

# Crop Biofortification as an Intervention Strategy for Reducing Nutritional Diseases among Rural Farmers in Okpe LGA, Delta State, Nigeria

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Publication Date: 2026/05/02

**Abstract:** This study examined crop biofortification as a way to address nutritional diseases among rural farmers in the Okpe Local Government Area (LGA) of Delta State, Nigeria. "hidden hunger", referring to micronutrient deficiencies such as vitamin A, Iron, and Zinc. These are common in rural communities that depend on low -nutrient staple crops. The researchers used a descriptive survey design, with data through a structured questionnaire from 364 rural farmers in Okpe LGA. They analyzed the data using mean, standard deviation, and Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) at a significance level of 0.05. The results showed that farmers had a high level of awareness (Cluster Mean = 2.63) about biofortified crops and their health benefits. Adoption and utilization low (Cluster Mean = 2.34), mainly due to a shortage of planting materials (Mean = 3.42) and infrequent visits from agricultural extension agents (Mean = 3.27). Despite the low adoption rates, farmers adopted these crops reported a High Positive Impact (Cluster Mean = 2.97) on their household health, reporting increased energy levels and fewer visible nutritional deficiencies. Hypothesis testing findings indicated positive relationship between awareness and adoption ( $r = 0.642$ ) and a significant correlation between adoption and the reduction of nutritional diseases ( $r = 0.588$ ). The study also found no significant difference in how male and female farmers perceived health impacts ( $p = 0.651$ ). However, there was a significant negative relationship ( $r = -0.412$ ) between implementation challenges and the effectiveness of the programme. In conclusion, while biofortification is an effective health intervention, its success in Okpe LGA is hampered by supply chain issues and socio-cultural resistance to the appearance of biofortified staples. The study recommended that the Delta State Ministry of Agriculture should establish decentralized systems to improve access to these crops.

**Keywords:** Crop Biofortification, Nutritional Diseases, Rural Farmers, Okpe LGA, Delta State, Nigeria, Micronutrient Intake, Malnutrition, Sustainable Agriculture.

**How to Cite:** Rita Uzezi Oyibo; Oritsematosan Marian Ogbede; Adaighofua Obue (2026) Crop Biofortification as an Intervention Strategy for Reducing Nutritional Diseases among Rural Farmers in Okpe LGA, Delta State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology*, 11(4), 2917-2928. <https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/26apr1256>

## I. INTRODUCTION

Nutritional deficiencies remain a significant public health issue, particularly in developing regions where many people suffer from what is known as 'hidden hunger' that refers to a condition caused by insufficient intake of essential micronutrients which negatively affect health and productivity. These challenges are more pronounced in the rural farming communities such as Okpe Local Government Area of Delta State. Their heavy reliance on staple crops that lack micronutrients has heightened the risk of nutritional disorders among these at-risk groups (Ogunleye et al., 2021). Biofortification is a promising intervention used to address micronutrient deficiencies by increasing the nutrient content

of crops using either traditional breeding methods or modern biotechnology.

Biofortification involves improving the nutritional quality of food crops through plant breeding or biotechnology. This approach focuses on increasing the micronutrient levels in staple foods like cassava, maize, and rice which many people rely on but often lack essential vitamins and minerals (Bouis & Saltzman, 2017). Research has shown that these biofortified crops can significantly improve dietary intake and health, especially for communities that have limited access to a variety of foods (Saltzman et al., 2013). Agriculture is the main source of livelihood in Okpe LGA, embracing biofortified crops is a key strategy to reduce nutritional diseases among local farmers and their families.

By enhancing the nutrient content of the staples they consume daily, this initiative not only aims to boost food security but also to tackle malnutrition and related health problems like anemia and stunting (De Groote et al., 2021). To address these challenges, sustainable strategies are required (Dhaliwal et al., 2024).

Biofortification enhances the micronutrients content of staple crops such as cassava, maize, and rice, which are widely consumed yet often deficient in essential vitamins and minerals (Bouis & Saltzman, 2017). Studies have shown that biofortified crops can significantly improve dietary intake and health outcomes, particularly in populations with limited access to diverse foods (Saltzman et al., 2013). Agriculture serves as the main economic activities in Okpe LGA. Adopting biofortified crops is a major strategy to lower the rate of nutritional diseases for local farmers and their households. By improving the nutrient profiles of commonly consumed staples, this intervention not only aims to enhance food security but also to combat malnutrition and associated health issues, such as anemia and stunting (De Groote et al., 2021). Addressing the challenge requires innovative, self-sustaining strategies integrated within the existing agricultural ecosystem. One of the most promising and cost-effective agricultural solutions is crop biofortification, an advanced technique that enhances the nutritional density of staple crops through conventional breeding or biotechnology (Dhaliwal et al., 2024). Biofortified crops, like maize rich in provitamin A or beans enhanced with iron, are cost-effective and sustainable intervention. They offer a steady, passive supply of vital nutrients to at-risk communities without requiring significant changes in dietary habits or dependence on outside supplement distribution (WHO, 2013). This technology is especially important in Okpe LGA, where people predominantly consume locally grown staple foods.

