Review Article

# Bio-Fortification in Crops, Recent Approaches, Challenges and Future Strategies: A Review

**Abstract**

Micronutrient deficiencies such as iron (Fe), zinc (Zn), selenium (Se), iodine (I), carotenoids and folic acid affects individuals worldwide, posing significant challenges to human health and development. Malnutrition and hidden hunger continue to be global challenges, particularly in developing countries. Biofortification through plant breeding and genetic

engineering has emerged as a cost-effective and sustainable solution to address these deficiencies. This strategy is particularly beneficial for the health of people with limited access to commercially fortified foods. With a one-time investment and the ability for farmers to propagate seeds at minimal cost, biofortification offers a promising avenue for long-term nutritional improvement. Recent advancements by integrating conventional breeding, genetic engineering and agronomic approaches have made the introduction of biofortified crop varieties by targeting various macro and micronutrients, antioxidants and other bioavailable components possible. Despite its potential, biofortified crops encounter obstacles related to development, distribution, and consumer acceptance. Overcoming these challenges is crucial for optimizing the utilization of biofortified foods and achieving widespread impact in combating malnutrition and starvation worldwide.

Keywords: Biofortification, Genetic engineering, Hidden hunger, Micronutrient, Plant breeding

# Introduction:

Micronutrients, such as iron (Fe), zinc (Zn), selenium (Se), iodine (I), carotenoids and folic acid are crucial for human growth and development because they support several metabolic processes. A large portion of the global population relies on plant-based meals, which are frequently deficient in essential micronutrients (Waters & Grusak., 2008) and frequently fall short of the recommended daily requirements (RDA) for certain micronutrients. One in three individuals struggling with micronutrient deficiency worldwide, also known as "hidden hunger" (FAO, 2013). The definition of hidden hunger is more like an elucidation. The Challenge of Hidden Hunger, the 2014 Global Hunger Index, asserts that: “Micronutrient deficiency, usually known as hidden hunger, is a type of undernutrition that develops when vitamin and mineral intake or absorption are inadequate to support adults' normal mental and physical wellness and development as well as children's excellent health and development. Poor diet, illness or increased micronutrient requirements not satisfied during both stages of pregnancy and lactation are some of the causes.” **(**Von Grebmar et al., 2014). However, incorporating health- related elements and minerals into a meal could be viewed as a tactic to combat malnutrition or address a particular nutritional need (Vlaic, *et al*., 2019). The only way to increase the nutritional value of Agricultural products before harvest in the case of unprocessed food, such as fruits and vegetables, is to adopt superior genotypes or certain

agronomical practices (Kyriacou & Rouphael., 2018). Enhancing the nutritional value of grains through a variety of techniques, such as altering crop agronomic practices, traditional plant breeding and cutting- edge biotechnology alternatives. Since the Sustainable development goals' targets were established, it has been of the uttermost importance. Malnutrition manifests itself in a variety of ways including undernourishment, obesity and overweighing, and dietary-related, non- contagious conditions. The increasing demand for the addition of mineral elements to fresh food articles for consumption by humans has sparked active research with a focus on developing appropriate application techniques. This article encompasses advancements in the biofortification of vegetables, fruits and grains for number of essential minerals, which include magnesium (Mg), calcium (Ca), iodine (I), zinc (Zn), selenium (Se), iron (Fe), copper (Cu) and silicon (Si) which are frequently absent or insufficiently present in human diets. This review intends to describe and bring to light, the most effective agronomic ways to increase the quantity of the evaluated minerals in the cooked form of food articles (grains, fruits, and vegetables) after their perceptive role in human nutrition and physiology of plants.

