



## Advancing the Mainstreaming of Millet in Odisha's Agrifood System

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### Introduction and Context

Millets holds immense promise as one of the key strategies in addressing several critical challenges that Odisha's agrifood system faces today, including malnutrition, rural poverty, and the impacts of climate change. During recent years, the state has made significant progress in promoting sustainable agriculture, with millets emerging as a crucial component of the agrifood system for this transformation.

Recognizing the potential of millets to enhance nutritional outcomes, improve climate resilience, and support the livelihoods of smallholder farmers, the Government of Odisha has undertaken commendable efforts to promote millet cultivation<sup>1</sup> since 2017-18 through initiatives such as the Odisha Millets Mission (OMM), which was later redesigned as *Shree Anna Abhiyan*, promotion of non-*ragi* millet under MURO-

Millet in upland regions of Odisha project, Mission Shakti among others. These efforts have led to notable successes, particularly in increasing millet production, raising awareness about their nutritional, economic, and environmental benefits, increased consumption and employment opportunities, especially for rural women.

As Odisha continues to build upon these achievements, there is a need to identify levers for harnessing the full potential and advancing the mainstreaming of millets within the agrifood system from the production to consumption continuum, including the rural-to-urban ecosystem. By integrating millets more deeply into the agrifood system by targeting potential upland and midland ecologies, the state can drive forward a vision of sustainable agricultural practices, resilient and strengthened local food systems, and improved nutritional security.

<sup>1</sup>It is important to note that finger millet accounts for over 86% of the total millet cultivation area and 95% of the total millet production in Odisha.

This policy brief seeks to offer insights and potential strategies to fully realize the potential of millets in Odisha State. It emphasizes the importance of collaborative approaches that engage the government, farmers, the private sector, and civil society stakeholders in creating a more inclusive and resilient agrifood system. It is intended to complement and strengthen ongoing government initiatives by offering evidence-based policy recommendations that build upon the progress already achieved.

## Changing Landscape of Millets in Odisha

The cultivation of millets in Odisha has undergone a significant transformation, reflecting the state's proactive measures to mainstream these crops into its agrifood systems. Since the launch of the Odisha Millets Mission (renamed now as *Shree Anna Abhiyan*) in 2017-18, there has been notable progress in expanding the area under millet cultivation.






Prior to 2016, the total area under millet farming steadily declined, reaching its lowest point of around 114,350 hectares in 2017. However, post-2017, there was a remarkable revival, with the area increasing to 179,000 hectares by 2022, representing an increase of 56.5%. Similarly, production increased from approximately 100,580 tons in 2017 to over 226,972 tons in 2022, representing an increase of 125.7%, reflecting both expanded cultivation and enhanced productivity. Yields showed significant improvement from 880 kg/ha in 2017 to nearly 1,268 kg/ha in 2022, representing an increase of 44%.

These trends highlight the success of the targeted mission mode strategies in revitalizing millet farming in the region, which included technical support, farmer

## Expansion of Millet Cultivation in Odisha:

**Before initiative (2017)**

**After initiative (2022)**

	<b>Cultivated area</b> <b>114,350</b> ha	<b>↑ 56.5% increase</b> <b>179,000</b> ha
	<b>Millet production</b> <b>100,580</b> tons	<b>↑ 125.7% increase</b> <b>226,972</b> tons
	<b>Millet yield</b> <b>880</b> kg/ha	<b>↑ 44% increase</b> <b>1,268</b> kg/ha
	<b>Farmer participation</b> <b>5,739</b> farmers	<b>↑ 9 times increase</b> <b>59,621</b> farmers
	<b>Public procurement</b> <b>1,799</b> tons	<b>↑ 33 times increase</b> <b>60,335</b> tons

incentives, improved inputs availability, farmer awareness, millet inclusion in public feeding programs, public procurement of millet from farmers at minimum support price (MSP), and market linkages.

