



## **Australian Government**

Australian Government response to the  
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence  
and Trade report:

Food for thought: improving health and nutrition in the  
Indo-Pacific region

DECEMBER 2016

## Government Response

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### **Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade**

*Inquiry into development partnerships in agriculture and agribusiness in promoting prosperity, reducing poverty and enhancing stability in the Indo-Pacific region*

#### **Recommendation 1**

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government:

- develop a stronger regional policy and funding focus under Australia's Official Development Assistance program on both nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive activities; and
- consider announcing Australia's new Indo-Pacific nutrition policy and funding focus at the forthcoming Nutrition for Growth Summit, to be held in Rio de Janeiro in the second half of 2016.

### **Response**

#### Noted

The Australian Government's development policy, *Australian aid: promoting prosperity, reducing poverty, enhancing stability* provides the policy setting for Australia's nutrition investment under the aid program. Nutrition is addressed under both the 'agriculture, fisheries and water' and 'education and health' investment priority areas, recognising that good nutrition is a precondition of human development and economic growth.

Australia's aid program adopts a multi-sectoral approach to nutrition. Nutrition is integrated within health, agriculture, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), education, social protection and humanitarian interventions, as reflected in Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) aid sector strategies. Practical guidance is provided for staff on how to design, implement, monitor and evaluate programs across multiple sectors for nutrition results through operational guidance notes and staff training. For example, the *Strategy for Australia's aid investments in agriculture, fisheries and water* (February 2015) is supported with an operational guidance note on Nutrition-Sensitive Agriculture. This note supports DFAT activity managers to integrate nutrition considerations in agricultural programming. It provides step-by-step guidance from analysis, program design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation, with examples and links to further resources.

The current policy and guidance has resulted in a growing number of both nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive investments in the Indo-Pacific region. Some recent examples are as follows:

- Australia is investing in the Pakistan Partnership for Improved Nutrition that enables Pakistan to scale-up and sustain an effective response to malnutrition by supporting provincial governments to prepare and implement nutrition

plans, and provide nutrition services (such as nutrition supplements) that are known to reduce malnutrition in women and children.

- Australia's Aid Investment Plan for Timor-Leste (2015-16 to 2018-19) prioritises a multi-sectoral approach to nutrition across investments in health, agriculture, market development, and water and sanitation. Under the Timor-Leste 'Farming for Prosperity Program' (TOMAK) technical support is being provided to farmers to grow more nutritious crops to improve health and food security, while increasing their capacity to effectively engage profitable export markets.

To strengthen multi-sectoral linkages, DFAT has recently committed to develop a research program supporting global engagement on women's economic empowerment that will include a focus on childcare standards and delivery of integrated health, nutrition and education by care providers. DFAT will continue to seek opportunities to strengthen its programming focus on nutrition in our region.

The latest Nutrition for Growth (N4G) event was held in Rio de Janeiro in August 2016. The Australian Government recognises the importance of global and regional fora, such as the N4G events, in generating consensus among like-minded donors to respond to the challenges of nutrition. The Government will continue to explore opportunities to build consensus around, and advocate for, improved nutrition policies, including through participation in fora such as the World Health Assembly and future Summits as appropriate. The Government continues to report on both nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive expenditure as reflected in the 2016 *Global Nutrition Report*.

## **Recommendation 2**

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government:

- continue to support and scale up aid innovations aimed at improving nutrition outcomes, including through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's innovationXchange;
- give priority support to innovative aid partnerships and approaches that leverage private sector finance and expertise in support of improved nutrition outcomes; and
- focus the above efforts, in particular, on finding solutions that help address the 'double burden' of malnutrition and obesity in the Pacific region.

## **Response**

### Supported

The Australian Government recognises that innovative approaches and partnerships are essential to address the challenge of malnutrition (both under and overnutrition) in our region. Australia's Official Development Assistance continues to support innovative investments in nutrition that leverage new technologies, approaches and partnerships, including with the private sector. This work is informed by research and learning relevant to country and regional contexts.