# What is bio-fortification and why is it needed:

Different strategies are used to alleviate micronutrient malnutrition; the most prevalent are product fortification and medical supplementation (Buturi *et al.,* 2021). Biofortification, which involves using plant breeding to improve micronutrients, is one approach in addressing hidden hunger and deficiencies in micronutrients. We use the term "biofortification" to describe a genetic modification of a crop variety to increase the level of specific micronutrients in the edible part of the crop, in contrast to "fortification," which is the addition of nutrients, such as folic acid to wheat flour or iodine to salt. Agronomic biofortification, which involves adding nutrients to soil or leaves to boost their concentration in food (De Valença *et al*., 2017). Conventional crop breeding and selection have been mostly responsible for biofortification, while direct genome modification has also been used, as in the case of Golden Rice (Ginkel & Cherfas, 2023).



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| * CONSUMPTION OF DIFFERENT

DIVERSIFIED DIET FOOD GROUPS* PREVENT NUTRITION

DEFFICIENCIES |
| FOOD •ADDITION OF NUTRITIENTS TOCOMMONLY CONSUMED FOODFORTIFICATION •COSTLY |
| * CROPS WITH IMPROVED

BIOFORTIFICATION MICRONUTRIENT CONTENT* COST EFFECTIVE AND FEASIBLE
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|  |

Fig .1 Three strategies to address micronutrient malnutrition

Globally, over two billion people suffer from undernutrition, with the poor being especially affected, as they often cannot afford diverse diets that supply adequate levels of essential micronutrients. The micronutrient content of staple crops can be increased by biofortifying them.

The HarvestPlus research program of the CGIAR, which is concentrated on enhancing vitamin A, iron, and zinc in several starchy cereals, root, and tuber crops, has been largely responsible for the worldwide research effort on biofortification. The development of iron- rich beans, cowpeas and millets, zinc-rich maize, rice and wheat, as well as vitamin A-rich bananas,

plantains, maize, cassava, and sweet potatoes by Harvest Plus and its affiliates, is to date (HarvestPlus, 2019).

Biofortified varieties released by Harvest Plus in different regions

80

60

40

20

0

Africa Asia LAC

Fig 2. Graph- biofortified varieties released by HarvestPlus in different regions.

Agronomic and genetic techniques, which can be used via conventional breeding or transgenic techniques, are two various ways to produce biofortified crops (White & Broadley, 2009 and Siwela et al., 2020). Transgenic programs involve biotechnology research which allows the genetic modification of a species to produce a plant with desired characteristics (such as a higher concentration of specific nutrients). Despite the potential for long-term cost savings, this methodology is now the least used because the research and development process is still so sluggish and expensive. In any event, the development of a premium product with greater nutritional content, able to satisfy the new consumer demand, ready to pay for a healthy way of eating, offsets the higher costs associated with the cultivation of biofortified vegetables in developed countries (Timpanaro *et al*., 2020). Furthermore, several nations have strong legal restrictions that prohibit genetically modified organisms (GMOs). In a similar line, it is possible to cross various genotypes in an effort to introduce desired qualities that are present in plants naturally in new cultivars. Traditional breeding using a genetic approach has been done for many years and can produce new kinds with a greater amount of specific nutrients. Finding the needed traits among the genetic resources at hand is the restriction in this instance (Gómez-Galera et al., 2010).

