South Korea’s nutrition ODA

Nutrition is a focus of South Korea’s new global health strategy; funding is low but increasing

South Korea has not made nutrition one of its top five priority issues in its overall development policy. However, the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) has identified ensuring the stable supply of key nutrients and creating a self-sustaining environment where communities leverage their resources to adequately supply nutrients as one of its focus areas within its mid-term health strategy for 2016 to 2020. The strategy emphasizes exclusive breastfeeding, preventing and treating malnutrition, community-based nutrition, and supplying essential micronutrients for pregnant women and children.

According to data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), South Korea spent US$5 million on basic nutrition in 2017. US$3 million alone was for a single investment in Afghanistan to support the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) work strengthening maternal and child nutrition. Disbursements in 2017 were lower than in 2016 (US$8 million) but an increase over 2015, when South Korea spent US$3 million.

South Korea does not participate in the reporting framework set by the ‘Scaling Up Nutrition’ (SUN) initiative to track nutrition-sensitive interventions. The country also did not make a commitment to Nutrition for Growth, an initiative where participating countries signed on to a ‘global compact’ to improve nutrition and made a range of international commitments.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs leads South Korea’s nutrition strategy development

South Korea’s nutrition policy is largely defined by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA). The Development Policy Division, within MOFA’s Development Cooperation Bureau, is responsible for nutrition policies. The Multilateral Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Assistance Division manages relations with multilateral organizations like the World Food Programme (WFP).

The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and its International Cooperation Bureau are also engaged in nutrition policy. The ministry’s total ODA budget for food and agricultural projects is KR₩77 billion (US$68 million) in 2019. Its funding request for 2020 is for an increased budget of KR₩85.5 billion (US$76 million).