For example, in Timor-Leste the Australian Government is funding a pilot project, the Nutrition Collective Impact Program (HAMUTUK) that uses targeted messaging through mobile and wireless platforms to monitor and change nutrition behaviours. In addition, the Tongan First 1,000 Days health promotion program uses SMS messaging and mobile applications to change nutrition behaviours among mothers and pregnant women, and supports the remote management, self-management and treatment of gestational diabetes mellitus. Australia's aid program will draw on lessons learned from these pilots and other research to inform future investments and will seek to bring successful innovations to scale.

In August 2016 the Government announced support for an innovative new partnership in Indonesia through the DFAT Business Partnerships Platform. This partnership aims to support mothers to improve feeding practices and child nutrition and is an opportunity for women entrepreneurs, namely private midwives, to grow small business as distributors of micronutrient powders.

DFAT's innovationXchange is focussed on improving nutrition outcomes and has commenced a global innovation challenge on improving health and nutrition called 'LAUNCH Food'. A challenge statement has been developed in consultation with Pacific communities, industry, academia, whole of government, indigenous and development experts. The challenge seeks food innovations that improve the supply of nutritious food and innovations that encourage people to make good food choices. Such innovations could include new food products, programs, technologies, business and delivery models, alternative models of production, financial instruments or new

communications and marketing approaches that have the potential to improve nutrition outcomes.

To generate ideas for development innovation from the Indo-Pacific region, DFAT partnered with the President's Office of Timor-Leste to execute a regional food innovation workshop. During the workshop, policy, business and development innovations were showcased, with a view to cross-fertilising learning. Thought leaders and social entrepreneurs from Timor-Leste, Papua New Guinea and the Pacific also brainstormed new ideas potentially suitable as applications for LAUNCH Food.

DFAT's innovationXchange has made a commitment to pilot up to six innovations from LAUNCH Food. The process has attracted a network of over 100 companies, governments and organisations with the potential to attract finance beyond the Australian Government's contribution. USAID has already committed US\$400,000 to this challenge.

The Australian Government has been proactive in refocusing its nutrition approach to take into account the double burden of under and overnutrition in the Pacific region. The Government will continue to work with Pacific Island countries in identifying culturally appropriate and innovative solutions, including through LAUNCH Food, to address this challenge.

### **Recommendation 3**

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government commit to strengthening existing whole-of-government co-ordination on nutrition, including through:

- designating a central Australian Government ‘DFAT point of contact’ for all of Australia’s international engagement on nutrition (including through Australia’s aid program); and
- developing an intersectional strategy (e.g. engaging education, agriculture, health, women’s empowerment, climate change, and credit support) to guide all of Australia’s international policy and program engagement on nutrition, including both nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive investments under the Australian aid program.

### **Response**

#### Partially supported

The Australian Government recognises the importance of effective whole-of-government co-ordination on matters of policy. Consistent with a whole-of-government approach to development, DFAT currently coordinates with other government departments for an integrated and collaborative approach to nutrition development under the aid program. This approach draws on the resources of several departments and agencies based on their comparative strengths and areas of expertise with each leading on matters within its area of responsibility. It is considered the most efficient means of drawing on each department and agency’s resources. This also allows stakeholders to directly engage with technical experts on their specific areas of responsibility on nutrition rather than indirectly through a central point of contact. The Government agrees to seek opportunities to strengthen the existing whole-of-government co-ordination on nutrition but does not support designating a central Australian Government ‘DFAT point of contact’.

As outlined in the response to Recommendation 1, Australia’s 2014 development policy, *Australian aid: promoting prosperity, reducing poverty, enhancing stability*, and DFAT’s aid sector strategies provide the policy settings for nutrition investments under Australia’s aid program. These aid sector strategies were released during 2015 with additional guidance to DFAT staff provided through operational guidance notes. Guided by these policies, the Australian aid program adopts a multi-sectoral approach to responding to the double-burden of malnutrition, including in the health, education, agriculture, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), and social protection sectors. The Government does not consider that an intersectional strategy would necessarily provide a higher level of priority, additional resourcing or benefit, to nutrition under the aid program and may disrupt effort already undertaken under the existing policy settings.