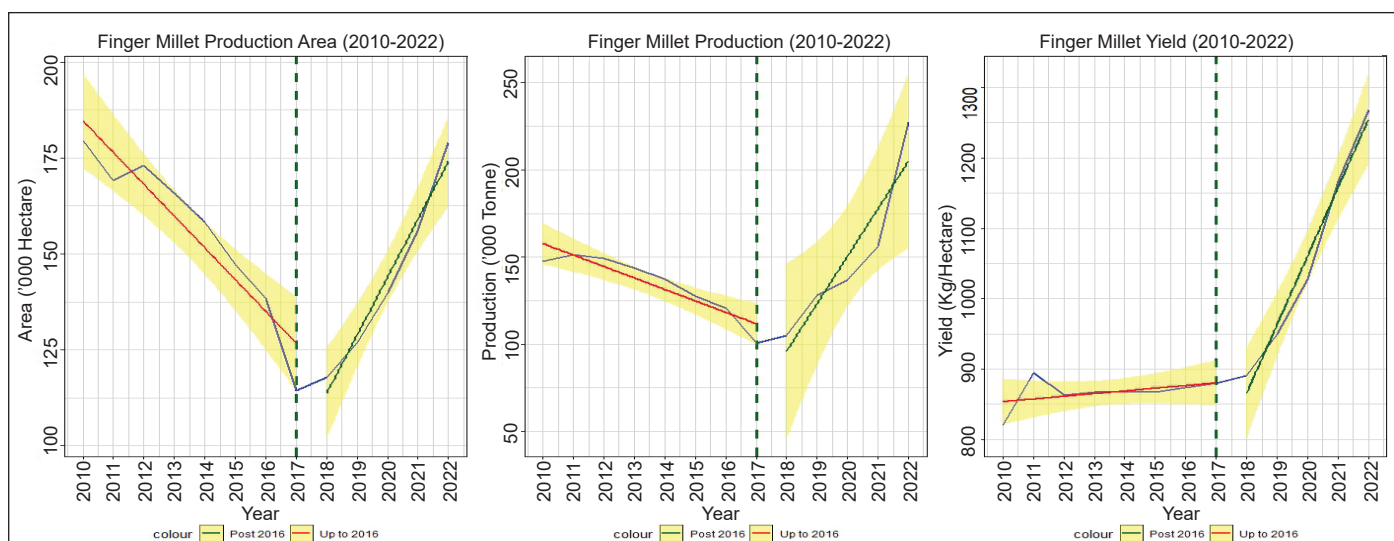


Figure 1: Changing landscape (production area, production, and yield) in finger millet in Odisha<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup>Data source: Department of Agriculture and Farmer's Empowerment (<https://agri.odisha.gov.in/page/statistics>)

Districts such as Koraput, Balangir, Gajapati, Ganjam, Kalahandi, Kandhamal, Malkangiri, Nabarangapur, Nayagarh, Nuapada, Rayagada, and Sundargarh have shown remarkable progress in increasing the area, production, and yield of millet in Odisha. In contrast, districts like Angul, Bargarh, Boudh, Cuttack, Dhenkanal, Jharsuguda, Kendrapara, Kendujhar, Khorda, Mayurbhanj, Puri, and Sambalpur are in the early stages of adopting finger millet cultivation and are beginning to show good progress.

The *Shree Anna Abhiyan* has achieved remarkable progress over the years, significantly increasing farmer participation from 5,739 in 2018-19 to 59,621 in 2022-23. Finger millet (*ragi*)'s public procurement has also surged, rising from 1,798.58 tons to 60,334.88 tons during the same period, which has been a key driver of better price-discovery of finger millet. The procurement process is being facilitated through an online system called M-PAS, a platform designed for smooth procurement management and operation. Furthermore, the distribution of millet through the public distribution system (PDS) expanded from 1,750 tons in 2021-22 to 40,250 tons in 2023-24, benefiting over 11.3 million PDS cardholders.

## Gender Inclusion

Shree Anna Abhiyan (SAA) has made notable progress in piloting gender inclusion strategies. A Gender Analysis Committee was formed to review ways to make SAA more gender friendly. Key recommendations include focusing on single-women households left out during implementation, developing policies for better access to schemes for women farmers, participatory machinery development, gender audits of FPOs, and long-term support for WSHGs in the millet value chain. In response, the state's single-women pilot on millet promotion in three blocks—Lamtaput (Koraput), Bangripasi (Mayurbhanj), and Lathikata (Sundergarh) covering 1,329 households is an example of evidence-based policy action and likely to contribute in harnessing the potential of millet development.

