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Title – The Effects of Anti-GMO Rhetoric on Potentially Life-Saving Crops

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Abstract

This study examines the implications of weaponized rhetoric from anti-GMO organizations. Specifically, it aims to answer the question: How does the collective anti-GMO narrative created by the Stop Golden Rice Network affect the acceptance and consideration of Golden Rice as a potential life saver? To answer the question, this paper analyzes Ernest Borman's Symbolic Convergence Theory and applies it to the Stop Golden Rice Network. Symbolic Convergence Theory explains how individuals can develop a collective consciousness and a sense of cohesion by sharing repeated symbolic expressions. This paper focuses on Golden

Rice, a genetically modified organism developed in the 1990s. Golden Rice has been subjected to countless international safety, toxicity, and allergy studies. An extensive amount of empirical research has confirmed the safety and effectiveness of Golden Rice. It could prevent around 3 million deaths among preschoolers every year in Africa. However, countries continue to sideline this crop because the Stop Golden Rice Network weaponized their rhetoric against Golden Rice. By accepting and sharing repeated phrases, the Stop Golden Rice Network created their own symbolic reality masked as universal public opinion, which led to countries rejecting this crop. From this study, two implications are found: weaponized rhetoric tears people apart, and it limits progress. Overall, this paper synthesizes the framework of Symbolic Convergence Theory and empirical research. Through this synthesis, contributions are made to the understanding of collective narratives and their role in shaping a group's perception of GMOs. This framework provides a valuable starting point for future research.