Conventional

Approaches

Genetic

Engineering

Agronomic

Approaches

Increased

Nutrient Variety Selection

Post Harvest

Methods

* Storage Conditions
* Processing Techniques

-QTL and GWAS

-Phenotypic Screening

- Breeding Methods

-Biodiversity Enhancement

-Water Management

-Soil Amendments

-Transgenic Methods

* Gene Silencing
* CRISPER Cas-9

-Crossbreeding and Hybridization

-MAS

**Fig 3:** Various approaches to Crop Bio-fortification (Nagar et al., 2024)

1. **Genetic Engineering Approach:** When a particular micronutrient is not produced naturally in the crops, changes in the necessary characters is not accessible commonly in the readily accessible germplasm, and/or changes cannot be acquired through conventional breeding. Hence biofortification by genetic engineering provides a second approach (Perez-Massot et al., 2013). This method can be used to concurrently target the elimination of antinutrients and the incorporation of promoters that can increase the bioavailability of micronutrients in addition to boosting the concentration of microelements (White & Broadley, 2005) (Garg et al., 2018). This method employs genes from bacteria as well as other species in addition to those connected to different metabolic pathways used by plants (Christou & Twyman, 2004). Transgenic strategies have been used to successfully modify several crops to address micronutrient scarcity and for resilience to climate change (Mandal.et al.,2024).
2. **Conventional Plant Breeding Approach:** The method of Plant breeding is one among the sustainable and cost-effective approaches of biofortification which can enhance the health of impoverished people worldwide (Bouis et al., 2011). This strategy has been utilized for treating micronutrient deficiencies, such as those involving carotenoids, iron, and zinc (White & Broadley, 2005). For the plant breeding approach to be successful, there must be genetic variety in the gene pool. Various studies have divulged that the quantity of minerals and vitamins in diverse crops varies significantly (White & Broadley, 2009). Screening a large variety of germplasms can identify parental genotypes that have elevated micronutrients

concentration, and they could be used in crosses and for the creation of molecular markers to aid marker-assisted selection in breeding and genetic research. To find genotypes and environment interaction (GXE), promising lines must be examined in several different places (Bouie & Saltzman, 2017). Through conventional plant breeding techniques, research has been undertaken on crops to increase essential micronutrients like carotenoids, Fe, Zn, Se, I, and folates.

 + =

Targeted plant Plant with gene of interest Gene incorporated on the targeted plant

**Fig 4:** Incorporation of gene of interest on selected plant

1. **Agronomic Approach:** The supplementation of essential nutrients as inorganic compounds through fertilization has proven effective in elevating the mineral content of crops such as rice, wheat, and maize (Bouis et al., 2010). Nevertheless, implementing this strategy universally poses challenges due to the associated costs and variable crop responses contingent upon the properties of the nutrient and the specific characteristics of the crop**.**

# 3. Micronutrients involved in biofortification and their sources:

**Sources of micronutrients:** In general, the macronutrients (proteins, carbs, and fats) and micronutrients (vitamins, minerals, and other elements needed in precise quantities) present in the foods ingested as part of an eclectic diet vary. When accessible, staple meals provide nearly all the diet's macronutrients and are eaten once or more during the day; however, which foods are considered staples depends on culture. These social standards, religious perspectives, and socioeconomic practices differ widely between nations and express how much influence women have (Pingali and Sunder, 2017). Animal-based meals can be excellent sources of calories, protein, and minerals, but they are frequently inaccessible to the most vulnerable households. Overall, the world's meals have become more uniform, relying more on fewer varieties of grain crops that are crucial to the international economy (Khoury et al., 2014).

# Table 1*:* Micronutrient Fortification in Common Crops

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Micronutrient | Crops | Reference |
| Calcium (Ca) | Finger milletBasil Lettuce | Knez et al.,2021D’Imperio et al., 2016 Borgeshi et al., 2013 |
| Magnesium (Mg) | Onion | Kleiber et.al., 2012 |
| Iodine(I) | Chinese cabbage CarrotCowpea | Buturi et al 2021Signore et.al.,2018 Buturi et al.,2021 |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Zinc (Zn) | KaleLettuce | Sousa Lima et al.,2015Barrameda-Medina et.al.,2017 |
| Selenium (Se) | Radish Tomato | Silva et al.2020 Castillo et al., 2016 |
| Iron (Fe) | PotatoTomato | Kormann et al.,2017Carrasco-Gil et al., 2016 |
| Silicon (Si) | ChardGreen bean Kale | De Souza et al.,2019Montesano et al.,2016 De Souza et al.,2019 |
| Copper (Cu) | Spinach | Obrador et al.,2013 |

