

## Effect of Climate Change on Rice

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### Abstract

Climate change has evolved from a subject of future speculation to an inconvenient reality of the present. Given the inseparable link of agriculture with climatic variables, impact of climate change on agriculture and food security has been at the forefront of the research and policy agenda in recent times. Climatic alteration in India is becoming fairly perceptible, and the changes are far more evident than in other parts of the country. As a result of climate change, extreme abiotic factors like high and low temperatures, droughts, salinity, osmotic stress, heavy rains, floods and frost damages are posing serious threats to rice production and also are detrimental for the farmers earning livelihood from rice cultivation. There is a dire need to frame strategies against these stresses, so that in order to cope with such impacts crop improvement will help in finding the sustainable and effective solution against the negative impact of climate change. Advancement in Molecular breeding will help in utilizing the inherent potential of wild species by generating abiotic tolerant lines through introgression. Large screening of tolerance in wild genotypes should be done with the help of molecular markers to identify the underlying QTLs/genes. With the development in the field of bioinformatics, DNA microarrays, mass spectrometry, RNA-Sequencing or other modern high-throughput genomic techniques, it is now feasible to decipher the underlying metabolic pathways through top down approach. The present paper provides an overview of the recent evidences, potential impacts of climate change on rice and also offers its mitigation strategy through crop improvement with special reference to northeast India.

**Keywords:** Climate change; Rice yield; Abiotic stress mitigation; Molecular breeding

### Introduction

The Earth's climate has changed throughout history. Most of these climate changes are attributed to very small variations in Earth's orbit that change the amount of solar energy our planet receives. Climate change also called global warming refers to an upsurge in average surface temperature on earth which can be revealed by some compelling evidence. According to evidences, seven sister states of North eastern India region are clearly seen affected by climate change which may lead to droughts in the future due to decrease in rainfall and increase in temperature [1]. Although projected rainfall change in the mid- and late- 21<sup>st</sup> century is uncertain, increased frequency and severity of extreme climatic events (severe storms, flooding, droughts, etc.) are very likely [2].

### Causes of Climate Change

#### Natural causes

The earth's climate is dynamic and always changing through naturally, there are a number of natural factors responsible for climate change. More dominant ones are continental drift, volcanoes, ocean currents, the earth's tilt, comets and meteorites. It has been found from the studies that large explosive volcanic eruptions are a major driving factor of natural climate variability over the past centuries by injecting large amounts of particulate matter (ash) and gases into the stratosphere [3].

#### Human causes

Anthropogenic climate change due to industrialization, deforestation, and pollution have greatly increased atmospheric concentrations of water vapor, methane and nitrous oxide which are categorized as greenhouse gases that help to trap heat near earth's surface. Human activities have increased atmospheric carbon dioxide

(CO<sub>2</sub>) concentrations past 400 ppm levels unseen for millions of years [4]. Two broad causes of climate change are shown in Figure 1.

While climate change has the potential to influence the cereal yield directly by heat and water stresses, it can also have an indirect impact by affecting the fertilizer supply, pathogens, and pests [5]. To resolve this problem, the scientific community must find alternative crops that can be adapted and cultivated despite the global warming phenomenon. Simultaneously, these crops should also be able to release less greenhouse gases, must be less resource-intensive, and be rich in major and minor nutrients required for our well-being. Millets are cereal crops that have many of the desirable attributes mentioned above when compared to other major crops [6]. Also, there are several other possible strategies including breeding, technical progress, and improving fertilizer efficiency to increase rice production.

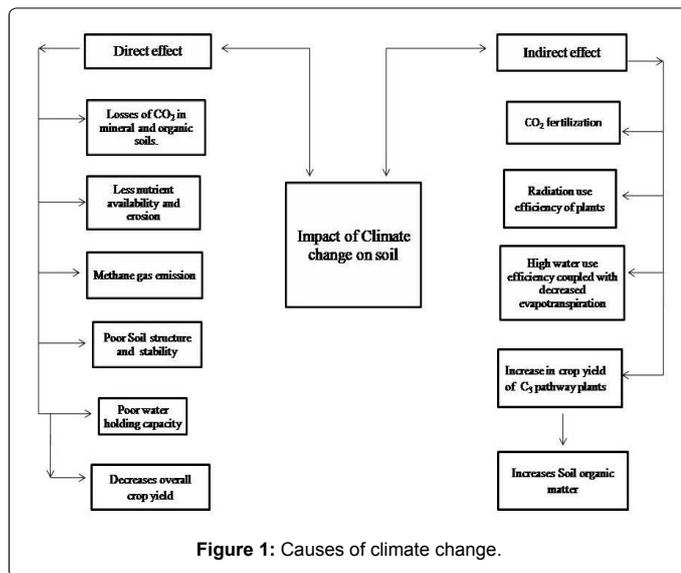
In a world where population size is soaring and reaching unsustainable levels, a drastic reduction in agricultural yields of major cereal crops can significantly hinder ensuring food security. The majority of researchers agree that global warming is irreversible over a short period and requires global policy change and sustainable agricultural practices for a long period to mitigate and reverse the environmental damage.

