Italy has shown international political leadership on nutrition issues, though funding is low

Nutrition is a component of Italy’s larger focus on agriculture and food security. The Italian Development Cooperation (AICS) aims to adopt a deeply integrated approach to these fields relevant to development.

Italy has demonstrated international leadership in the nutrition sector and has pushed the issue forward at international events. Food security and nutrition were key areas of Italy’s G7 presidency in 2017. The Taormina Leaders’ Communiqué reaffirmed the Elmau commitment to lift 500 million people out of hunger by 2030. It committed support to the United Nations (UN) Secretary General’s call for urgent action in several famine-stricken African countries and committed to raising collective support – including official development assistance (ODA) – for nutrition in sub-Saharan Africa. Despite this, Italy did not make a concrete financial commitment during its G7 presidency.

In the past Italy has shown political engagement around nutrition: In 2012, Italy took part in the G8’s establishment of the New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition. In November 2017, the Italian Ministry of Health, together with the City of Milan, hosted the Global Nutrition Summit in Milan. The Global Nutrition Summit is a high-level meeting on nutrition and food, during which the 2017 Global Nutrition Report was launched, and stakeholders took stock of commitments and progress made to date.

In the framework of its bilateral cooperation, the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS) focuses its nutrition interventions on improving methods of food production, with particular attention given to new technologies. The Italian budget law in December 2017 established a yearly contribution of €500,000 (US$563,000) between 2018 and 2020 to the Milan Center for Food Law and Policy, which focuses on public nutrition policies and which aims to further the nutrition-related objectives of the Agenda 2030.

Moreover, in 2017, Italy established a multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral national working group ‘ITALY-DEC-ADE’ to implement the ‘Decade of Action on Nutrition’, which aims to identify actions and strategies to undertake, under the framework of the United Nations’ decade of action, jointly launched by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO). The Italian Ministry of Health seeks to improve dialogue with international institutions – in particular with the FAO and WHO – to better coordinate cross-cutting actions addressing the triple burden of malnutrition i.e. undernourishment, micronutrient deficiency, and obesity.

Precisely quantifying Italy’s engagement in the nutrition sector is difficult, particularly as Italy did not make a commitment at the 2013 launch of the Nutrition for Growth Summit. Italy also doesn’t participate in the reporting framework set by the ‘Scaling Up Nutrition’ (SUN) initiative to track nutrition-sensitive interventions, nor does it report to the Global Nutrition Report. Although it doesn’t contribute financially, Italy hosted a high-level political meeting of the SUN initiative in Sudan in 2018 and the AICS has on-going initiatives to support the Sudanese population in the poverty alleviation and nutrition sector. According to data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Italy’s funding for basic nutrition (nutrition-specific activities) stood at US$6 million in 2017, up from US$2 million in 2015.

Nutrition policy is shaped by the DGCS and by AICS offices

Priorities are set by the Directorate-General for Development Cooperation (DGCS), within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development (MAECI). Relevant departments include geographic departments and the unit for multilateral cooperation. The Italian ambassador to the UN institutions in Rome (FAO; International Fund for Agricultural Development, IFAD; and World Food Programme, WFP) also plays a key role in defining priorities on nutrition. Within AICS, the ‘Rural Develop-
ment and Food Security’ office is in charge of driving Italy’s policy around nutrition. The government has strong ties with the Rome based UN agencies of the ‘Rome Agri-food hub’: WFP, IFAD, and FAO.