#### ➤ *Problem Statement*

Malnutrition remains a major public health issue in various regions of Nigeria, particularly among rural communities that rely heavily on subsistence farming for their survival. In the Okpe Local Government Area (LGA) of Delta State, local farmers and their families experience high levels of nutritional deficiencies. These include vitamin A deficiency, iron-deficiency anemia, and protein-energy malnutrition. These issues largely stem from a repetitive diet centered around staple crops like cassava, maize, and yam, which are often deficient in essential micronutrients. Traditional nutrition programmes such as supplementation and food fortification have recorded limited success in rural areas due to challenges such as poor accessibility, high costs, and lack of sustainability. As a result, there is growing interest in crop biofortification, which is a sustainable agricultural strategy aimed at improving the nutritional quality of food crops through plant breeding and biotechnology. Although biofortified crops like pro-vitamin A cassava and orange-fleshed sweet potato have been introduced in some regions of Nigeria, research indicates that awareness and adoption among smallholder farmers are still relatively Problem Statement.

Malnutrition remain a major public health issue in various regions of Nigeria, particularly among rural communities that rely heavily on subsistence farming for their survival. In the Okpe Local Government Area (LGA) of Delta State, local farmers and their families experience high levels of nutritional deficiencies, including vitamin A deficiency, iron-deficiency anemia, and protein-energy malnutrition. These issues largely stem from a repetitive diet centered around staple crops like cassava, maize, and yam, which lack essential micronutrients. Traditional nutrition programmes, such as supplementation and food fortification, have seen limited success in these rural areas due to challenges like poor accessibility, high costs, and lack of sustainability. As a result, there is an increasing interest in crop biofortification, which is a sustainable agricultural approach aimed at improving the nutritional quality of food crops through breeding and biotechnology. Although biofortified crops like pro-vitamin A cassava and orange-fleshed sweet potato have been introduced in some regions of Nigeria, research indicates that awareness and adoption among smallholder farmers are still relatively low. In Okpe LGA, there is limited empirical data on farmers awareness, adoption, and utilization of biofortified crops as a way to combat nutritional diseases. Gaining insight into the connection between crop biofortification and nutritional health outcomes is very crucial for developing effective agricultural and public health strategies. Therefore, this study seeks to examine crop biofortification as a potential intervention for reducing nutritional diseases among rural farmers in Okpe LGA, Delta State, Nigeria.

#### ➤ *Research Objectives*

The study aims to:

- Examine the level of awareness of crop biofortification among rural farmers in Okpe LGA.
- Assess the extent of adoption and utilization of biofortified crops among rural farmers in Okpe LGA.
- Determine the perceived impact of crop biofortification on reducing nutritional diseases among rural farmers.
- Identify the challenges affecting the implementation and sustainability of crop biofortification programmes in Okpe LGA.

#### ➤ *Research Questions*

The following research questions are raised to guide the study.

- What is the level of awareness of crop biofortification among rural farmers in Okpe LGA?
- To what extent have rural farmers in Okpe LGA adopted and utilized biofortified crops?
- How has crop biofortification contributed to reducing nutritional diseases among rural farmers in Okpe LGA?
- What are the major challenges hindering the effective implementation of crop biofortification programmes in Okpe LGA?

### ➤ *Research Hypotheses*

The following research hypotheses were tested.

- H1: There is no significant relationship between awareness of crop biofortification and adoption of biofortified crops among rural farmers in Okpe LGA.
- H2: Adoption of biofortified crops has no significant effect on the reduction of nutritional diseases among rural farmers in Okpe LGA.
- H3: There is no significant difference in the perception of male and female farmers regarding the impact of crop biofortification on nutritional health in Okpe LGA.
- H4: Challenges affecting crop biofortification implementation do not significantly influence its effectiveness in reducing nutritional diseases among rural farmers in Okpe LGA.

### ➤ *Significance of the Study*

The importance of this study lies in its potential to provide data-driven insight for addressing micronutrient deficiencies in rural Delta State. The insights gained will be beneficial for several major groups:

- **Rural Farmers in Okpe LGA:** This study provides important insights for local farmers, encouraging them to improve traditional subsistence farming and embrace nutrition-sensitive agriculture. By incorporating biofortified staples like Provitamin A cassava and Orange-Fleshed Sweet Potato (OFSP), farmers can enhance their family's health, reduce medical costs for supplements, and even boost their income by selling high-quality, nutrient-rich produce.
- **Delta State Ministry of Agriculture and ADP:** The findings will provide the Delta State Agricultural Development Programme (ADP) with valuable data on specific challenges like the absence of planting material multiplication centres or sensory preferences that are hindering the adoption of biofortified crops in Okpe. This information will help the ministry tailor its extension services, focusing on improved delivery of biofortified planting materials at the grassroots level rather than generic agricultural inputs.
- **Health Practitioners and Policy Makers:** This study establishes a link between agriculture and public health. For health officials in Okpe LGA, the results will provide a sustainable, food-based alternative to clinical supplementation programmes (such as Vitamin A supplementation), which often face logistical hurdles and high costs. Policymakers can leverage this research to integrate biofortification into the State Strategic Plan of Action for Nutrition.
- **Academic and Research Community:** This study contributes to the existing literature on agricultural interventions in Okpe LGA, Delta State. It provides baseline data for researchers interested in the nutritional health of rural farming communities in Nigeria. Furthermore, the use of the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sampling technique and Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) provides a methodological reference for future socio-agricultural research in similar ecological zones.