**I. Micronutrients commonly involved with the Bio-fortification of various crops:**

1. **Iron:** Life forms require iron (Fe), which is essential for several metabolic activities like electron transport and the production of deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) (Abbaspour et al., 2014). The human body needs iron to create the oxygen-transporting proteins haemoglobin and myoglobin as well as the enzymes needed for electron transfer as well as oxidation-reduction reactions (Hurrell, 1997; McDowell, 2003). The Recommended dietary allowance (RDA) for Fe is 8 mg for adult males and 18 mg for adult females, as determined by the Food and Nutrition Board (The Institute of Medicine), National Academy of Sciences (<https://ods.od.nih.gov/Health_Information/Dietary_Reference_Intakes.aspx>). Lack of iron can result in fatigue, light cephalalgia, and unfavorable pregnancy outcomes including early delivery, babies with low birth weights, delayed baby growth and development, and impaired cognitive abilities (Bailey et al., 2015).
2. **Selenium:** Se a micronutrient, which is crucial for growth and development, also shields the body from disease, oxidative stress, and the spread of cancer (Zeng & Comb, 2008). The recommended daily intake **(RDI**) for selenium is 55 g/day for males as well as females (<https://ods.od.nih.gov/Health_Information/Dietary_Reference_Intakes.aspx>). Selenium deficiency in humans is connected to various conditions, including Keshin-Beck, Keshan, and myxedematous cretinism (Coppinger & Diamond, 2001).
3. **Zinc:** Another essential mineral that humans require is zinc (Zn). It plays a role in various biological processes, including cell growth and proliferation, wound healing, membrane signaling systems (Prasad, 1996; MacDonald, 2000), quenching reactive oxygen radicals to prevent oxidative damage to cells (Rostan et al., 2002; Prasad et al., 2004), and lowering the risk of malignancies such as pancreatic and prostate cancer (Costello & Franklin, 2017). Zn's recommended daily allowance for adults is 8 mg for females and 11 mg for males (<https://ods.od.nih.gov/Health_Information/Dietary_Reference_Intakes.aspx>). A poor immune system, frequent infections, mental disease, stunted growth, and infertility are among the effects of Zn deficiency (Roohani *et al*., 2013).
4. **Carotenoids:** Plants naturally synthesize coloured pigments called carotenoids. Since both humans and animals are unable to synthesize carotenoids, carotenoids must be obtained through

diets originating from plants (Fraser & Bramley, 2004). In the human body, carotenoids function as significant antioxidants and are crucial to many physiological functions. In nature, more than 600 carotenoids are identified. Age-related degeneration is prevented by lutein and zeaxanthin (Fraser & Bramley, 2004). Lutein lowers the chance of cataracts and has a link to lowering cardiovascular diseases (Moeller et al., 2000). Mammals need vit-A for healthy cell division, development of bone and eyesight (Stephens et al., 1996). Β-Cryptoxanthin suppresses osteoclastic bone resorption while stimulating osteoblastic bone growth (Yamaguchi & Uchiyama, 2004).

1. **Iodine:** Thyroxine (T4) and triiodothyronine (T3), the thyroid hormones, are dependent on iodine, which is also necessary for healthy growth, development, and metabolism. As to the Food and Nutrition Board of the Institute of Medicine, the recommended daily intake (RDI) of I2 for adult males and females is 150 µg (<https://ods.od.nih.gov/Health_Information/Dietary_Reference_Intakes.aspx>). Iodine deficiency results in hypothyroidism, goitre, cretinism, mental retardation, decreased fertility and higher rates of neonatal and perinatal mortality (Delange, 1994). It is essential for brain development, deficiency during pregnancy might result in cognitive problems in the offspring (Skeaff, 2011).
2. **Magnesium:** The mineral is crucial for assisting over 300 different enzymes in carrying out numerous chemical processes in the body, including those that produce proteins and robust bones, control blood sugar and blood pressure, and maintain healthy muscle and nerve function. Magnesium also functions as an electrical conductor, which causes the heart to beat steadily and contract muscles. For individuals aged 19 to 51 and over, the Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) is 400–420 mg for men and 310–320 mg for women per day. About 350– 360 mg per day is needed for pregnancy, while 310–320 mg is needed for lactation. Our bodies store over half of all the magnesium we contain, in our bones, with the remainder stored in different body tissues. Deficiency symptoms include Fatigue, weakness, Poor appetite, Nausea, vomiting, Numbness or tingling in skin, Muscle cramps, Seizures and Abnormal heart rate (Moeller et al., 2000).
3. **Calcium:** The mineral calcium is most frequently linked to strong bones and teeth, but it also has a significant impact on blood clotting, muscle contraction, regular heart rhythms, and neuron function. The recommended daily allowance (RDA) for calcium is 1,000 mg for women aged 19 to 50 and 1,200 mg for women aged 51 and beyond. The RDA for women who are pregnant, or nursing is 1,000 mg. The RDA is 1,000 mg for men aged 19 to 70 and 1,200 mg for men aged 71 and beyond. The body stores 99% of its calcium in the bones, with the remaining 1% being found in other tissues such as muscles, blood, and other tissues. Deficiency symptoms include Muscle cramps or weakness, Numbness or tingling in fingers, Abnormal heart rate and Poor appetite (Stephens et al., 1996).
4. **Silicon:** The manufacture of collagen and elastin depends on silicon, which is also critical for the health of bones, cartilage, tendons, joints, and connective tissues. While elastin gives tissues, skin, hair, and blood vessels their elasticity, collagen serves as a structure to support the tissues (Saito et al.,2003). Bone is a unique kind of connective tissue. The concentration of silicon decreases as the bone ages, while deposits of calcium and phosphorus are

