

World Bank Recommendations: Driving Nutrition Impact at Scale

On behalf of the Multilateral Development Bank Nutrition Financing Advocacy Coalition

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Introduction

The World Bank is the largest source of multilateral finance for development and holds unique influence in shaping country priorities and mobilizing resources toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Yet despite progress, malnutrition remains one of the world's most pressing challenges, contributing to nearly half of all child deaths globally. An estimated [45 million children suffer from wasting](#)—an acute form of malnutrition—and [37 million are overweight, reflecting the double burden of malnutrition](#) in many low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). [Two out of three children under the age of two are not eating a minimally diverse diet](#), and [two out of three girls and women experience micronutrient deficiencies](#), limiting their health, wellbeing, and economic potential. [Malnutrition costs LMICs trillions of dollars each year](#) in lost productivity and human capital potential. Undernutrition undermines children's ability to learn, workers' ability to thrive, and countries' ability to grow their economies. At the same time, shrinking official development assistance (ODA) budgets from key donor markets risk widening financing gaps, underscoring the Bank's responsibility and unique capacity to close these gaps and drive equitable, gender-responsive nutrition investments.

The Bank has grown its leadership as one of the largest funders for nutrition and reported that its nutrition commitments [increased from US\\$12 million in 2012 to \\$2 billion in 2023](#) — though much of this financing is embedded within broader sectors like health, agriculture, or social protection rather than tracked as stand-alone nutrition investments. This growth highlights the Bank's potential to mobilize resources at scale. Ahead of the 2025 Nutrition for Growth (N4G) Summit in March, [civil society called on the World Bank](#) to commit at least \$5 billion in nutrition-sensitive financing annually for fiscal year 2026 (FY26) to FY28 to tackle the global nutrition crisis. The Bank ultimately pledged [\\$5 billion in total for FY25–30](#), or \$1 billion a year annualized — a commitment now considered the floor, not the ceiling, of what is needed. The addition of a [nutrition-specific sub-indicator](#) in the World Bank Corporate Scorecard marks important progress — measuring the millions of people receiving quality health, nutrition, and population services — but sustained attention is needed to ensure it drives financing, integration, and results.

With IDA21 set to begin implementation and \$100 billion in new resources at stake, alongside the Bank's universal health coverage (UHC) pledge to reach 1.5 billion people with access to quality healthcare by 2030 ("UHC2030"), there is an urgent opportunity to embed nutrition across Bank portfolios and processes. While the Bank made its N4G commitment, advocates continue to emphasize that this target should serve as the baseline for scaling up nutrition investments. The Bank's forthcoming Nutrition Strategy provides a useful platform for alignment; although its overall direction is largely established, implementation will determine whether nutrition is fully invested in and mainstreamed across the Bank architecture. Ensuring that the Strategy translates into tangible financing and country-level integration—particularly through primary health care and food systems—is essential to deliver results at scale. In addition, the World Bank's "Jobs" creation agenda can be a catalyst to leverage resources needed for good health and nutrition that are foundational — not optional — to unlock child development, empower people, create jobs, and drive economic growth. The returns are clear: [children who are adequately nourished in the first 1000 days do better in school, earn 20% more in the labour market, and are 33% less likely to live in poverty as adults](#).

Prioritizing Nutrition

Globally, nutrition resources remain fragmented and accountability weak, leading to under-recognition of nutrition's central role in driving human capital, jobs, and resilience. Supporting country-led decision making efforts, which include not only governments and ministries of health and finance, but also communities, civil society, and parliamentarians, will be needed to ensure nutrition programming and services reach all populations equitably. By maximizing resources,

strengthening policy and accountability, and linking nutrition to broader agendas, the World Bank can drive impact at scale.