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### Consequences of Climate Change and its Context to Northeast India

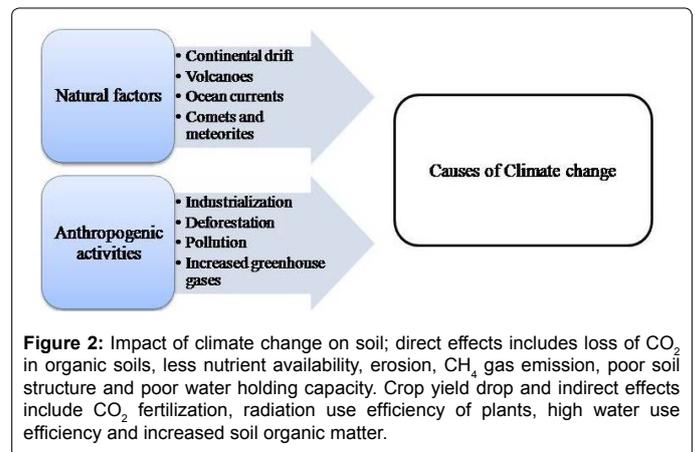
Global climate change has already had noticeable effects on the environment and such prolonged effects are an alteration of growing season, precipitation patterns, and severe drought and heats waves. Assessment of the impact of climate change can be done based on four important sectors of Indian economy, including water, biodiversity, natural ecosystem and agriculture. We all know the potential of Northeastern states in terms of biodiversity and agriculture, but the area falls under climate sensitive regions of India. This is the reason due to which slight climatic alteration will adversely affect various agricultural activities. The surface air temperature and precipitation of the north eastern region is projected to rise from 1.8°C to 2.1°C and 0.3-3%, respectively in the 2030s with respect to the 1970s [7]. It will adversely affect the paddy production, tea plantation and other agricultural crop production, which will degrade the overall livelihood of the local people. The main concern is paddy cultivation as rice is the principal food grain crop of the North Eastern hilly ecosystem followed by maize, occupying 3.51 million hectares which accounts for more than 80% of the total cultivated area of the region and 7.8% of the total rice area in India while its share in national rice production is only 5.9% [8].

Before discussing the effects of climate change on paddy, it is important to know about its impact on soil functions. The impact on soils is a sluggish and complex process. It can be strongly affected by climate change; directly and indirectly (Figure 2).

Indirectly, the combined impact of climate change is expected to generally increase the yield for some crops. The result of the combined effects of CO<sub>2</sub> fertilization, radiation use efficiency and longer growing seasons which mostly complies to plants with the C<sub>3</sub> photosynthetic pathway [9] and not prominent to species with the C<sub>4</sub> pathway [10].

### Impact of Climate Change on Rice Yield

The climate change is going to reduce rice yield in India by 4.5%-9% by 2039 [11]. Global climatic predictions indicated increased frequency of heat spikes and warmer nights, exerting additional challenges towards achieving higher crop yields [12]. The monsoon rainfall is not the only weather variable affecting the kharif rice yield in India [13]. Paddy yield and its response to climate change can be estimated by



using crop simulation models such as GIS-based environment policy integrated climate (GEPIC) model.

Climatic factors such as temperature, rainfall, atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> and solar radiation are important parameters to rice production [14]. An increase in temperature variability and rainfall variability were found to be beneficial and harmful, respectively to autumn and winter rice yield but these variables were positive as well as insignificant for summer rice [15].

Increasing trend of daily maximum temperature may decrease the rice spikelet fertility, which affects for reduction of the yield while the increasing trend of atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> concentration could increase the rice yield [16]. Temperatures beyond thresholds limit reduces the crop duration of rice and it also results in increased spikelet sterility [17], reduced grain-filling duration [18] and enhanced respiratory rate [19] resulting in lower yield and lower quality rice grain [20]. Rice is highly susceptible to high temperature particularly at flowering stage [17]. The overall effects of multiple climate variables on yield depend on both the sensitivity of yield to the climate variables and the magnitude of change in the climate variables, where temperature and Solar radiation duration plays a crucial role in affecting rice growth and productivity [21].