simultaneously created. Consequently, it may be said that silicon regulates the amount of calcium and phosphorus that accumulates in bone tissue. Apart from its involvement in bone and connective tissue health, silicon also contributes to other health benefits like preventing aluminium toxicity and shielding vascular tissue. The recommended daily requirement for silicon is between 20- 50 mg. A lack of silicon can harm the skin and hair, dry out the nails, and cause them to break easily. Furthermore, a low silicon diet is the consequence of decreased stomach acidity brought on by disease or ageing, which also reduces the body's capacity to metabolise silicon from dietary sources. Silicone supplements should not be taken by expectant or nursing women since it may affect the mothers and their unborn children (Gao et al.,2011).

1. **Copper:** Copper supports several enzymes involved in the body's energy production, iron absorption and breakdown, red blood cell formation, collagen synthesis, connective tissue, and neurotransmitter production in the brain. In addition, copper is necessary for healthy immune system and brain development (Altarelli et al.,2019). It is also a part of the antioxidant enzyme superoxide dismutase, which breaks down dangerous oxygen molecules known as free radicals. For individuals 19 years of age and older, the Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) is 900 micrograms per day for men and women. 1,300 micrograms per day are needed for pregnancy and breastfeeding in adults (19 years of age and older) and 1,000 micrograms per day in younger people (14 to 18 years of age). Deficiency symptoms include Anaemia, High cholesterol, Osteoporosis, bone fractures, Increased infections, and Loss of skin pigment (Myint et al.,2018).