- **Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs):** Organizations like HarvestPlus and the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) can utilize the findings to improve their intervention strategies in Southern Nigeria, ensuring that biofortification programmes are culturally acceptable and agronomically viable for the Okpe people.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### ➤ *Conceptual Framework*

Crop biofortification refers to the process of increasing essential vitamins and minerals of food crops. This can be achieved through various methods such as plant breeding, transgenic techniques, including agronomic practices such as the application of mineral fertilizers. Biofortification differs from traditional fortification because it addresses malnutrition while the crops are still growing in the field, rather than after harvest during processing. In the Okpe Local Government Area (LGA) of Delta State, crop biofortification is a key strategy to tackle the issue of hidden hunger. This term refers to a situation where people get enough calories but miss out on vital micronutrients like Vitamin A, iron, and zinc. It's a form of malnutrition that's particularly prevalent in many rural communities, where diets often consist mainly of staple foods that lack these essential nutrients. For rural farmers in Nigeria, biofortification can be regarded as a community-based nutritional intervention. It integrates nutrition into agricultural practices. By incorporating essential nutrients directly into commonly consumed foods, biofortification helps reduce dependence on costly dietary supplements and commercially fortified processed foods, which are often out of reach for rural households (Bouis & Saltzman, 2024).

Crop biofortification can be implemented through plant breeding, transgenic techniques, or agronomic practices, such as the application of zinc-rich fertilizers. Unlike traditional post-harvest fortification, which adds nutrients after harvesting, biofortification integrates these nutrients directly into the edible parts of plants as they grow. In the context of Okpe LGA in Delta State, this approach aims to tackle "hidden hunger," a type of malnutrition where people get enough calories but lack essential micronutrients like Vitamin A, Iron, and Zinc. For rural farmers in Nigeria, biofortification is seen as a "rural-based" solution because it integrates nutrition into the existing agricultural system, reducing the need for costly dietary supplements or processed fortified foods (Bouis & Saltzman, 2024).

### • *Challenges to Crop Biofortification Adoption in Okpe LGA, Delta State, Nigeria*

While crop biofortification holds great promise for enhancing nutrition among rural households, farmers in Okpe LGA face a variety of constraints that hinder its adoption. These challenges are complex and stem from agronomic, socio-cultural, economic, and institutional factors (Ajala et al., 2024).

**Agronomic and Production Constraints:** In Okpe LGA, farmers primarily engage in subsistence agriculture, and their decisions on crop adoption are heavily influenced by factors

like productivity, adaptability, and ease of cultivation (De Steur et al., 2017). A significant agronomic issue is the scarcity of quality planting materials. Biofortified varieties, such as provitamin A cassava (PVAC), are often difficult to access locally due to limited supply chains and high prices. Consequently, many farmers struggle to access the improved planting materials necessary for large-scale farming (Akinyele et al., 2019; Otoo et al., 2025). Without a reliable and affordable source of seeds or stems, maintaining biofortified crop production becomes quite challenging.

Another important factor to consider is how farmers view yield and crop performance. Even though biofortified varieties are typically designed to match or even surpass the performance of traditional crops, farmers might still see them as less productive, especially when factors like soil fertility, climate, or availability of inputs influence production outcomes (Ajala et al., 2024). In some instances, farmers express concerns that these improved varieties might not withstand drought or pests infestation as well as their local counterparts (Otoo et al., 2025). Additionally, challenges with post-harvest handling and processing can hinder their adoption. For example, biofortified cassava varieties may exhibit higher moisture content, which can complicate storage and processing. Farmers may think these varieties are less suitable for processing into popular local dishes like gari and fufu (Ayinde et al., 2019; Otoo et al., 2025). Moreover, cassava roots are highly perishable after being harvested, particularly in regions where storage options are limited, raising the risk of post-harvest losses (Akinyele et al., 2019).

- *Socio-Cultural and Consumer Acceptance Barriers*

Even when biofortified crops are successfully grown, consumer acceptance significantly influences whether farmers keep growing these varieties. This is especially true for crops that are enriched with provitamin A, as this nutrient boost often alters the crop's color (De Steur et al., 2017). Take biofortified cassava and maize, for instance; they might exhibit yellow or orange colouration instead of the usual white that many people in Nigeria, particularly in Delta State, prefer. Since consumers are used to their white staples, this noticeable colour shift can initially lead to resistance in embracing these new crops (Ejike et al., 2020). However, studies shows that as awareness of the health benefits of these crops increases, their acceptance tends to improve significantly (De Steur et al., 2017). Another significant hurdle is the lack of awareness regarding the nutritional advantages of biofortified crops. Many rural farmers and consumers lack adequate knowledge about how these crops can help combat micronutrient deficiencies. Consequently, farmers might grow these crops for agricultural reasons but overlook their consumption at home, particularly among vulnerable groups like children and pregnant women (Ajala et al., 2024; Akinyele et al., 2019).

Concerns about taste, texture, and nutrient stability during processing can significantly influence consumer preferences. If biofortified crops are seen as having a noticeably different taste or cooking quality compared to traditional varieties, people might be reluctant to add them to

their everyday meals (Akinyele et al., 2019; Chibuzo et al., 2024).

- *Institutional and Economic Factors*

The support from institutions and the overall economic climate also play a significant role in whether farmers in Okpe LGA decide to adopt crop biofortification. One major constraints is the limited access to agricultural extension services. These extension agents are essential for providing farmers with knowledge about better agricultural practices and the nutritional perks of biofortified crops. Unfortunately, inconsistent visits and a lack of proper advisory services make it difficult for farmers to get the information and guidance they need (Otoo et al., 2025). This makes it harder for them to grow effectively utilize biofortified varieties. Market opportunities are another important factor in this decision-making process. While some research suggests that biofortified crops can enhance household livelihood security, farmers may be reluctant to grow them if market connections are weak or if these crops do not provide higher economic returns than conventional ones (Ajala et al., 2024; Otekunrin et al., 2020). Without clear financial incentives, many farmers may stick to traditional crops. Additionally, limited access to credit and financial resources is a significant barrier.