## Current Opportunities and Challenges Across Production to Consumption Continuum

ICRISAT as part of its Pan-India Millet Value Chain Survey comprehensively examined the Odisha millet value chain, focusing on key stakeholders, including farmers, traders, processors, consumers, women self-help groups (WSHGs), and *Anganwadi*/ Mid-Day Meal centers across Koraput, Rayagada, Bhubaneswar, Sundargarh, and Gajapati districts.

## Millet based foods: Stakeholders' perception and behavior change

It is important to highlight that the involvement of farmers and other actors in the millet value chain has significantly increased due to various initiatives implemented by the Odisha Government under *Shree Anna Abhiyan*. Moreover, the perception and attitudes of value chain stakeholders, including consumers, toward millet products have improved over time. While traditional millet products like *Arsi Pitha* are widely familiar in Odisha's food culture, the introduction of new millet-based foods, such as *samosa*, cookies, biscuits, chocolate and nutri bar, cake, pizza, and Kurkure, etc., presents a novel experience for many.

From our focus group discussions with women self-help groups (WSHGs) and other stakeholders, it came out that there has been a slow but steady consumption behavior change. The people (consumers) initially were reluctant to purchase the millet snacks due to their unusual color and distinct taste. However, over time, an increasing number of rural and urban consumers began to accept and appreciate these products, recognizing that millet-based snacks are healthier as compared to snacks made from refined wheat.

Several farmers also wanted to grow millet, at least in a small area, for home consumption. The acceptance for millet products was much higher among the urban health-conscious consumers. This increasing acceptance and consumption behavior change has created demand and conditions supporting some micro-scale millet processing enterprises run by WSHGs contributing to the sustainability of their business. However, the millet business of all WSHGs at present is not economically viable without government support. Further, the share of millet-based snacks out of the total volume of snacks sold in rural and urban areas remains very small.

## Farmers

With support from the Odisha Government, farmers have been experiencing notable progress in the millet value chain. Odisha was the first state in the country to incentivize farmers on new areas brought under millet cultivation. However, this study found that all the farmers were not fully aware of this incentive scheme and were not linked to the Millet Procurement Automation System (M-PAS). To encourage farmers, the government provides seeds to farmers, and in some areas, Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) and NGOs

play a key role in distributing seeds. Under this arrangement, farmers get free seed and in return, they need to give back twice the quantity of millet grain (by weight) to these organizations, which is shared as seed to other farmers.

In most cases, the expansion of millet cultivation took place on *kharif* fallow lands, resulting in the generation of additional farm income. Farmers with good access to markets (*mandi*) expressed interest in expanding millet cultivation, but many other traditional millet farmers wanted to shift to cotton due to perceived lower labor requirements, higher government incentives for cotton, and challenges in selling millet at remunerative price.

Both new and traditional farmers agree that millet is mainly grown for household consumption, with any surplus sold. Our study found that the cost of producing finger millet (*ragi*) in Odisha was about ₹21,500 per hectare, lower than in other states due to lesser labor costs and more usage of organic inputs in millet cultivation. Farmers selling at government markets (*mandis*) benefit from the Minimum Support Price (MSP) of ₹42.90 per kg, available only from January to March. Consequently, smallholder farmers growing millets during the monsoon (*kharif*) season or needing quick cash after harvest often sell to local traders, FPOs, NGOs, or WSHGs at lower prices ranging from ₹25–32 per kg, depending on cleanliness, color, and grain size. However, the government procurement of about one-fourth of total finger millet production at MSP has contributed to much better price discovery.