# Via conventional plant breeding

1. **Rice:** Throughout most of the Asian countries, rice accounts for up to 80% of their daily energy uptake. The Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI) and the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) created rice cultivars with high zinc for India and Bangladesh. The first breeding objective for polished rice was established as 24 ppm zinc, which is 8 ppm more than the initial zinc concentration sold commercially. Trials for Official registration is underway in India and Bangladesh for high-yielding cultivars and have achieved over 75% of the aim. An iron-rich rice cultivar was released in China in 2011, and a high-zinc rice variety was discovered in Brazil and registered for distribution by Embrapa in 2012. According to retention studies, parboiling and milling do not significantly lower the zinc concentration of rice compared to iron because zine is more evenly distributed across brown rice grains (Liang et al., 2008). The Bangladesh Rice Research Institute measured the amount of zinc that was lost from rice throughout milling and washing process before cooking. Before cooking, washing the milled grain caused about 10% of its zinc to be lost (Juliano, 1985). An additional 10-14% of the zinc in rice may be lost if it is boiled in too much water which is then discarded before consumption. Yet, there is no proof of the bioavailability or effectiveness of rice that has been biofortified with zinc. The low responsiveness of concentration of zinc in blood to relatively small quantities of extra zinc consumption make it difficult to demonstrate the effectiveness of a food-based strategy to upgrade zinc intake. More investigation is required to determine the effects of zinc therapies on human health, as well as more sensitive biochemical markers for zinc levels (Saltzman et al., 2013).
2. **Wheat:** CIMMYT oversees the development of high-zinc wheat for Pakistan and India. For whole wheat, the initial breeding target was set at 33 ppm zinc, which is 8 ppm higher than the original baseline zinc concentration. High-zinc wheat's enhanced agronomic qualities over popular varieties and are anticipated to propel adoption. Breeding efforts have concentrated on increasing zinc content as well as resistance to emerging strains of stem rust and yellow rust. Both India and Pakistan are conducting multilocation trials; the first release with 75% of the desired level of zinc is anticipated in India at the earliest. In 2011, a wheat variety was introduced in China that had a zinc concentration of 44 ppm, significantly higher than the desired level [(www.harvestplus-china.org).](http://www.harvestplus-china.org/)
3. **Maize:** Provitamin A maize breeding is driven by International Maize and Wheat Improvement Centre (CIMMYT) and International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) in relation to NARES in southern Africa. Germplasm evaluation found genetic variation for the objective level (15 ppm) of provitamin A carotenoids in temperate maize, which was then reproduced into tropical varieties. Ongoing improvements in marker-assisted selection technology have accelerated the precision of recognizing genes controlling the characters of interest in maize. Genotypes that can provide 25% more EAR were released in Zambia (three varieties) and Nigeria (two varieties) in 2012. A maize variety with comparable provitamin A levels has been registered for release by Embrapa of Brazil in South America [(www.biofort.com.br).](http://www.biofort.com.br/) Studies on the storage stability of the 2012- released varieties are still ongoing; however, a prior investigation involving several varieties revealed a 25-60% reduction in provitamin A following drying along with four months of dark storage with 251 degree Celsius (Burt et al., 2010).

# Via transgenics development:

1. **Golden rice:** Golden rice was the first to be developed by The Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, and Syngenta continued the research as part of their then-commercial pipeline. After Syngenta settled not to go after the character as a commercial product, transgenic variety with greater levels of provitamin A, up to 37 ppm was created and contributed to be utilized by the Golden Rice Network (Al-Babili &Beyer, 2005). IRRI is currently in charge of Golden Rice research. The GR2 genes had been backcrossed into varieties for Bangladesh, India, the Philippines and Indonesia beginning in 2006. Golden rice has shown, through bioavailability testing, to be a useful source of vitamin A for humans, with a projected 3.8:1 beta-carotene to retinol conversion rate (Tang et al., 2009).
2. **African bio-fortified sorghum:** Transgenic sorghum has reduced relative bio-accessibility, but the grain's higher carotenoids increased provitamin A and overall levels of its accessibility. Further research on bioavailability has demonstrated that lowering phytate levels increases iron absorption by 20–30% and zinc absorption by 30–40% (Saltzman et al., 2013).
3. **Iodine potato -** Fortified potatoes are a nutritionally enhanced variety of potatoes that have been augmented with additional vitamins and minerals to address nutritional deficiencies in certain populations. The fortification process involves adding essential nutrients such as vitamin A, vitamin C, and iron to the potato, thereby increasing its overall nutritional value. This approach aims to combat micronutrient deficiencies and improve the health outcomes of individuals who rely heavily on potatoes as a staple food. Fortified potatoes can play a crucial role in enhancing dietary diversity and addressing specific nutrient needs, contributing to overall public health. (Bouis.et.al.,2017). Potato has been majorly incorporated with PSY gene and by the incorporation of three other genes; PSY, lycopene β -cyclase and phytoene desaturase (Diretto et al., 2006).