The rise in night temperature associated with global warming decreases the rice yield. Rice yield tends to be reduced by higher minimum temperature [22] and lower solar radiation [23], especially during the latter part of the growing season. The warming impacts on rice phenology were studied and it was found that climate warming over the past three decades had shortened rice growth period in China [24]. Temperature stress during the flowering period of rice has been experimentally linked to spikelet sterility [25].

The increased level of CO<sub>2</sub> from 340 to 680 ppm could increase the yield of major crops by 10%-15% especially in C<sub>3</sub> plants like rice [26,27] but the beneficial effects can be negated as the incidence photosynthetically Active Radiation (PAR) is likely to decline by 1% [28]. A study reported that physiological traits like relative water content (RWC %), membrane stability index (MSI %), chlorophyll content, photosynthetic rate and TSS content were improved under elevated CO<sub>2</sub> but responses of these traits were negative with elevated temperature [29]. A study showed that panicle initiation period was most sensitive stage to water stress that contributed to a substantial reduction in yield of rice [30].

## Relationship of Flowering Time of Rice with Photoperiod and Temperature

The rate of development of rice is generally responsive to photoperiod for only part of their life cycle i.e. between emergence and flowering. Three stages of pre-flowering development can be identified in plants namely the juvenile, inductive, and post-inductive phases. Photoperiod only affects the duration of the inductive phase [31,32]. The most important exception is in rice where the duration of the pre-inductive phase also known as the basic vegetative phase or BVP, may exceed 50 days which is quite a long duration [33]. It is of immense importance to quantify and remodel the climate change responses with respect to use of the appropriate temperature driver, not simply the ambient air temperature. A study revealed that it is the temperature nearest to the growing point or meristem that matters [34]. With severe water deficits or at elevated CO<sub>2</sub> concentration, large differences between air and tissue temperatures can also arise due to a decrease in cooling effect by transpiration. Hence it is proved that the timing of flowering within a season is largely determined by responses to temperature and photoperiod. To ensure sustained adoption of water-saving technologies under future hotter climates, rice cultivars with enhanced tolerance of combined heat and drought stress during the floral meristem stage will be crucial to complement the progress achieved in overcoming the damage across other sensitive developmental stages such as flowering [35].

## Occurrence of Abiotic Stress as a Consequence of Climate Change

There is an emergence of several abiotic stresses due to the climate change lately. These have negative impact on morphology and physiology of rice plants, hampering its overall growth and development. Some of the adverse conditions are discussed below:

### Drought

The adverse impacts of water shortage on rice crops would be, to a large extent, maintained under elevated ambient CO<sub>2</sub> levels, which shows CO<sub>2</sub> and drought interactions. According to a study, moisture stress affects rice at morphological (reduced germination, plant height, plant biomass, number of tillers, various root and leaf traits), physiological (reduced photosynthesis, transpiration, stomatal conductance, water use efficiency, relative water content, chlorophyll content, photosystem II activity, membrane stability, carbon isotope discrimination and abscisic acid content), biochemical (accumulation of osmo-protectant like proline, sugars, polyamines and antioxidants) and molecular (altered expression of genes which encode transcription factors and defense related proteins) levels and thereby affects its yield [36]. The reproductive stage is affected by reduced grain formation, inhibited pollen development at meiosis stage and panicle exertion, which can usually account for 70%-75% spikelet sterility under water stress [37]. It also inhibits processes such as anther dehiscence, pollen shedding, pollen germination, and fertilization [38].

### Submergence/flooding

Rice is semi aquatic in nature and tolerates partial submergence more than any other crops but dies within few days when completely submerged. The flooded environment, created during rice cultivation, provides anaerobic conditions that favor CH<sub>4</sub> production by methanogens [39]. A study concluded that anaerobic conditions affect glycolysis promoting ethanol and lactate production through ethanolic fermentation pathway [40]. In a study, it is mentioned about the toxicity

of ethanol since it can diffuse out of the cell and results in the formation of acetaldehyde as a toxic intermediate [41]. It was concluded from the study that varieties and submergence duration had significant influence on morphological characters of rice at early vegetative stage [42].

