

# Biofortification: Improving Gender Equity in Nutrition & Agriculture



Empirical studies have shown that it is important to take gender roles into account to achieve equitable nutritional outcomes from agricultural development programs. For example, women tend to perform much of the agricultural work, food preparation, and child care duties in rural settings in low- and middle-income countries. These women also often have inequitable access to and control over resources; they lack decision-making power within the household and hold fewer leadership positions in the community.

In some cultures, many types of nutritious foods are also

disproportionately distributed between male and female household members; males (especially adult men) tend to receive a greater share of available nutrient-dense foods such as meat, vegetables, and dairy products. Women's responsibility and control tends to be confined to less-nutritious staple crops, which also often dominate their diets. Men often are also the decisionmakers about food purchases and how much of the harvest is retained for home consumption and how much is sold. However, women can influence these choices if they are empowered.

## Biofortification: A Gender-Sensitive Intervention

HarvestPlus and our partners ensure that the reach and benefits of biofortification are gender-equitable by making more micronutrients available in staple crops eaten by the whole family. We also encourage both men's and women's involvement in biofortified food production and family nutrition. Our trainings increase awareness, particularly for men, of the importance of meeting the nutritional needs of their families and how biofortified crops can help. Women are prioritized in our training programs: 62 percent of the 67,000 people we trained in 2018 were women.

Gender is a key factor in setting the nutritional targets for breeding

biofortified crops. For example, we and our breeding partners develop varieties with shorter cooking times than non-biofortified varieties, which may give women more time to engage in other activities, including income generating activities. We also advocate for policies and programs that are gender-equitable and responsive to women.

Our monitoring and evaluation team collects and analyzes data to track indicators covering several gender dimensions of biofortification. For example, we disaggregate data on beneficiaries reached and number of people trained to ensure that women are being appropriately engaged

through our programming. Learnings from program evaluations enable us and our partners to adjust annual delivery and scale-up strategies to become ever more inclusive.



# Prioritizing Gender Equity: HarvestPlus Examples

## The Lead Mother Initiative

In the Kakumiro district of Western Uganda, Nakijoba Anet Wadega (see photo) teaches other mothers about preparing nutritious and balanced meals, proper hygiene behaviors, and growing biofortified crops like vitamin A sweet potatoes, which are rich in nutrients their children need. She is part of the Lead Mother initiative, one of the many ways HarvestPlus and its partners engage rural women in country programs. The participants are chosen by farmers' groups that include both men and women, reflecting the importance of also engaging men as stakeholders in nutrition and gender equity. Lead Mothers in Uganda develop songs and skits to promote

the consumption of vitamin A sweet potato and use their platform to address wider cultural beliefs, misconceptions, and gender issues within their community.



Lead Mother nutrition training material and training session

## ENRICH: Empowering Women Farmers and Their Families

HarvestPlus is proud to be a consortium member in a global nutrition program that was recognized on International Women's Day 2019 with an award for making notable contributions to global health for women and their children. As part of the ENRICH Programme, funded by Global Affairs Canada, HarvestPlus teaches

women farmers and their families in Bangladesh, Kenya, and Tanzania about nutrition and how to grow and prepare biofortified crops. ENRICH, implemented by World Vision Canada and Nutrition International, received the award from the Canadian Partnership for Women's and Children's Health.

## Empowering Women in the Value Chain

In Nigeria, Bola Adeyemo decided to help address undernutrition by setting up a women-run cooperative to produce food products made from vitamin A cassava supplied by HarvestPlus. The 20 or so women working there earn a living, learn about good nutrition, and build valuable skills about how to run a processing operation.

Adeyemo has created a successful business with a social mission to improve the health and livelihoods of the women who work there. HarvestPlus partners with hundreds of entrepreneurs worldwide like Adeyemo to expand the reach of biofortified foods.



Hortensia Olgadez, a Guatemalan farmer, participated in a study on an iron-biofortified bean variety known as ICTA Chortí: "This bean is really great," she said. "Besides being more nutritious, I like that it requires less cooking time. When I didn't have [ICTA Chortí], I bought another bean in nearby stores, but even if I cooked that bean for an hour, it didn't soften. This new bean is ready in 30 minutes."

HarvestPlus improves nutrition and public health by developing and promoting biofortified food crops that are rich in vitamins and minerals, and providing global leadership on biofortification evidence and technology. HarvestPlus is based at the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and is part of the CGIAR Research Program on Agriculture for Nutrition and Health (A4NH). **Learn more about the evidence base for biofortified crops: [Harvestplus.org/evidence-document](https://harvestplus.org/evidence-document)**

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