# Difficulties with Bio-fortification:

1. **Dietary diversity:** The fundamental rationale for biofortification fails to acknowledge the significance of dietary diversity in providing sufficient nourishment (Pingali & Sunder, 2017; Fanzo, 2021; Siddique et al., 2021). When taken as a whole, diet is heavily influenced by culture and is based on historical cultural practices as well as regional farming, seed, and market conditions which are suitable, readily available, reasonably priced, and accessible (Fanzo, 2021). Numerous recent research in rich and developing nations have cast doubt on the notion that varied, sustained healthy meals are invariably more expensive than existing diets (Batis et al., 2021). Harvest Plus has claimed that it will compare biofortification to industrial fortification and supplementation between 2020 and 2030, as well as evaluate health results in addition to micronutrient insufficiency status (Bouis et al., 2019).
2. **Impact on health:** A committee was established by the World Health Organization in 2016 to examine data regarding the nutritional effects of biofortification (CGIAR, 2018). The World Health Organization (WHO) classified biofortification as a “Category 3 Intervention” on its website in January 2022, stating that “systematic reviews have not yet been conducted” and that “available evidence is limited”. "More research is required before specific recommendations can be made," the conclusion states (World Health Organisation, 2022).
3. **Yield penalty:** There are numerous instances of biofortification that blend high yield with elevated micronutrient levels for example, High-Zinc Maize (Kawikhonliu *et al*., 2022), Zinc and Iron enriched wheat (Velu *et al*., 2019), etc. Furthermore, new studies show that the yield penalty is still an obstacle. Zinc content in rice can be diluted by increasing yield, and combination selection for both qualities yield less genetic gain compared to either feature considered alone(Calayugan et al., 2021). In cassava and maize, it have been observed that there was a negative correlation between yield and beta-carotene (Chavez *et al*., 2005).
4. **Genetic uniformity:** There are certain risks to genetic uniformity which are well known, particularly causing diseases like Late blight of potato, Southern corn blight, Fusarium in banana and the benefits of genetic diversity are well received in the field of agriculture (Wolfe & Barrett, 1980; Wolfe, 1985; Bocci *et al*., 2020). By continuously backcrossing into a single adapted parent and also introducing strains with elevated micronutrient levels into several new types with the exact same genetic package, bio- fortification helps maintain genetic homogeneity. Breeders can now choose offspring that have the beneficial traits of the recipient (high-yielding) parent through marker-assisted backcrossing, which has emerged as the preferred technique for bio-fortification (Natesan *et al*., 2020). Near clones of commonly cultivated types are the result, improving genetic consistency and susceptibility to abiotic and biotic stresses.

# Delivery and commercialization of bio-fortified crops:

The development of a delivery strategy is shaped by two key considerations: how noticeable or discreet the biofortified trait is, and whether there is a strong existing infrastructure for distributing seeds, like established seed markets and systems. Biofortified crops enriched with zinc or iron typically look the same as conventional varieties, while those lacking provitamin A are visually distinct (Saltzman et al., 2013**).** Harvest Plus and its various NGO companions provided orange sweet potatoes (OSP) to almost 24,000 homes in Mozambique and Uganda between 2007 and 2009 (Harvestplus, 2010). Although the pilot delivery project was unique to Uganda, it expanded upon two earlier CIP initiatives in Mozambique, Towards Sustainable Nutrition Improvement. Planting supplies were sent through NGO partners since sweet potato vines were not sold in Uganda or Mozambique. While a team focused on impact evaluation carried out a randomized controlled trial, an operations research team monitored the implementation process. The evaluation compared two delivery strategies: a more intensive approach that included providing planting materials and training over two years, and a less intensive approach offering the same support but for only one year. The findings showed that the less intensive method was just as effective as the more comprehensive one. In both countries, the intervention led to increased adoption and consumption of orange sweet potato (OSP) among farming households. As a result, the primary target groups—children and women—experienced a twofold rise in their vitamin A intake (Saltzman et al., 2013),(Sandhu et al.,2023).