### Chilling stress

Low temperature is a major factor limiting rice growth and yield, and seedling is one of the developmental stages at which sensitivity to chilling stress is higher [43]. Chilling stress triggers a series of changes in physiological and molecular processes and, results in the accumulation of reactive oxygen species (ROS) in plant cells [44]. Indica types are generally sensitive to cold as compared with japonica.

### Saline soils and coastal salinity

Nearly 6.7 million ha of rice growing region are affected by salinity stress in India, or 15.76% of their total harvested area which is a result of climate change [45]. In a report from a study it was found out that salt-stress damage could be heightened by the interactions between high temperature and relative humidity (vapor pressure deficit-VPD) [46]. Rice can be categorized as moderately salt sensitive crop and under high-salinity conditions, photosynthesis, protein synthesis and metabolism are significantly affected. Under salinity stress, the accumulation of reactive oxygen species (ROS) including superoxide radicals, H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub>, and hydroxyl radicals has been termed as an important cause of damage to the plant cell [47].

### Acidic soil

Soil pH levels range from 0 to 14, with 7 being neutral. Levels below 7 are acidic, and those above are alkaline. Acid soils significantly limit crop production worldwide because approximately 50% of the world's potentially arable soils are acidic. The primary limitations on acid soils are toxic levels of aluminum (Al), manganese (Mn) and iron (Fe) as well as suboptimal levels of phosphorous (P) [48]. The main reason of soil acidity in high rainfall areas such as North East India is due to high rainfall and soil erosion.

## Approaches to Mitigate Abiotic Stress through Crop Improvement and its Achievements

There are several options to counter abiotic stress generated by climate change. Crop improvement approach is one of the most effective ways to deal with abiotic stress. Numerous works have been done to counter the impact of climate change in rice. Climate robust rice system should be designed to cope with increased risk of abiotic stress. The concepts of climate resilient agriculture have been of immense importance recently. It enhances the resilience of Indian agriculture to climate change and climate variability through strategic research and technology demonstration. Different activities are performed by diverse branches of agriculture and its integration to increase the resilience against climate change. Crop improvement will help in finding the sustainable and effective solution against the negative impact of climate change.

Crop improvement helps in developing high-temperature tolerant cultivars. According to the modulation of crop growing period, early or late maturing cultivars should be adopted. Also, the crop models have been used to estimate crop yield potential at scales ranging from a specific field to a region or country [49]. Thus crop growth simulation models can replace the need for years of costly multi location, on station and on farm trials to select rice varieties. In context to plant breeding, technical advancement in the field of molecular markers

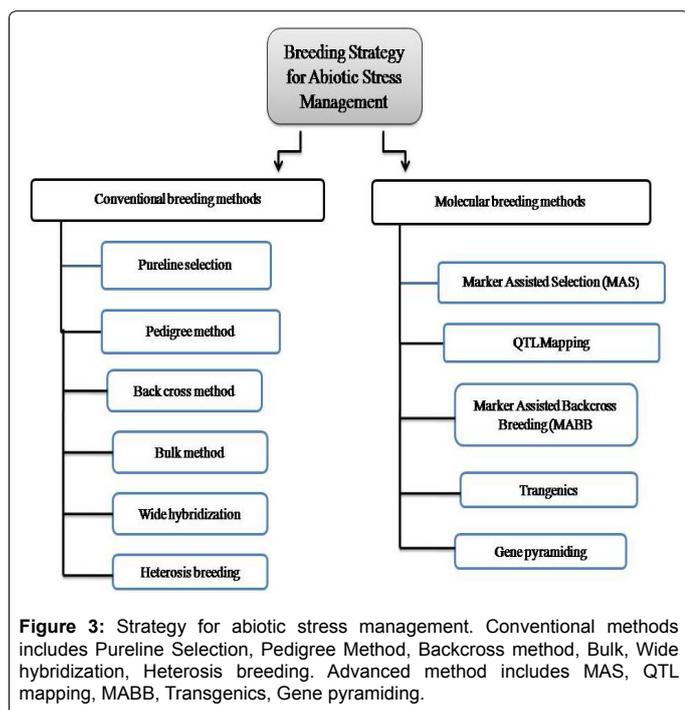
led to the development of new branch called “molecular breeding”. Conventional plant breeding such as selection, introduction, pureline, pedigree method, backcrossing, intercrossing, single seed descent and topcross can also be used. Developing a variety tolerant to abiotic stress is very tedious and complex work. The mechanism underlying abiotic stress tolerance in plants is not well understood. Many previous ‘omics’ studies, which can reveal highly informative expression patterns of genes/proteins that reflect the differentiation of response among genotypes with contrasting stress tolerance, have been performed to unravel the abiotic stress-responsive mechanisms in plants [50-52]. Disclosure of new approach is gaining popularity among the molecular biologist, it is known as top-down approach which involves metabolic network reconstructions using ‘omics’ data (e.g., transcriptomics, proteomics) generated through DNA microarrays, RNA-Seq or other modern high-throughput genomic techniques using appropriate statistical and bioinformatics methodologies [53].

