Within health and agriculture policy, nutrition is an elevated development priority but receives little funding

Australia’s government has not developed a separate strategic framework for nutrition policies. It considers nutrition as a development challenge that is linked to its major policy priorities such as health and agriculture. Accordingly, nutrition is integrated into both the health and agriculture strategy documents. The ‘Health for Development Strategy 2015-2020’ refers to nutrition as a crucial “pre-condition for good health” and combines it with its water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) strategic priority area. It is mentioned under the priority area “Investments in improved access to WASH and nutrition”. This focus area emphasizes nutrition during the first 1,000 days of life for all children and for girls additionally during adolescence.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) reinforce this emphasis with two operational guidance notes, ‘Nutrition in Australia’s aid program’ and ‘Nutrition and health in Australia’s aid program’, published in 2015. DFAT also published a report in 2015, ‘A window of opportunity: Australian aid and child undernutrition’, that found Australia allocated most ODA to nutrition-sensitive interventions, and that Australia’s nutrition interventions were largely aligned with best practices.

Nutrition is also integrated into the agriculture strategy, ‘Strategy for Australia’s Aid Investment in Agriculture, Fisheries and Water’. Enhancing food, nutrition and water security are identified as major contributors to promoting prosperity, reducing poverty, and strengthening stability in partner countries.

According to data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Creditor Reporting System (CRS), Australia disbursed US$1 million to nutrition-specific projects in 2017. These are projects that are classified under the ‘basic nutrition’ purpose code. Australia’s nutrition-specific development assistance has been in steady decline in recent years, decreasing from US$9 million in 2014.

Nutrition-specific: Interventions that address immediate causes of undernutrition and have the improvement of nutrition (i.e., support for exclusive breastfeeding, supplementary feeding, etc.) as their primary objective.

Nutrition-sensitive: Interventions that address underlying causes of malnutrition and that take into account cross-sector actions and impacts (i.e., improving access to diverse foods).

Australia also reports its nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions to the Global Nutrition Report every second year. For 2016, Australia reported US$16 million in nutrition-specific and US$129 million in nutrition-sensitive contributions.

Australia focuses its nutrition interventions on sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and East Asia, due to the regions’ higher rates of undernutrition. This geographic focus deviates from Australia’s overall concentration on the Indo-Pacific region (39 countries in the Pacific, South-East and East Asia, South and West Asia, and the African East Coast). Australia is involved in the ‘Nutrition for Growth’ initiative and has joined the ‘Scaling up Nutrition’ (SUN) movement.

DFAT leads policy development and decision-making

Nutrition financing policies and decision-making processes are spread across development areas, reflecting Australia’s cross-sectoral perspective. Policy development and decision-making in these fields (e.g., health and agriculture) is led by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and implemented by the respective governmental agencies.