The average net return from millet was around ₹20,750 per ha. Progressive farmers cultivating larger areas achieved economies of scale and better market access and could earn up to ₹45,000 per ha. However, respondents emphasized that access to *mandi* (market) facilities plays a crucial role in determining their ability to sell at remunerative prices. Farmers in areas with poor access to *mandis* were often forced to sell their millet at lower prices as compared to MSP, limiting their overall net returns. Several farmers mentioned that little millet (*kutki/suan*) is more resilient, profitable and also tastier than finger millet but access to its seed and market is a constraint. Further, the rice yield in several upland areas was less than 2 tons per ha, presenting an opportunity to diversify with millets- finger millet, little millet, and foxtail millet. Lack of appropriate storage at farm household level often affected the quality of stored grains for consumption and seed. Farmers' and other value chain stakeholders' access to scale-appropriate mechanization is critically important for boosting millets in Odisha. The Participatory machinery development initiative taken up under the SAA is likely to help in improving access to appropriately designed machinery in each agroclimatic region.

## Traders

Traders are a vital link in the millet value chain. They typically commute to farm gates to procure freshly harvested millet from the remote villages of Koraput, Rayagada, Sundargarh, and several other districts. These traders often engage directly with farmers, assessing the grain for attributes such as color, cleanliness, grain size, variety type, and taste, which influence the buying price. Market dynamics and government policies heavily influence buying and price discovery. The traders mostly prioritize those markets and timings when government procurement is absent and often pay much lower prices than the MSP. For instance, finger millet, a staple in Odisha, was procured by traders at an average price of ₹26/kg, pearl millet at ₹21/kg and little millet at ₹28/kg. Traders use this produce to cater for diverse market outlets. Some millet is sold directly to consumers at local bazaars, while the rest is directed toward other traders or processors. They sell millet to local consumers at higher prices: ₹60/kg for finger millet, ₹40/kg for pearl millet, and ₹65/kg for little millet, while bulk sales to processors fetch ₹30-37/kg.

However, traders face challenges like high logistical costs due to sourcing from scattered small-scale farmers and inadequate transport infrastructure in hilly terrains. Seasonal availability, unstable supply, and fluctuating prices increase financial risks and prompt higher market margins. Additionally, limited market linkages hinder access to larger urban centers with growing demand for millet products. Despite these obstacles, traders remain dedicated to the millet value chain, recognizing opportunities for growth through collaborations with processors and WSHGs.

## Processors

In Odisha, the millet processing ecosystem has two major segments: modern startups or companies focusing on contemporary millet food products and, WSHGs under Mission Shakti, which focus more on millet-based traditional dishes along with modern foods and snacks to a small extent. Despite their different focuses, both types of processors contribute significantly to the millet value chain and face unique challenges at various stages of operation.

## Startups and Companies

Startups and companies in Odisha are focused on creating Millet centers, outlets, cafés, and innovative millet-based products, including biscuits, nutritional bars, pizzas and ready-to-eat mixes. They source millet from local traders or FPOs, with buying prices for finger millet ranging from ₹27-40/kg. Millet is cleaned, graded,

and processed using modern technology before being packaged for local and urban markets. Cleaned grain is sold at ₹60-70/kg, while value-added products like millet flour sell for ₹80-170/kg. These businesses primarily target high-end small market segments of health-conscious consumers, charging premium prices that limit their market reach and consumer demand.

Modern processors face significant challenges, including high setup costs for processing units, lack of specialized machinery, limited experience and knowledge of millet food product technology, and inconsistent demand that hampers scalability. Logistic inefficiencies stemming from sourcing from scattered small-scale farmers often tend to increase cost. Although processors maintain quality control and adhere to food safety standards, these operational hurdles and high market risks lead them to impose steep margins, further constraining consumer demand and business growth.

### Women's Self-Help Groups (WSHGs)

Women Self-Help Groups (WSHGs) under Mission Shakti in Odisha are vital partners in strengthening the millet value chain, contributing to production, processing, and popularizing millet-based foods like porridge, *pitha*, *khir*, *samosa*, *laddu*, biscuits, and noodles. These products serve local markets, village fairs, exhibitions and government-supported platforms such as Millet Shakti Tiffin Wheels initiative, enhancing visibility and accessibility. These government-supported platforms have increased the visibility and accessibility of millet-based products, benefiting both producers and consumers. These channels ensure a steady but limited demand. WSHGs source finger millet directly from farmers or FPOs at ₹25–35 per kg and sell their products through fairs, local shops, and institutional orders. Typically, a 10-member WSHG earns ₹25,000–35,000 monthly from millet-based activities. However, many focus solely on production, avoiding market risks.