1. **Maximize Financing for Nutrition:** Despite existing commitments, the Bank's \$5 billion pledge at N4G represents only [a fraction of past investments](#) despite a record-breaking budget for IDA21. Without scaled-up financing, nutrition risks being deprioritized in the Bank's portfolio. The Bank's [UHC2030 pledge](#) to reach 1.5 billion people with quality health services provides a major opportunity to mobilize additional financing for essential nutrition interventions. The Bank has committed to mobilizing \$30 billion in the first year of IDA21 — part of the record \$100 billion replenishment — there is also a critical opportunity to direct resources toward nutrition from the outset. To ensure that sufficient resources are available for countries to meet the needs of their communities, the Bank should:
 - a. Publicly reaffirm that the \$5 billion N4G pledge is a minimum baseline and commit to mobilizing an additional \$2 billion in nutrition-sensitive and nutrition-specific financing. Ensure progress on nutrition financing is regularly tracked and publicly reported at World Bank Annual and Spring Meetings.
 - b. Align nutrition financing with the Bank's UHC target to ensure high-impact nutrition health interventions are prioritized within primary health care (PHC) and UHC and taken to scale to reach those most in need.
 - c. Support implementing countries with the necessary technical assistance to avail themselves of the unused funds of the Resilience and Sustainability Trust to strengthen their health sector.
 - d. Ensure that funding aligns to nationally developed nutrition plans, policies, and priorities. Make funding available to strengthen national systems to coordinate, administer, and track nutrition financing multi-sectorally.
 - e. Ensure that its efforts to reduce nutritional insecurity and malnutrition prioritise those most at risk - especially women and children, as well as low-income households with limited resilience to shocks, displaced populations facing instability and food scarcity, communities and individuals experiencing multiple, overlapping vulnerabilities.
2. **Strengthen People-Centered Policy and Accountability:** The Bank has a key role to play in strengthening policy and accountability for nutrition, and prioritization will be critical to ensure that investments also leverage regional and national strategies, financing frameworks, and budgets. Nutrition must be framed not as an add-on but as essential to achieving national policy goals, including food, climate, social protection, education, economic, agriculture, health, and nutrition plans. In addition, the new Corporate Scorecard nutrition sub-indicator provides an opportunity to track results more systematically, but elevating nutrition politically and operationally is essential for accountability and to signal its importance across all sectors. In an effort to strengthen impact and ensure nutrition commitments translate into measurable results, the Bank should:
 - a. Ensure strong implementation of the IDA21 policy package to deliver on nutrition, including alignment with the Corporate Scorecard nutrition sub-indicator, consistent financing reports, updates on investment impacts, and reinforced country-level accountability and community engagement.
 - b. Define how many of the 1.5 billion people under the UHC target will gain access to essential nutrition services. Ensure these services are tracked and reported, and prioritize high-impact nutrition interventions within PHC to scale coverage for those most in need. We also urge the Bank to consider applying a child lens on its UHC commitment, ensuring early investments to accelerate action towards SDG nutrition targets.
 - c. Enhance the use of the Crisis Response Window Plus (CRW+) to integrate nutrition into crisis prevention, preparedness, and response, especially in fragile and conflict affected settings. Technical support should be expanded to help countries build nutrition into their emergency and resilience plans.
 - d. Strengthen country capacity on nutrition by issuing guidance to World Bank leadership to raise nutrition in dialogues with governments and by providing technical assistance to integrate nutrition into national strategies, financial frameworks, budgets and delivery systems — including co-developing projects that build the workforce, particularly community health workers, to detect and treat malnutrition. In addition, civil society can bring expertise, support, and connections to the communities we serve, and the Bank should strengthen partnerships and work with NGOs in this area as key drivers of development.

- e. Ensure that marginalized voices are meaningfully included in the design, implementation and monitoring of the Bank's nutrition policies and strategies. This includes:
 - i. Co-designing solutions with communities most affected by malnutrition, ensuring their lived experiences shape priorities and interventions
 - ii. Listening to women, children and young people who often hold deep knowledge of what works best in their contexts.
 - iii. Investing in inclusive engagements and social accountability mechanisms that enable safe and sustained participation -especially for those from disadvantaged or underrepresented groups and creating feedback loops that allow communities to engage on nutrition projects and policies over time.

3. **Integrate Nutrition Across Bank Commitments and Initiatives:** Nutrition is cross-cutting, yet it remains inconsistently integrated into the Bank's major commitments and financing levers. It is often viewed narrowly as a health issue, competing with other priorities such as jobs, climate, or resilience. Yet, it is foundational to all these agendas, for no country can achieve inclusive growth, human capital development, or economic resilience without addressing malnutrition. The [Jobs agenda](#), [GFF investment cases](#), the [Agribusiness portfolio](#), and key World Bank sectors like social protection all provide opportunities to systematically embed nutrition into policy, financing, and results frameworks. To strengthen impact and ensure nutrition is consistently integrated across Bank systems and commitments, the Bank should:

- a. Systematically integrate nutrition into the Health Works for People initiative as part of its "Jobs" agenda with clear indicators and technical support to ensure implementation of the UHC target, especially making it explicit that essential health services include nutrition and essential health commodities include Iron/folate/MMS, Vitamin A, and RUTF.
- b. Use the development of the GFF 2026–2030 Strategy as an opportunity to embed nutrition as a core priority, creating a strategic lever to inform and strengthen the upcoming resource mobilization campaign in an effort to leverage more GFF funding for country investment cases.
- c. Leverage the Bank's \$9 billion agribusiness portfolio to improve food security, access to affordable healthy diets, and nutrition outcomes. Identify nutrition as a key outcome of investments, support nutrition-sensitive interventions across food systems, and ensure projects promote a climate-sensitive approach to diversifying food production and reducing post-harvest losses, boosting gender equity and prioritizing smallholder farmers and rural communities.

Conclusion

The global nutrition crisis is urgent and solutions are within our reach. The World Bank has the scale and influence to make transformative progress if nutrition is prioritized, financed, and tracked at levels commensurate with the challenge. The Bank has an opportunity to position nutrition as a foundation for human capital, jobs, and sustainable growth and to leverage the impact that nutrition gains can have on the most vulnerable communities.