A lot of small-scale farmers lack adequate financial resources to buy improved seeds, fertilizers, and other necessary inputs for growing biofortified crops (Akinyele et al., 2019; Otoo et al., 2025). Crop biofortification has significant potentials for tackling micronutrient deficiencies and nutrition-related health issues among rural farmers in Okpe LGA, Delta State. Yet, its effective implementation is constrained by a variety of challenges. These include limited access to planting materials, worries about crop yields and post-harvest management, cultural resistance tied to food color and taste, weak agricultural extension services, scarce market opportunities, and financial hurdles. To overcome these obstacles, a collaborative approach that focuses on strengthening local seed systems, enhancing agricultural extension services, raising public awareness about the nutritional advantages of biofortified crops, and creating sustainable markets for these agricultural products is required (Ajala et al., 2024; Akinyele et al., 2019).

- *Theoretical Framework*

This study is grounded in the "Theory of Induced Innovation" (TII) and the "Health Belief Model" (HBM). The Theory of Induced Innovation was first introduced by Hayami and Ruttan in 1971 and later expanded upon by Pingali and Birner in 2023. The theory suggests that technological and institutional innovations often arise in response to shifts in resource availability, factor prices, and socio-economic pressures. When certain resources become scarce or costly, people and communities tend to embrace innovations that help them utilize available resources more efficiently, thereby improving productivity and overall welfare. In many rural areas, challenges such as poverty, limited dietary diversity, and poor market access hinder households from securing nutrient-rich diets that include meat, fruits, and fortified foods. These challenges create a

strong need for innovative strategies that can enhance nutrition without significantly raising financial burdens.

Closely related to this is the Health Belief Model, which explains how individual's perceptions of health risks influence their health behaviors. According to this model, individuals are more inclined to take preventive health measures when they perceive themselves to be susceptible to health issue, believe that the issue could have serious consequences, recognize the benefits of preventive actions, and perceive few obstacles to taking those actions. The relevance of these theories to this study lies in their ability to explain both the structural and behavioural factors influencing the adoption of biofortified crops and improved nutritional outcomes among rural farmers. The theory of Induced Motivation explains how biofortification emerges as a practical response to resource limitations and nutritional challenges in rural communities. Similarly, the Health Belief Model helps explain how farmers' perceptions of the benefits of biofortified crops, as well as perceived barriers to their adoption influence their willingness to adopt and utilize such innovations.

#### ➤ Empirical Review

Empirical evidence on the efficacy, adoption, and socio-economic impact of biofortification is extensive, spanning clinical trials, agronomic assessments, and socio-behavioral studies across Nigeria and the Sub-Saharan region. The following empirical studies highlight the nutritional, agronomic, and socio-economic impacts of biofortification interventions:

- *Nutritional Efficacy and Health Outcomes*

The primary objective of biofortification is to improve nutritional status. Oparinde et al. (2023) demonstrated through a randomized controlled trial in Nigeria that children (ages 3–5) consuming Provitamin A yellow cassava twice daily for six months showed significantly higher serum retinol concentrations compared to those consuming white cassava diets. This clinical efficacy is supported by Gannon et al. (2024), who validated that bio-fortified maize is as effective as conventional supplementation in boosting total body Vitamin A stores. Furthermore, Abebe et al. (2022) documented that iron-rich beans significantly improved hemoglobin levels in pregnant women in rural Nigerian communities within a single production cycle. Furthermore, long-term safety was confirmed by Oparinde et al. (2016/2023 follow-up), proving that consistent consumption does not lead to nutrient toxicity, establishing it as a safe long-term dietary option.

- *Agronomic Performance and Processing Retention*

For an intervention to be sustainable, biofortified must be comparable with traditional crops varieties in both production and consumption. Agbaje et al. (2023) found that biofortified maize varieties in humid tropical zones exhibited a 15% higher resistance to local stem-borer pests than landraces. In terms of soil science, Agbaje et al. (2025) showed that agronomic biofortification (zinc-enriched fertilizers) could significantly increase the zinc content in rice grown in Delta State. Regarding post-harvest stability,

Nkhata et al. (2020) demonstrated that Vitamin A retention in bio-fortified cassava remains as high as 70% even after traditional Nigerian processing methods such as fermentation and frying into garri. Additionally, Okwuono (2021) highlighted that these crops provide multiple benefits, providing food security and high-quality industrial starch for local processing plants.

- *Socio-Economic Impact and Market Viability*

Biofortification provides economic benefits for rural households. Kolapo and Kolapo (2021) demonstrated that cultivating Provitamin A cassava increased smallholder farmers' annual income by 12% due to higher market value for "yellow garri." In terms of household expenditure, Ume et al. (2025) found that adoption of Orange-Fleshed Sweet Potato (OFSP) in nearby Imo State reduced household spending on Vitamin A supplements by 40%. Gilligan et al. (2020) further argued that this strategy is more cost-effective than industrial fortification for remote rural areas where commercial fortified foods are rarely accessible.

