



House of Commons
International Development
Committee

**DFID's results in
nutrition Review:
report from the
Sub-Committee on
the work of ICAI:
Government response
to the Committee's First
Report**

**Third Special Report of
Session 2021–22**

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The International Development Committee

The International Development Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Department for International Development and its associated public bodies.

On 1 September 2020, DFID and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office were merged to form the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). The Committee remains responsible for scrutiny of those parts of FCDO expenditure, administration and policy that were formerly the responsibility of DFID.

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Third Special Report

The International Development Committee published its First Report of Session 2021–22, [Assessing DFID's results in nutrition Review: report from the Sub-Committee on the work of ICAI \(HC 103\)](#) on 13 July 2021. The Government response was received on 22 September 2021 and is appended below.

Appendix: Government Response

Introduction

1. We welcome ICAI's positive assessment that UK nutrition programmes have generally been delivering against their objectives. This achievement will have an impact in improving nutrition and tackling malnutrition. However, work is still to be done to improve data gathering on nutrition, both centrally and in recipient countries. Following the expected completion date of September 2021, we would welcome an update on the progress made in implementing ICAI's recommendation on effective data use by 31 October.

We welcome the IDSC's recognition that UK nutrition programme delivery has been delivering against objectives. We agree more needs to be done to improve data gathering and are currently developing guidance and tools to support the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of nutrition relevant FCDO programmes. More broadly we are working with partners and through international frameworks to promote improved use of data both at country level and globally. We will provide an update on progress against ICAI's recommendation on effective data use by 31st October.

2. We welcome the good results that UK aid programmes have achieved in reaching some of the most marginalised people within the target groups for nutrition support. This work is often particularly difficult and hazardous, especially in conflict zones. We also welcome the Government's acceptance that further steps should be taken to make sure no one is left behind in the provision of nutrition. The steps that have been taken to embed stronger citizen feedback across the FCDO's work is a positive start.

Protecting the nutrition of the most marginalised women and children remains a priority for the UK as part of our commitment to end the preventable deaths of mothers, newborns and children.

Through our partnership with UNICEF, we are working to improve treatment services for acute malnutrition, which primarily affects the most marginalised groups. The partnership focuses on strengthening supply chains, improving financial sustainability, promoting government-led action, and improving coherence among UN agencies and the international community. As part of this effort, in May 2021, Minister Morton and UNICEF Executive Director Fore co-chaired the inaugural high-level panel on child wasting, to drive political action and push for reform in the way acute malnutrition services are delivered. A second meeting is planned for later this year.

Since the release of the ICAI report the Government has also been working with a technical assistance partner to develop evidence-based guidance for FCDO teams to improve the

design, targeting and monitoring of nutrition and social protection investments to ensure they reach the most marginalised groups. This will be rolled out across the FCDO later in the year.

We also welcome the IDSC's recognition of the steps taken to embed citizen feedback into our work. We are working with technical assistance partners to integrate citizen feedback into new nutrition guidance currently under development. In July we dedicated a meeting of the FCDO nutrition community to citizen feedback, to highlight FCDO beneficiary engagement guidance, promote new online learning material and share positive examples of citizen feedback in nutrition programming.

3. It is vital that the UK and international community do not lose sight of the importance of maintaining support for nutrition while also combatting covid-19 and other diseases. Properly nourished people, especially women and children, are far better equipped to survive infectious disease and to prevent the spread of disease. We recommend that, in response to this report, the Government sets out what action it is taking to improve nutrition in developing countries, and in particular where it forms part of the Government's covid-19 response.

Malnutrition is the underlying cause of 45% of child deaths and 20% of maternal deaths and the COVID-19-related economic crisis and food- and health-system disruptions threaten to exacerbate undernutrition. It is estimated that COVID-19 will result in an additional 9.3 million wasted and 2.6 million stunted children by the end of 2022, in addition to 168,000 additional child-deaths and 2.1 million additional cases of maternal anaemia, as well as losses of US\$29.7 billion in future productivity. In this context, FCDO is taking a range of actions to support the prevention and treatment of malnutrition.

Through its partnership with UNICEF the FCDO is working to strengthen the resilience of services to treat and prevent child wasting (acute malnutrition) in the face of crises and climate change. The programme has supported modelling the impact of COVID-19 on malnutrition. UNICEF has adapted its nutrition programming in light of the pandemic, including testing phone-based and online surveys to understand the impact of COVID-19 on diets. In several countries, treatment guidelines have been modified, and simplified protocols rolled out to allow nutrition services to continue to be delivered throughout the pandemic.

In response to disruptions to traditional nutrition monitoring mechanisms, we supported data and evidence gathering around the indirect impacts of COVID-19 on malnutrition, treatment and prevention services, and global and local policy responses. The synthesis of evidence covers a range of issues, including the impact of the pandemic on breast feeding, diets, availability and price of nutritious food and coverage of services. Our programming also supported the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement to provide guidance to countries and supported the SUN Movement Secretariat to help champion a focus on nutrition as part of COVID-19 responses.