#### **Recommendation 4**

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government consider taking a leadership role in co-ordinating an effective donor response to the specific challenge posed by the health 'double burden' in the Pacific region, including through:

- developing strategies to combat malnutrition – both undernutrition and overnutrition – a high priority for the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister for International Development and the Pacific, in particular through regional fora such as the Pacific Islands Forum;
- lobbying strongly for Pacific Island countries to join the Scaling Up Nutrition Movement, to help ensure that the region's 'double burden' becomes a priority in its forward agenda;
- commissioning a major 'stocktake' of nutrition interventions that are currently being pursued by lead aid donors and relevant international organisations in the Pacific region, with a view to assessing how future co-ordination and collaboration on nutrition issues between these key players could be improved and expanded;
- supporting innovative and effective public health education campaigns in Pacific Island countries including creative engagement of local media, to promote healthy dietary choices; and
- strengthening the evidence base to inform future policymaking by:
  - ⇒ driving regional efforts to improve the availability and use of reliable and timely data on relevant nutrition indicators;
  - ⇒ working to strengthen nutrition data collection and analytical capacity among partner countries in the region; and
  - ⇒ encouraging and supporting researchers across a range of disciplines to focus more on nutrition issues in the Pacific region.

#### **Response**

##### Partially supported

The Australian Government will continue efforts to support Pacific Island Countries in addressing the double burden of under and overnutrition in the region. The Government draws on Australia's unique position as the major donor to foster collaboration at a country and regional level to ensure our investments are effective and complement the efforts of other donors. This includes support to the implementation of the Pacific Non Communicable Diseases (NCD) Roadmap which was endorsed by Pacific Islands Forum Economic Ministers and Pacific Health Ministers in 2014. A key strategy of the Roadmap is to reduce the consumption of unhealthy food and drinks linked to obesity, diabetes, heart disease and other NCDs through targeted taxes, better regulation and improved public understanding of drivers of NCDs.

Australia collaborates with key development partners such as the Pacific Community, the World Health Organization, UNICEF, the World Bank, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the Asian Development Bank and the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade on nutrition, health, education, water and sanitation, agriculture and fisheries in the Pacific – each taking the lead on different aspects of development to address the challenges which cannot be managed by any one partner. For example, FAO is coordinating development of a Global Action Plan for accelerated action to address food and nutrition challenges facing Small Island Developing States (SIDS) – in response to adoption of the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (S.A.M.O.A.) pathway at Apia in September 2014.

As a member of the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement, the Australian Government is supportive of Pacific Island Countries joining the movement where it aligns with a country's development priorities, resources and capacity. For example, Australia supported Papua New Guinea (PNG) to officially join the SUN Movement in April 2016 in alignment with its nutrition strategy.

Australia supports Pacific Island Countries to implement effective public health education campaigns. For example, in Solomon Islands, Australia's assistance to the Ministry of Health and Medical Services includes nutrition training for health workers and health promotion campaigns. In Tonga, the First 1000 Days program provides public outreach that includes breast feeding, nutrition and physical activity counselling. The LAUNCH Food challenge should also stimulate innovative ideas for public health education campaigns to promote healthy food choices in the Pacific.

The Australian Government recognises the importance of reliable and timely data to support evidence-based decision-making and will continue to support activities to strengthen the evidence base for nutrition responses in the Pacific. For example, Australia provides bilateral program support for health information systems in Tonga, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Samoa. In Samoa, Australia funded a Demographic Health Survey module on child under-nutrition (2014) which was the first national survey on child under-nutrition in Samoa since 1999. The Australian Government's innovative partnership with Bloomberg Philanthropies under the Data for Health initiative is working in both PNG and the Solomon Islands to improve data collection and to help governments use data to improve the targeting of health services. Regionally, Australia is supporting the development of the Healthy Islands Monitoring Framework for reporting to the Pacific Health Ministers on progress towards the Pacific's Healthy Islands Vision. This includes nutrition indicators and is aligned to the Sustainable Development Goals.