- *Adoption Determinants and Barriers in Delta State*

Despite the benefits, adoption remains uneven. Okorie and Agumagu (2024) found that while awareness in Delta State is high (72%), actual adoption in LGAs like Okpe is constrained by a lack of local stem multiplication centers. Okorie et al. (2026) corroborated this, noting that 60% of rural adults in Okpe LGA suffer from poor nutritional knowledge, which is closely associated with low adoption. However, social factors can influence adoption. Samuel et al. Johnston et al. (2024) emphasized the "a multiplier effect," where one trained "Lead Farmer" in Delta State typically influences five neighbours to adopt the crop within two seasons. Adoption is further enhanced by "sensory-based interventions," such as community tasting events; Breen et al. (2024) found that these events increased consumer willingness to pay by 25%. Gender also influences uptake; Samuel et al. (2024) found that women in Nigeria are 30% more likely to adopt these crops when the health benefits for children are emphasized.

- *Policy and Scaling Frameworks*

At the national level, Birol et al. (2024) reported that biofortified crops have reached 1.7 million Nigerian households through informal exchange networks. HarvestPlus (2025) noted that the integration of these seeds into national policy has expanded the availability of Iron-Zinc sorghum, with current expansion strategies focuses on the South-South zone. Nevertheless, the NFCMS (2021/2025 update) warns that only 14% of rural households in the South-South currently consume biofortified maize, indicates a critical need for localized interventions in areas like Okpe LGA. Finally, Okorie and Onemolease (2023) established a significant positive correlation between access to agricultural extension services and successful OFSP cultivation. In the Niger Delta region, Okorie and Agumagu (2024) found that while awareness of bio-fortified crops is increasing, adoption rates in LGAs like Okpe are hindered by "sensory barriers," specifically the yellow color of biofortified garri compared to traditional white varieties. However, empirical evidence from Birol et al. (2024) suggests that when nutritional education is

paired with seed distribution, "colour-related barrier" can be significantly reduce by the perceived health benefits. Furthermore, Agbaje et al. (2023) highlighted that biofortified maize and sweet potatoes have shown higher resilience to local pests in Delta State, providing both agronomic and nutritional benefits.

#### ➤ *Summary of Literature Review*

The literature reviewed in this study highlights the significance of crop biofortification as a sustainable strategy for addressing micronutrient deficiencies, particularly among rural farming populations. Biofortification involves increasing the nutritional content of staple crops through plant breeding, agronomic practices, or modern biotechnological techniques. This approach has gained global recognition as an effective method for combating hidden hunger, especially in developing countries where access to fortified foods and dietary supplements may be limited (Bouis & Saltzman, 2024). Studies have shown that biofortified crops such as provitamin A cassava, iron-rich beans, and zinc-enriched cereals have demonstrated the potential to improve the nutritional status of vulnerable populations. By integrating essential micronutrients directly into commonly consumed crops, biofortification provides a cost-effective and sustainable approach to malnutrition in rural communities where staple foods dominate daily diets.

However, the literature also reveals several factors that influence the adoption and utilization of biofortified crops among farmers. Agronomic factors such as availability of improved and quality planting materials, crop yield performance, resistance to pests and diseases, and post-harvest characteristics significantly affect farmers' willingness to cultivate biofortified varieties (Akinyele et al., 2019; Otoo et al., 2025). Similarly, farmers tend to prioritize crop productivity and adaptability to local environmental conditions when making decisions about adopting new crop varieties (De Steur et al., 2017). Socio-cultural factors also play a critical role in determining the acceptance of biofortified crops. In many communities, consumer preferences related to colour, taste, and texture can influence the consumption of biofortified foods. For instance, the yellow or orange colour of provitamin A cassava and maize may initially face resistance in areas where white staples are traditionally preferred (Ejike et al., 2020). Nevertheless, studies indicate that awareness of the nutritional benefits of these crops can significantly improve consumer acceptance (De Steur et al., 2017).

Institutional and economic factors also influence the adoption of biofortified crops. Limited access to extension services, inadequate market linkages, and lack of financial resources have been identified as key barriers affecting farmers' ability to cultivate biofortified crops at a larger scale (Ajala et al., 2024; Otekunrin et al., 2020). In addition, insufficient awareness and education regarding the health benefits of biofortification reduce the motivation of farmers and consumers to adopt these crops (Akinyele et al., 2019). Furthermore, the reviewed literature demonstrates that while crop biofortification has significant potential for improving nutrition and reducing micronutrient deficiencies among rural

populations, its successful adoption depends on the effective management of agronomic, socio-cultural, economic, and institutional challenges. These insights provide a strong foundation for the present study, which seeks to examine the role of crop biofortification in addressing nutritional diseases among rural farmers in Okpe Local Government Area of Delta State.

The literature establishes that biofortification is a cost-effective, and sustainable intervention for rural populations. However, there is a clear gap in localized data for Okpe LGA, particularly regarding the intersection of cultural food processing methods and nutrient retention. While the technical viability of these crops has been established, the socio-economic factors influencing the long-term production- to- consumption pathway in Delta State remain a critical area requiring further field-based investigation.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### ➤ *Research Design*

This study will adopt a cross-sectional Descriptive Survey Design. This design is appropriate as it allows for the collection of data from a large number of rural farmers in Okpe LGA at a single point in time to describe their current level of adoption and the prevalence of nutritional diseases without manipulating the environment.

#### ➤ *Area of Study*

The study is conducted in Okpe Local Government Area (LGA) of Delta State, Nigeria, with its administrative headquarters at Orerokpe. Located in the Niger Delta region, the area is characterized by a tropical rainforest climate and fertile soil, making it a suitable for the cultivation of cassava, yam, maize, and plantain. The inhabitants are primarily of the Okpe ethnic group, and their livelihood is largely dependent on small-scale subsistence and commercial farming.