4. One of the less satisfactory features of aid for nutrition is a focus on the amount of food provided rather than on its quality. We were disappointed to hear that many UK programmes are failing to take full account of the need to improve dietary diversity

and quality. To help the Committee to better understand the balance between improving food quality and food quantity, the Government should set out how it considers these elements when undertaking nutrition programmes.

We agree on the importance of quality of food and dietary diversity. Improving access to nutritious diets, making them more available and affordable, are important elements of our approach to nutrition.

In response to ICAI's recommendation to scale up our efforts on improving diets, we have taken steps to further strengthen our capability and focus on this:

(1) We have adopted a more rigorous methodology to monitor nutrition outcomes in our Commercial Agriculture Portfolio Review (CAPR) published in May 2021.

(2) We have been working with external experts to develop FCDO guidance on how to improve diets through our work on agriculture and food systems. This is due to be finalised by the end of 2021.

(3) We have also continued to invest in research, evidence and technology for climate-resilient and nutrition-sensitive agriculture and food systems. For example, UK investment in the Drivers of Food Choice programme is funding research into the different dimensions of food choice in varied low- and middle-income settings, an area with significant evidence gaps. The research, co-funded with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), is designed to produce policy-relevant evidence which can result in a more robust nutrition-sensitive approach to future agricultural programmes, policies and interventions.

(4) Our strengthened focus on food safety is also expected to contribute to food quality outcomes. For example, our Food Safety research programme (with BMGF) is generating new evidence on foodborne disease and practical approaches to increase food safety from seven countries with low- and middle-income contexts. UK support through the Commercial Agriculture for Smallholders and Agribusiness programme strengthens regulatory oversight of safety and quality in the poultry sector in Malawi and safety and quality practices in the dairy sector in Nepal.

5. The evidence we heard indicates there have been improvements in the way UK aid works with the private sector, and we also heard of a specific area of good practice. This is welcome, as commercial agriculture and other private sector players can play a key role in improving nutrition if they are well integrated with the aid effort. However, progress needs to be maintained. We recommend that, in response to this report, the Government sets out in more detail how it will continue to ensure that best practice and lessons learned from cooperation with the private sector in existing programmes are fed through to new programmes.

FCDO, with support from technical assistance partners, is in the process of developing internal guidance on how to ensure its support of private sector investments in agriculture and food systems help improve access to nutritious diets. The guidance draws on existing evidence, good practice and lessons learned from UK and other stakeholders' cooperation with the private sector. It is also expected to set out how to monitor and apply lessons learned in future programming.

With FCDO funding, the Access To Nutrition Initiative (ATNI) holds the world's 25 largest food and beverage companies and several other food companies at country level to account for their actions on nutrition. Its benchmark assesses companies against 'best practice' and encourages companies to improve performance based on ATNI's findings. ATNI also identifies and promotes good practice and learning through its action research, engagement with investors and dialogue with businesses. Over 60 ATNI investor signatories use ATNI's findings to inform their investment decisions.

FCDO has also been engaging with the World Benchmarking Alliance (WBA) to help shape its Food & Agriculture Benchmark, which assesses the performance of 350 food and agriculture businesses on nutrition, social inclusion, and the environment. WBA provides a roadmap for private sector action to transform food systems and help deliver the SDGs and will distill key lessons and insights from companies across the food and agriculture sector.

In future, FCDO's regular Commercial Agriculture Portfolio Reviews are expected to continue to identify important lessons on progress of nutrition integration into our work with the private sector.

6. We heard mixed views on whether the decisions to merge the FCO and DFID and to depart from a stand-alone nutrition strategy would have a positive impact. Nonetheless, it will be vital to make the most of the opportunities offered by the creation of the FCDO to increase the coherence and global focus of the Government's wider approach on nutrition. This should include working across Government to ensure that the development aspects of nutrition policy are given the priority they deserve.

The creation of the FCDO enables us to combine our diplomatic and development assets and expertise in order to further our work on nutrition. We have also been working with DHSC and DEFRA to ensure coherence between our domestic and international work on nutrition.

7. Although the creation of the new FCDO health directorate is a step forward, this must not lead to any loss of focus on nutrition, which is central to success in so many aspects of development. The FCDO must continue to closely monitor progress against the key nutrition indicators and respond swiftly to urgent needs in crisis situations.

We are intending to retain a focus on nutrition within the new FCDO Global Health Directorate. Nutrition will be a key part of our work towards ending preventable deaths. We agree on the need to continue to monitor progress on nutrition indicators and will set out progress in relation to our data in the update to ICAI's recommendation on effective data use by October 31st.