# Effectiveness of bio-fortification:

The main source of proof for the efficacy of biofortification is orange sweet potatoes (OSP). In both nations, the effectiveness was evaluated using a randomized control study. The abovementioned pilot delivery effort increased the likelihood of OSP adoption in Mozambique by 68% and in Uganda by 61% (Hotz *et al.,* 2012a, 2012b). Adoption of OSP led to a significant area under cultivation replacement of other sweet potato varieties, the project raised the percentage of OSP in total sweet potato areas by 44% and 59%,

respectively. By the project's completion, vitamin A intake in Mozambique had doubled for each of the age/gender groups compared to baseline intakes; in Uganda, it had improved by nearly double for women and two-thirds for older and younger children. In Uganda and Mozambique, OSP accounted for 52% and 74% of the total vitamin A consumption for children aged 6 to 35 months, which is the age group most concerned. As a result of the project, the high prevalence of inadequate vitamin A intake among a group of breastfeeding children aged 12 to 35 months in Uganda dropped significantly—from nearly 50% to just 12%. Among children aged 5 to 7 who had low vitamin A levels at the start of the study, researchers observed a modest yet meaningful improvement in vitamin A intake due to OSP consumption. By the end of the study, it was also found that women who consumed more OSP and consequently had higher vitamin A intake were at a reduced risk of marginal vitamin A deficiency (Hotz et al., 2012a).

# Challenges and future strategies for bio-fortification:

Effective biofortification requires large yields and higher micronutrient densities; these crops also need to be embraced by farmers and eaten by the intended population (Bouis et al., 2011). By 2030, Harvestplus has three major obstacles to overcome as stated by Saltzman and Bouis (Bouis & Saltzman, 2016): increasing consumer demand; mainstreaming biofortified features into private and public plant breeding programs; and integrating biofortification into private and public policy. The success of biofortification strategies depends on a number of factors, including genetic variation in the gene pool, the decrease of antinutrients (particularly phytate and polyphenols), and an increase in the concentration of promoter substances like ascorbic acid (vitamin C) and selected amino acids (cysteine, lysine, and methionine), which improve the uptake of essential minerals and/or high yield (White & Broadley, 2009). The goal of effective biofortification should be to raise the concentration of micronutrients while also boosting their bioavailability. This can be accomplished by lowering the levels of antinutrients that obstruct absorption and raising the concentrations of promoters, which increase the absorption of minerals (White & Broadley, 2009). Since milling, polishing, and boiling can remove a significant quantity of minerals from the diet, postharvest processing can also be crucial to the effective use of biofortified crops (Gregorio *et al*., 2000). Consequently, after processing and heating, efforts should be made to preserve the micronutrient levels in consumable seeds as well as the consumer's ability to absorb them (Haas *et al*., 2005). The nutritional makeup of the harvested seeds can be dramatically changed by these stressors. As previously indicated, the micronutrients that are being targeted are either antioxidants or components of enzymes that are indulged in different metabolic processes, such as electron transfer and oxidation reductions. As a result, they shield cells from damage due to oxidation by scavenging reactive oxygen species that are produced in response to environmental stress (Hurrell, 1997; McDowell., 2003). More micronutrient- concentrated biofortified crops are more able to tolerate harsh environmental conditions and show increased adaptation to them.

# Conclusion:

One among three people worldwide suffers from micronutrient deficiency, which is a serious concern because micronutrients are critical for human advancement and growth. When it comes to addressing micronutrient deficiencies, biofortification via plant breeding is thought to be the most cost-effective and long-lasting method. This strategy is widely acknowledged and can assist those residing in rural, somewhat isolated places with limited access to fortified foods sold for a profit. Additionally, it needs a single expenditure, and farmers can multiply seeds at almost zero marginal cost over the course of several years. The introduction of multiple crop types that are biofortified and aiding in the target population recovery from micronutrient deficiencies has resulted in notable advancements in recent years. Bio-fortification is conducted for various macro, micro-nutrients, antioxidants and other components that increase bioavailability of other nutrients. Currently a wide range of crops have been fortified thus making optimum nutrition a reality for people all over the world and help fight starvation and malnutrition as well. But such crops face many difficulties pertaining to creation, delivery and acceptance. To effectively optimize the usage of biofortified foods, several obstacles and challenges must be conquered.

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1.

2.

3.

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