Flagship 2: Biofortification

Highlight 2: Engaging the Private Sector

As part of HarvestPlus’s value chain approach to creating self-sustaining biofortified food systems, the A4NH-based program provides capacity strengthening and technical assistance to hundreds of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Africa, Asia, and Latin America to support their work in biofortified seed and food value chains. The annual Nutritious Food Fair (NFF), organized by HarvestPlus Nigeria, is one example of how HarvestPlus attracts stakeholders from the public, private, investor, and NGO sectors to learn from each other’s efforts to advance biofortification and discuss ways to further scale it up. The NFF, which takes place in November every year, is hosted in a different state each year, and highlights the critical role of businesses—particularly SMEs—in advancing biofortification.

At the 2019 NFF, which took place at the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) campus in Ibadan, multiple SMEs in the food sector showed how they use biofortified ingredients grown by Nigerian smallholders to make consumer products for an increasingly health- and nutrition-minded consumer base. For example, Oluwatoyin Onigbanjo, CEO of infant food company AugustSecrets, described how she uses biofortified maize “to make delicious and amazing food for children in their first 1,000 days” and engages a one-million-strong community of mothers to educate them about the value of nutritious foods for them and their families. Tunji Kalajaiye, director for Business Development and Strategy for Nigeria’s Graceco Industries, explained how, with HarvestPlus’s guidance, using biofortified vitamin A maize in their Ogi breakfast porridge allowed them to deliver a nutritious product more economically than with industrial fortification methods. “The affordability part of it would have been impossible if we had to fortify [industrially],” said Kalajaiye.

HarvestPlus is also working in Asia to catalyze private sector participation in biofortified foods, such as through a meeting held in New Delhi in April 2019 for about 60 food industry representatives and business leaders from across the supply chain to brainstorm on ways to create markets for biofortified foods and thereby stimulate the supply of biofortified crops by Indian farmers. “We will increase the number of farmers in India growing and consuming zinc rice, zinc wheat, and iron pearl millet by creating a market for these foods,” said Wolf Pfeiffer, director of research and development at HarvestPlus. India suffers loses estimated at over US$12 billion in GDP annually to vitamin and mineral deficiencies. Biofortification has the potential to become a critical element in the country’s quest for Kuposhan Mukt Bharat (Malnutrition Free India) by 2022; at the end of 2018, the Indian Council for Agricultural Research set minimum levels of iron and zinc for pearl millet varieties—signaling nutrition as a priority for breeders. HarvestPlus believes ending hidden hunger and managing profitable food businesses can be done simultaneously and sustainably. By addressing the barriers to embedding biofortification in the food system, HarvestPlus aims to increase the access families and communities have to nutritious seeds and foods.

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