Building on our capability to respond swiftly to crises, and in response to increasing global humanitarian need, including acute food insecurity and malnutrition, the Foreign Secretary launched a UK Call to Action to prevent famine last September, and appointed Nick Dyer as the UK Special Envoy for Famine Prevention and Humanitarian Affairs. The Call to Action seeks to address immediate crises and protect people from slipping into the worst phases of acute food insecurity (IPC 5) through humanitarian financing and diplomacy. It also focuses on building resilience and investing in anticipatory action across the international system, International Financial Institutions, and development actors, to act ahead of crises and avert future food insecurity.

8. The impacts of climate change and other challenges will make it difficult to maintain the positive results from nutrition programmes in years to come. In the medium and longer term, the UK will need to make significant adjustments to its aid programmes to take account of the interaction of climate change and other factors on food systems.

In the Integrated Review the Prime Minister made clear that “In 2021 and beyond, Her Majesty’s Government will make tackling climate change and biodiversity loss its number one international priority”. In line with this ambition, Rule 5 of FCDO’s new Programme Operating Framework (PrOF) stipulates that “all programming... must align with the Paris Agreement... and assess climate impact and risks, taking steps to ensure that no environmental harm is done...”. Internal programme guidance on climate and environment, published in May 2021 supports FCDO staff in designing and implementing programming to take account of the Paris Agreement, Environmental Protection and International Climate Finance (ICF) requirements.

As host nation for COP26, the UK is supporting the COP26 Nature Campaign, which builds on the Just Rural Transition (JRT) initiative launched in 2019. The Nature Campaign aims to promote transition to sustainable land use, agriculture, and food systems, to match the clean technology revolution. As part of the Nature Campaign, the FCDO and CGIAR are co-leading the ‘Transforming Agriculture Innovation Systems for People, Nature and Climate’ initiative. This aims to mobilise and realign investment in agriculture R&D with climate-resilient food systems; develop innovative solutions; build evidence on what works; and foster partnerships to bring technology to scale. CGIAR and FCDO have also developed learning material to build the capacity of FCDO advisers to support design, implementation and performance assessment of climate-smart agriculture projects and programmes.

As noted above, the FCDO is also working with technical assistance providers to develop guidance setting out how UK policy engagement and aid investments in agriculture, economic development, and other areas related to the food system, can help improve access to sustainable and nutritious diets, contributing to reducing all forms of malnutrition. This guidance will be launched across FCDO by the end of 2021, providing a toolkit to integrate support for nutritious diets into programming and policy, where relevant.

9. Given these forthcoming difficulties, we were disappointed to hear from the UN Special Envoy that the UK had been showing a “lack of enthusiasm” for the coming Food Systems Summit. The UK has demonstrated leadership in the past decade, not least in convening similar international gatherings. However, some witnesses suggested that the UK had failed to provide full support to this important event, which has the potential to play a key role in tackling both malnutrition and climate change.

The Government has engaged actively to shape the UN Food Systems Summit. We have focussed our inputs on UNFSS Action Tracks 5 (Resilience to Shocks and Stresses) and Action Track 3 (Nature-Positive Production) as these Tracks most effectively support the UK’s G7 Food Security, Resilience and Famine Prevention objectives, as well our COP 26 Sustainable Agriculture campaign. This included submission of six innovative propositions to these two Action Tracks. Action Track 5 Co-Chairs recognised the UK as an ‘inspirational resilience champion’ and publicly thanked the Government for its leadership.

The UK actively participated in the UNFSS Pre-Summit, with Lord Goldsmith speaking at two high level panels and Minister Prentis addressing a side event on sustainable agriculture and food systems. The UK has also supported partner organisations to contribute to the UNFSS more broadly, including on Action Tracks 1 and 2 around sustainable and healthy diets, and on the cross-cutting theme of accountability. This included their submission of innovative propositions as well as hosting independent food system dialogues and Pre-Summit side events. The UK also participated in the national dialogue workstream of the UNFSS and submitted learnings on inclusive policy making from discussions with stakeholders in the UK between 2018 and 2021. As we move towards the Summit, now confirmed for 23 September, the Government looks forward to taking an equally proactive role.

In our support for N4G in December, we are working closely with the Government of Japan in ensuring the outcomes of the UNFSS are translated into national commitments at N4G. We are also working closely with FAO as co-leads on the Diets & Food Systems thematic session at N4G, building on the outcomes of UNFSS.

10. Given that the evidence we heard made clear the development benefits of UK support to nutrition, we feel it is unhelpful that, months into the relevant financial year, those responsible for such vital programmes still do not know how much has been allocated to support their work. We recommend that, in response to this report, the Government sets out what its expenditure on nutrition programmes will be in 2021–22, and how this has been conveyed to those delivering these programmes.

Due to the seismic impact of the pandemic on the UK economy, the Government has had to take tough but necessary decisions, including the temporary reduction in the aid budget from 0.7% to 0.5% of national income. Officials have been in touch with partners to let them know their revised budget allocations for this financial year and will continue to work with them to deliver on our shared objectives. Final 2021 UK ODA spend will be published as usual in the FCDO's Statistics on International Development report in 2022.