#### ➤ *Population of the Study*

The target population for this study consists of all 6,900 registered and non-registered rural smallholder farmers across the ten (10) administrative wards of Okpe LGA. This population was identified based on recent agricultural census data provided by the Delta State Agricultural Development Programme (ADP).

#### ➤ *Sample and Sampling Technique*

A multi-stage sampling procedure will be employed to select respondents for this study. This method will enable the researcher to systematically select participants from the study population in stages, thereby ensuring adequate representation the study population. The sample size for the study will be determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) "table for determining sample size for a finite population". Based on a population size (N) of 6,900, the table recommends a minimum sample size of 364 respondents. However, to account for possible attrition, non-response or improperly completed questionnaires, the researcher will distribute 380 copies of the questionnaire to ensure that the required minimum sample size of 364 respondents is achieved.

➤ *Sampling Procedure*

- Stage 1: Simple random sampling will be used to select four (4) administrative wards out of the ten in the LGA.
- Stage 2: From each selected ward, two (2) rural farming communities will be purposively selected based on their history of staple crop production.
- Stage 3: From each of the 8 selected communities, 47 to 48 farmers will be selected using systematic random sampling (selecting every k-th household to reach the total sample size of 380).

➤ *Instrument for Data Collection*

The primary tool for data collection is a researcher-developed questionnaire titled: "Biofortification Adoption and Nutritional Disease Intervention Questionnaire (BANDIQ)." The instrument is divided into:

- Section A: Demographic characteristics of the farmers.
- Section B: Level of awareness and adoption of biofortified staples (e.g., Yellow Cassava, OFSP).
- Section C: Self-reported prevalence of nutritional deficiency symptoms within the household.
- Section D: Constraints to the adoption of biofortified varieties.

➤ *Validity and Reliability*

- Validity: The instrument will be validated by three experts in the Department of Agricultural Extension and Rural Development to ensure face and content validity. A pilot test will be conducted with 30 farmers in Uvwie LGA (a neighboring area). Data collected will be subjected to the Cronbach’s Alpha reliability test; a coefficient of 0.70 or above will be considered reliable.

➤ *Method of Data Analysis*

The collected data will be coded and analyzed using SPSS (Version 27.0):

- Descriptive Statistics: Frequencies, percentages, and mean scores will be used to answer the research questions. A mean score of 2.50 on a 4-point Likert scale will serve as the decision point.
- Inferential Statistics: The Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) will be used to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance to determine the relationship between biofortified crop adoption and nutritional outcomes.

**IV. RESULTS**

➤ *Section 1: Analysis of Research Questions (Descriptive Statistics)*

Table 1: Level of Awareness of Crop Biofortification (RQ1)

Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean $\bar{x}$	SD	Remark
I have heard of "yellow" Vitamin A cassava.	140	150	50	24	3.12	0.85	Accepted
I know biofortified crops prevent night blindness.	90	130	80	64	2.67	0.98	Accepted
I know where to source biofortified stems in Okpe.	40	60	160	104	2.09	0.92	Rejected

Cluster Mean = 2.63 High Awareness

The results in Table 1 show a cluster mean of 2.63, which is above the decision mean of 2.50. This indicates that while rural farmers in Okpe LGA have a high level of awareness of biofortified crops and their health benefits, there is a significant gap in knowledge regarding where to actually source the planting materials (Mean = 2.09).

Table 2: Level of Adoption and Utilization (RQ2)

Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean $\bar{x}$	SD	Remark
I currently cultivate Orange-Fleshed Sweet Potato.	35	70	170	89	2.14	0.89	Rejected
I utilize biofortified crops for home consumption.	85	120	90	69	2.61	1.02	Accepted
I have replaced white cassava with yellow varieties	45	95	140	84	2.28	0.94	Rejected

Cluster Mean = 2.34 Low Adoption

Table 2 reveals a cluster mean of 2.34, which is below the decision mean of 2.50. This suggests that despite high awareness, overall adoption and cultivation of biofortified crops among farmers in Okpe LGA remain low. However, those who do plant them primarily utilize them for household nutrition rather than commercial sale.

Table 3: Contribution to Reducing Nutritional Diseases (RQ3)

Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean $\bar{x}$	SD	Remark
There is a reduction in skin infections in my kids	110	160	64	30	2.96	0.84	Accepted
Family members have improved energy levels	105	175	54	30	2.97	0.82	Accepted

Cluster Mean = 2.97 High Impact

The cluster mean of 2.97 indicates that farmers perceive a positive change in household health. This suggests that biofortified crops are effectively contributing to a reduction in nutritional deficiencies among the farming households that utilize them.

Table 4: Challenges Hindering Implementation (RQ4)

Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean $\bar{x}$	SD	Remark
Scarcity of biofortified planting materials	210	110	30	14	3.42	0.77	Accepted
Lack of extension agent visits in Orokpe	180	124	40	20	3.27	0.82	Accepted
High cost of inputs (fertilizers/transport)	150	140	54	20	3.15	0.86	Accepted

Cluster Mean = 3.28 Significant Challenges

With a high cluster mean of 3.28, it indicates that logistical and institutional barriers are the major obstacles. The scarcity of stems and lack of extension support are the most critical factors hindering the programme's effectiveness in the LGA.

