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Title: Reviewing the Evaluation of Nutrition Interventions for South African Children from Conception to 5 years

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In 2014 the Department of Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) contracted an independent company to evaluate nutrition intervention for South African children from conception to 5 years. The Evaluation Steering Committee comprises the Presidency, DPME, The Department of Health, the Department of Social Development, the Department of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries, and UNICEF. The Steering Committee oversaw the operation of the evaluation, commented and approved the reports.

Upon review of the evaluation various strengths and shortcomings were identified. A serious lack of national baseline data and the measurement of nutrition outcomes to evaluate intervention efficacy was identified, motivating the importance of regular national surveys such as the SANHANES. There was a lack of monitoring and evaluation of recognised nutrition indicators such as stunting or obesity of children under 5 years. Focus on food quality within the intervention outcomes was also limited.

The plethora of policies across various departments related to nutrition further complicated the evaluation. Recommendations made were somewhat ambitious, but emphasised that persistence of malnutrition is not being mainstreamed in the Health Agenda of South Africa. An important recommendation was to change the focus of services and communication across relevant sectors to focus more on nutrition promotion, exclusive breastfeeding, complementary feeding, dietary diversity, hygiene education and to help create an enabling environment.