Yield under drought is a function of yield potential, escape and drought response. The use of the Drought Resistance Index (DRI) can help to distinguish drought resistance from escape and yield potential [54]. Therefore, yield under drought can be evaluated to screen drought tolerance rice genotypes. Quantitative trait loci (QTLs) related to drought resistance is identified with the help of QTL mapping. The regions of chromosome responsible for drought tolerance are tagged with the help of molecular markers. The variety Sahbhagi Dhan, released and notified in India in 2010, showed a consistently good performance under rain-fed direct seeded upland and transplanted low land conditions [55]. A variety named Vandana tolerant to drought has been developed by Marker Assisted Selection (MAS) (Figure 3) [56]. New drought-resistant rice varieties such as RD12 for glutinous and RD33 for non-glutinous rice are also being produced with the application of DNA technology. *Oryza glaberrima*, a wild species of rice is a useful genetic source since it has a habit of early-morning flowering and high transpiration with sufficient water both of which are convenient traits for avoiding heat stress [57]. Rice proteome represents a phenomenal source of proteins that govern traits of agronomic importance, such as

drought tolerance. A comparison study of root cytoplasmic proteome was done for a drought tolerant rice cultivar in PEG induced drought conditions and the largest percentage of identified proteins was found to be involved in bioenergy and metabolism (29%) and mainly consists of malate dehydrogenase, succinyl-CoA, putative acetyl-CoA synthetase and pyruvate dehydrogenase, etc. which showed a large contribution toward drought regulatory mechanism in rice [58].

Internode elongation is the simplest mechanism of the submergence tolerance in deep rice. The most widely used variety is FR13A, a tall, photoperiod-sensitive variety of the aus-type rice from India [59]. Unraveling the genetic basis of the submergence tolerance is necessary. Ample number of genetic studies [60,61] have suggested that ~70% of the phenotypic variation that results in submergence tolerance of the rice genotypes is contributed by a major QTL [Submergence1 (Sub1)] located on rice chromosome 9 [62]. Three ethylene-responsive transcription factor (ERF) genes (SUB1A, SUB1B, and SUB1C) have been identified, out of which the SUB1A-1 allele has been identified as the major determinant of tolerance [63]. Varieties such as Swarna-sub-1, Samba mahsuri-sub 1, IR64-sub-1, etc. showing submergence tolerance were developed by using Marker Assisted Backcross Breeding (MABB) (Table 1). A transcriptomic comparison between deepwater rice and non-deepwater rice during submergence revealed that the expression of genes related to gibberellin biosynthesis, trehalose biosynthesis, anaerobic fermentation, cell wall modification and transcription factors that include ethylene-responsive factors was significantly different between the varieties, and also suggested the role of jasmonic acid in the submergence response of rice [64]. A study validated the transcriptome data through q-PCR of selected genes and biochemical analysis related to carbohydrate metabolism, anaerobic respiration and oxidative stress tolerance were found more significant in submergence tolerant genotype when compared to susceptible one [65].

Rice growing states such as West Bengal and Orissa have a large share of coastal areas that suffer from salinity. A major QTL, Saltol responsible for salinity tolerance was identified on chromosome 1 of



Variety developed	Method of development	Abiotic stress tolerance	Gene/ QTL	Parent/Donor	Reference
Swarna-sub-1	MABB	flash flood tolerance	Sub 1 gene	<i>O. sativa</i> ssp. <i>indica</i> cultivar FR13A	[79]
Samba Mahsuri-sub 1	MABB	flash flood tolerance	Sub 1 gene	FR13A (IR49830)	[80]
IR 64-sub-1	MABB	flash flood tolerance	Sub 1 gene	FR13A	[80]
CR 1009-sub 1	MABB	flash flood tolerance	Sub 1 gene	FR13A	[80]
Sahbhagi Dhan	Hybridization	drought tolerance	-	IR55419-04 X Way Rarem	[81]
Vandana	MAS	drought tolerance	qtl.12.1, qtl3.1, qtl1.1, qtl9.1.	Way Rarem	[82]
CSR 43, CSR 10, CSR 36	Selection	Sodic soil tolerant	-	KDML105/IR4630-22-2-5-1-3/ IR 20925-33-3-1-28	[83-85]
Improved Pusa Basmati 1121	MABB and MAS	Saline soil tolerant	Saltol (QTL)	Pokkali X IR 29 FL478 (RIL), Nona Bokra	[86]

