**Highlight 3: Engaging Policymakers**

Supportive policies are essential for sustaining and scaling biofortification’s impact—and 2018 saw progress at the national and regional levels.

By the end of 2018, 21 countries around the world had included biofortification in their national agricultural and/or nutrition strategies. For example, India prioritized nutrition in breeding by officially setting minimum standard levels of iron and zinc for the release of pearl millet cultivars.

Establishing minimum required levels of micronutrients for national crop breeding programs is an effective way for governments to promote crop biofortification. Diets deficient in iron and zinc are a major cause of anemia and stunting, respectively, and in India, 59 percent of children under five and 54 percent of women are anemic, while 38 percent of children under five are stunted.

Because it grows well in dry soil, pearl millet is a staple crop for over 90 million people around the world. The crop is grown on about 9 million hectares of Indian farmland, yielding about 8.3 million tons of pearl millet annually. Biofortified versions of this staple crop present a cost-effective, sustainable strategy to improve nutrition for resource-poor families and communities who rely on pearl millet for the bulk of their diets.

“This commitment [to minimum required breeding levels] will further strengthen the biofortification program and accelerate product development in India, to improve the nutritional status of poor households,” said Wolfgang Pfeiffer, director of research and development at HarvestPlus.

The Indian government also declared millets are “nutri-cereals,” important for improving food and nutrition security, and recommended their inclusion in the country’s extensive public food distribution system. When this is implemented, iron-rich millet will be available to many more millions of low-income Indians.

Additionally, HarvestPlus Founder and CEO Howarth Bouis was inducted into African Leaders for Nutrition, a high-level forum initiated by the African Union and African Development Bank (AfDB) to strengthen commitments to ending malnutrition. The AfDB also committed to prioritizing nutrition-smart investments like biofortification to help Africans reach their cognitive potential.

In its Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Action Plan for 2018–2025, the AfDB pledged to invest in “grey matter infrastructure” to ensure Africans can reach their full cognitive potential and their countries’ economies can realize demographic dividends. The Bank estimates that member states’ gross domestic product is reduced by between 2 and 17 percent annually by the impacts of hunger, particularly stunting.

The Plan, released in December 2018, includes biofortification among a few priority investments with “the greatest impact on nutrition.” The Bank also noted that its Technologies for African Agricultural Transformation projects will seek to increase agricultural production through activities that include scaling up biofortified nutritious crops. The Bank is targeting a 40 percent reduction in the number of African children whose cognitive and physical development are impaired by poor nutrition by 2025. More than a third of the world’s stunted children under age five reside in Africa.

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