➤ Section 2: Test of Hypotheses (Inferential Statistics)

For the PPMC analysis, the researcher used the sum of responses for each variable to determine the correlation coefficient (r).

Table 5: PPMC Analysis of the Relationship between Awareness and Adoption (H1)

Variables	N	$\Sigma X$	$\Sigma Y$	r-cal	p-value	Decision
Awareness (X)	364	957		0.642	0.001	Significant (Reject Ho)
Adoption(Y)	364		852			

The calculated r-value of 0.642 indicates a strong positive relationship between awareness and adoption. Since the p-value (0.001) is less than the 0.05 level of significance. This means that as awareness of biofortification increases, the likelihood of adoption also increases.

Table 6: PPMC Analysis of Adoption and Nutritional Disease Reduction (H2)

Variables	N	$\Sigma X$	$\Sigma Y$	r-cal	p-value	Decision
Adoption (X)	364	852		0.588	0.003	Significant (Reject H 0)
Disease Reduction (Y)	364		1081			

The r-value of 0.588 shows a significant positive correlation. The null hypothesis (H2) was rejected confirming that the adoption of biofortified crops significantly contributes to the reduction of nutritional diseases among rural farmers in Okpe LGA.

Table 7: Independent t-test of the Perception of Male and Female Farmers on Nutritional Health impact (H3)

Gender	N	Mean $\bar{x}$	SD	df	t-cal	p-value	Decision
Male	190	2.95	0.81	362	0.452	0.651	Accepted H 0
Female	174	2.99	0.84				

Table 7 shows that the calculated p-value (0.651) is greater than the 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H3) was accepted. This implies that there is no significant difference in how male and female farmers perceive the impact of biofortification on nutritional health; both groups generally agree that these crops improve health outcomes in Okpe LGA.

Table 8: PPMC Analysis of Challenges and Effectiveness in Reducing Nutritional Diseases (H4)

Variables	N	$\Sigma X$	$\Sigma Y$	r-cal	p-value	Decision
Challenges (X)	364	1194		-0.412	0.012	Significant (Reject Ho)
Effectiveness (Y)	364		1081			

The calculated r-value is -0.412, indicating a significant negative relationship. Since the p-value (0.012) is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis (H4) is rejected. This confirms that challenges (such as scarcity of stems and lack of extension services) significantly hinder the effectiveness of biofortification programmes. As challenges increase, the effectiveness of the programme in reducing nutritional diseases significantly decreases.

➤ *Summary of Hypotheses Decisions*

H 1: Awareness vs. Adoption | PPMC | Rejected (Significant Relationship)

H 2: Adoption vs. Disease Reduction | PPMC | Rejected (Significant Effect)

H 3: Gender vs. Perception of Health | t-test | Accepted (No Significant Difference)

H 4: Challenges vs. Effectiveness | PPMC | Rejected (Significant Influence)

## V. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This discussion presents a detailed analysis of the research findings based on research questions and hypotheses

➤ *Discussion of Research Questions*

• *Table 1: High Level of Awareness (RQ1)*

The study revealed a High Awareness (Cluster Mean = 2.63) among rural farmers. Specifically, awareness of "yellow" Vitamin A cassava was high (Mean = 3.12), and many respondents recognized its role in preventing night blindness (Mean = 2.67). This aligns with Okorie and Agumagu (2024), who found high awareness levels (72%) in Delta State. However, a critical gap exists: farmers do not know where to source biofortified stems in Okpe (Mean = 2.09, Rejected). This validates the findings of Bouis and Saltzman (2024), which defined biofortification as a "rural-based" intervention that depends largely on the effectiveness of local supply systems. The awareness appear to be largely theoretical but lacks the practical knowledge required for implementation.

• *Table 2: Level of Adoption and Utilization (RQ2)*

Despite high awareness, the level of adoption is low (Cluster Mean = 2.34). Farmers reported low level of cultivation of Orange-Fleshed Sweet Potato (Mean = 2.14) and the replacement of white cassava with yellow varieties (Mean = 2.28). This supports the sensory barrier concept proposed by Ejike et al. (2020) and Okorie and Agumagu (2024) that the traditional preference for white staples in Delta State creates resistance to the yellow colour of biofortified crops. It was also observed that those who do plant them use them for home consumption (Mean = 2.61) rather than for commercial purposes. This supports Oparinde et al. (2023), who noted that biofortification is most effective as a subsistence-level nutritional safeguard rather than just a market commodity.

• *Table 3: Contribution to Reducing Nutritional Diseases (RQ3)*

Farmers perceive a high impact (Cluster Mean = 2.97) on household health. The reported reduction in skin infections (Mean = 2.96) and improved energy levels (Mean = 2.97) support the clinical efficacy findings of Oparinde et al. (2023) and Gannon et al. (2024). This confirms that even limited consumption of biofortified crops in Okpe LGA is contributing to the reduction of "hidden hunger" described in the conceptual review.

• *Table 4: Challenges Hindering Implementation (RQ4)*

The study identified significant challenges (Cluster Mean = 3.28). The major challenges are the scarcity of planting materials (Mean = 3.42) and the lack of extension agent visits in Oorerokpe (Mean = 3.27). These results provide empirical support for Otoo et al. (2025), who argued that institutional failures are the primary reason biofortification fails to scale in Nigeria. Without "Lead Farmers" or extension support (as suggested by Johnston et al., 2024), the programme implementation remains limited.

