, economic development, education, and WASH) should be further prioritised by the FCDO, to systematically engage with nutrition work across key interventions and moving much closer to tackling the underlying causes of malnutrition. This includes integrating nutrition-sensitive objectives and outcomes in other development programmes, by using the OECD policy marker for nutrition across development sectors in the department and by tracking the impact of nutrition-sensitive interventions. In addition, FCDO teams should use and implement existing guidance and toolkits to enable the increase in nutrition sensitivity across sectors, and maximise the efficiency of ODA budget.

c) Nutrition funding for gender-sensitive interventions

To make significant progress in tackling the underlying causes of malnutrition, the FCDO should ensure that nutrition objectives are mainstreamed across sectors, where they can have an impact while prioritising those who are the most vulnerable.

More than 1 billion women worldwide experience at least one form of malnutrition, with higher rates of anaemia, overweight and obesity than men.^{xxvii} Malnutrition disproportionately affects women and girls and has dramatic impacts on pregnant and breastfeeding mothers. It is estimated that the number of acutely malnourished pregnant and breastfeeding women increased by 25% between 2020 and 2022) in 12 countries that are hard hit by the current food and nutrition crisis.^{xxviii} Addressing malnutrition in women and girls is therefore a priority to support the commitments of the FCDO Ending Preventable Death approach paper and the Women and Girls Strategy. This means that the FCDO should ensure that nutrition programmes are also gender-sensitive.

Tracking nutrition integration across FCDO's development programmes has proven its effectiveness in measuring the gender-sensitivity aspect of nutrition interventions. In 2021, FCDO screened its programmes using the OECD DAC gender equality policy maker for the third consecutive year, and resulting data shows that the proportion of FCDO's nutrition spending marked relevant to gender equality remains consistent.^{xxix} However, despite the great proportion of FCDO's nutrition-sensitive spending that are gender relevant, a significant gap has been found for nutrition-specific programmes. In 2021, 83% FCDO's of nutrition-sensitive spending was gender relevant, but only 42% of nutrition-specific spending was gender-relevant, compared to 64% in 2020.^{xxx} This major gap between the gender aspect in nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive programmes must be urgently filled, with increased gender relevance in approach.

Recommendations

- Given the disproportionate impact of UK ODA cuts on nutrition, and the future outlook suggesting further reduced spending, the FCDO should increase its financial support to nutrition, and should purposefully target any increases to the ODA budget onto investments in nutrition.
- The FCDO should increase nutrition-sensitive spending in key development sectors, in order to move much closer to tackling the underlying causes of malnutrition. Based on previous achievements and best practices from DFID,^{xxxii} this has previously included:
 - 64% of humanitarian spending to be nutrition-sensitive
 - 31% of health spending to be nutrition-sensitive
 - 30% of agriculture and food security spending to be nutrition-sensitive
 - 27% of social services spending to be nutrition-sensitive
 - 23% of WASH spending to be nutrition-sensitive
- The FCDO should increase funding for nutrition programmes that are climate-sensitive, and integrate more nutrition-sensitive objectives into climate change projects.
- The FCDO should increase gender policy objectives in nutrition-specific programmes as much as possible.
- The FCDO's heads of teams should ensure that their programmes integrate nutrition objectives in projects related to climate change, health, economic development, agriculture, education and WASH. This includes:
 - Using the OECD policy marker on nutrition,
 - Implement available guidance and toolkits and provide training to enable the increase in nutrition sensitivity across sectors,
 - Implement ICAI recommendation suggesting all commercial agriculture programmes and investments to be monitored for nutritional outcomes.
- The data presented in this paper has been collected from a variety of sources, many provided and funded by FCDO. This openness creates an ability to ensure accountability of commitments and creates an environment for improved policy decisions. As such, ICAN UK acknowledges this transparency and recommends the FCDO to regularly publish ODA budgets and disbursements across the department. This includes focused analysis on nutrition expenditure and cross-departmental development results and country priorities.

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