**Table 1:** Achievements in the field of abiotic stress management.

Pokkali, and SKC1 (*OsHKT1;5*). A gene located within the Saltol region was also identified from Nona Bokra [66]. Breeders are trying to combine SUB1 gene and Saltol in the same type of rice through gene pyramiding, increasing the rice plant's tolerance to salinity and submergence [67]. In a study for salinity stress tolerance, quantitative proteome analysis revealed that total of 56 proteins were significantly altered and 16 of them were enriched in the pathways of photosynthesis, antioxidant and oxidative phosphorylation [50]. A study concluded that identification of root hair-preferential genes and in depth analysis of those genes will be a useful reference to accelerate the understanding of root-hair development in rice [68]. Deciphering the underlying miRNAs-based mechanisms for streamlining nutrient uptake and transport would be a giant step towards solving this puzzle [69].

Molecular genetic tools have been urgently sought to improve rice chilling tolerance in order to maintain rice production in current regions and expand it into northern areas with lower yearly temperatures. It was found that overexpression of *COLD1jap* significantly enhances chilling tolerance, whereas rice lines with deficiency or down regulation p/of *COLD1jap* are sensitive to cold [70]. *OsCTZFP8* is a C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>2</sub> zinc finger transcription factor that plays an important role in cold tolerance in rice [71]. Multi-locus probability tests and linkage disequilibrium (LD) analyses detected 46 functional genetic units (FGUs) (37 single loci and 9 association groups or AGs) distributed in 37 bins (~20%) across the rice genome for Cold Tolerance [72].

Acid soils have aggravated levels of Al, Mn and Fe as well as low levels of phosphorous (P). The source of P has become limited in upland soil by P-fixation as acidic nature of soil and removal of more P from lowland conditions [73]. 10 QTL for Al tolerance in rice using a double haploid population were detected and also three QTL were identified by using recombinant inbred lines derived from a cross between one cultivar and one wild species [74]. Elevated CO<sub>2</sub> concentration that counters Al toxicity by decreasing cell wall hemicellulose in rice was reported [24]. Phosphorus uptake1 (PUP1), a major quantitative trait locus derived from Kasalath is reported to exhibit 78.8% phenotypic variance for P-uptake and the only available QTLs for marker assisted selection in rice [75]. A major candidate gene *OsPSTOL1* (Phosphorus starvation tolerance 1) in the PUP1 QTL has been cloned and gene based markers are available for marker assisted gene pyramiding in the different genetic background of rice [76]. Analysis of transcriptome data helped to identify differentially expressed genes associated with phosphate starvation on a genome scale and confirmed the meta-expression patterns of two genes stimulated by Pi starvation, which suggested novel promoters for enhancing Pi (inorganic Phosphorus) use efficiency [77]. Genetic variation in adaptation and tolerance for iron toxicity has been utilized for the development of iron toxic tolerant cultivars. There is a need to exploit genetic variability available among the different accessions. Recently, a unique QTL, qFRSDW11 associated with Iron and zinc toxicity tolerance was identified [78]. Therefore, pyramiding of genes/QTLs from different sources could result in higher level of tolerance in new varieties.

## Conclusion

Genus *Oryza* consists of 24 species, out of which *O. sativa* and *O. glabberima* are known for cultivation. All the remaining 22 species are wild in nature and act as a reservoir of several abiotic tolerance genes; large screening of tolerance in wild genotypes should be done with the help of molecular markers to identify the underlying QTLs/genes. Molecular breeding will help in utilizing the inherent potential of wild species by generating abiotic tolerant lines through introgression. Genome sequencing of other *Oryza* genome types which have not

been sequenced can hasten the approach of developing abiotic stress tolerant variety. Transcription factors C-repeat/dehydration-responsive element binding proteins (CBF/DREBs) are known regulators of abiotic stress responses [79-87]. Transcriptomics and proteomics study of these proteins in wild genotypes, together with the available and newly generated QTL map will be key to counter the impact of climate change.

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