➤ *Discussion of Hypotheses*

• *Hypothesis 1: Awareness and Adoption*

The calculated  $r = 0.642$  indicates a strong positive relationship. As awareness increases, adoption increases. This is consistent with the systematic review by Shapu et al. (2020), which found that education interventions significantly improve dietary practices. It suggests that while adoption is currently low, increasing targeted knowledge may enhance adoption.

• *Hypothesis 2: Adoption and Disease Reduction*

The significant positive correlation ( $r = 0.588$ ) indicates that the adoption of biofortified crops contributes to a reduction in nutritional diseases. This mirrors Abebe et al. (2022), who documented that biofortified crops could improve health markers within a single harvest cycle. It suggests that biofortification is an effective nutritional intervention for the Okpe rural community.

• *Hypothesis 3: Gender Perceptions (t-test)*

The p-value of 0.651 (Greater than 0.05) indicates that the null hypothesis was accepted. There is no significant difference in how male and female farmers perceive the health benefits. While Samuel et al. (2024) suggested women might prioritize these crops more for children, the findings indicate that in Okpe LGA, the nutritional value of biofortified crops is a widely accepted fact across gender lines.

• *Hypothesis 4: Challenges and Effectiveness*

The negative correlation ( $r = -0.412$ ) is an important finding. It indicates that as logistical challenges (stem scarcity, lack of extension) increase, the effectiveness of the biofortification programme in reducing disease significantly decreases. This validates Tesema et al. (2024), who identified institutional and socioeconomic barriers as the major reasons why anaemia and malnutrition persist in sub-Saharan Africa.

This is the complete, formatted version of Chapter Five for your MSc project. I have integrated all your statistical results (Means, Cluster Means, and r-values) and aligned them with the conceptual and empirical reviews you provided. You can now copy and paste this directly into your manuscript.

## VI. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### ➤ Summary

The study investigated crop biofortification as an intervention strategy for reducing nutritional diseases among Rural Farmers in Okpe Local Government Area (LGA), Delta State, Nigeria. The study was necessitated by the need to address "hidden hunger", a condition where caloric intake is sufficient but essential micronutrients are lacking. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design, utilizing a structured questionnaire to collect data from a sample of 364 rural farmers.

### ➤ The Major Findings of the Study are Summarized as Follows:

Farmers in Okpe LGA possess a high level of awareness (Cluster Mean = 2.63) of biofortified crops and their health benefits. However, there is a significant lack of knowledge regarding the specific locations to source improved planting materials (Mean = 2.09). Despite high awareness, the level of adoption is low (Cluster Mean = 2.34). Farmers expressed resistance to replacing traditional white cassava varieties with yellow biofortified ones (Mean = 2.28), largely due to socio-cultural and sensory preferences. Those who adopted the crops reported a high positive impact (Cluster Mean = 2.97) on household health. Specifically, respondents noted improved energy levels (Mean = 2.97) and a reduction in visible nutritional deficiency symptoms like skin infections (Mean = 2.96). The study identified significant barriers (Cluster Mean = 3.28). The most critical obstacles include the scarcity of biofortified planting materials (Mean = 3.42) and the inadequate agricultural extension agent visits in Orerokpe (Mean = 3.27). Inferential statistics (PPMC) indicated a strong positive relationship between awareness and adoption ( $r = 0.642$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and a significant correlation between adoption and the reduction of nutritional diseases ( $r = 0.588$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Independent t-test results established no significant difference in perception between male and female farmers regarding health impacts ( $p = 0.651 > 0.05$ ).

### ➤ Conclusion

Based on the findings, the study concludes that crop biofortification is a scientifically viable and effective "rural-based" intervention for addressing micronutrient deficiencies in Okpe LGA. It offers a sustainable alternative to expensive retail supplements by embedding nutrition directly into the existing agricultural system. However, the intervention is currently limited to the awareness stage. The high interest among farmers has not translated into widespread cultivation because the institutional supply system is inadequate, although farmers are willing to cultivate these crops, access to planting materials remain limited, and extension agents are

insufficient to provide technical support. Furthermore, the "colour- related barrier" remains a socio-cultural constraint. Unless these institutional bottlenecks are cleared, biofortification may remain a theoretical solution rather than a practical health intervention for rural farmers in Delta State.

### ➤ Recommendations

To enhance the effectiveness of biofortification in Okpe LGA, the following recommendations are made:

**Establishment of Community Seed Hubs:** The Delta State Ministry of Agriculture should partner with research institutes (such as IITA or HarvestPlus) to establish decentralized stem and seed multiplication centers within Okpe LGA to ensure local availability.

**Revitalization of Extension Services:** There is an urgent need for the regular deployment of agricultural extension agents to Orerokpe and surrounding villages to provide practical training on cultivation and post-harvest processing.

- **Integrated Nutrition Education:** Public health officials should organize "Community- based tasting programmes" to demonstrate that the taste and processing quality (for garri and fufu) of biofortified varieties are comparable to traditional landraces.

- **Policy Support and Input Subsidies:** The local government should provide input support packages, such as subsidized fertilizers or transport vouchers, specifically targeted at farmers adopting biofortified varieties.

### ➤ Suggestions for Further Research

- **Socio-Cultural Dynamics of Food Choice:** A qualitative study to explore the deep-seated cultural factors influencing the preference for white staples over biofortified yellow varieties in the Niger Delta region.

- **Supply Chain Analysis:** A research project focused on identifying the specific bottlenecks in the final-stage delivery of agricultural innovations to rural farmers in Delta State.

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