Progress is notable in districts like Koraput, Sundargarh, Khordha, Kalahandi, and Keonjhar, but systemic challenges persist. Limited access to Food Safety and Standard Authority of India (FSSAI) certification and weak marketing skills restrict larger market entry. NGOs and FPOs often rebrand and resell WSHG products at higher prices, reducing their direct profits. Manual labor and lack of advanced technology further hinder scalability and competitiveness. Addressing these gaps with support for certifications, marketing, and technology could unlock WSHGs' full potential in the millet economy.

## Consumers

Millet has been part of traditional kitchens in Odisha's households for generations, though its importance has decreased over time. Today, its renewed integration into the food systems strikes a balance between preserving old traditions and adapting to modern lifestyles.

Rural households in the districts of Koraput, Sundargarh, Kalahandi, and Keonjhar, among others, still consume millet as part of their cultural diets, crafting dishes like *payees*, *halwa*, *khir*, and *jao*. However, millet was often treated as an occasional food rather than a staple like rice or wheat *chapati*, with the average monthly consumption standing at 2.15 kg per person. For urban consumers, millet was largely a health-focused, niche choice, with ready-to-eat snacks and processed products gaining much traction in recent times. High prices—₹60–70/kg for grain and ₹85–170/kg for flour—make millet less accessible compared to subsidized staples like rice and wheat, especially for cost-sensitive consumers. Many rural people still view millet as a “poor person's food,” and its taste and texture struggle to compete with rice or wheat, further reducing appeal among younger generations.

Consumers frequently find it difficult to source millet flour or other millet-based products in local markets. This irregular supply disrupts cooking habits, limiting millet's mainstreaming into daily diets. Inconsistent demand is also perpetuating irregular supply. Over 60% of families in the sample survey believe that millet's inclusion in the PDS will improve affordability and access and could bring it back to the mainstream. Millet consumption is being influenced significantly by family networks and community traditions. Friends, relatives, awareness programs, and local demonstrations are playing a key role in shaping dietary choices, with self-learning and word-of-mouth acting as powerful motivators. However, the lack of effective marketing and advertising limits millet's visibility in potentially large consumer markets such as Bhubaneswar, and national and export markets.

Looking ahead, households advocate for millet's mainstreaming into public feeding programs like *anganwadi* (*childcare center*) and mid-day meal schemes, alongside awareness campaigns and cooking demonstrations to highlight its versatility. Institutional support and targeted initiatives could help revive millet as a nutritious and affordable food.

## Implications and Policy Recommendations for Advancing the Millet Mainstreaming

The Odisha Government's proactive initiative- *Shree Anna Abhiyan* have underscored the transformative potential of millets in addressing critical challenges such as ensuring nutritional security, building climate resilience, and enhancing rural livelihoods. These efforts have not only increased millet production and awareness but also integrated millet into public feeding programs, laying a strong foundation for mainstreaming these climate-smart crops in the state's agrifood systems.

Farmers and rural women, particularly through WSHGs and FPOs, have benefited from targeted capacity-building programs, financial support, and public procurement enabling better price discovery resulting in notable behavioral shifts across the millet value chain. The number of millet consumers has surged by 30–40% during recent years, empowering resource-poor women with additional income. While the health benefits of this shift are yet to be fully quantified, these achievements are a promising step forward. Despite significant progress, Odisha's millet economy's sustainability at present pivots on government support and handholding. Hence, to unlock the full potential of millets and realize their promise for Odisha's resilience and rural prosperity, the following strategies are recommended across the production-to-consumption continuum:

- **Potential of upland paddy areas:** There is a large area under upland paddy with an average yield of about 2 t/ha. This upland area has high potential to be brought under millets' cultivation for enhancing farm resilience and income. Little millet and foxtail millet were more resilient and had higher yields than finger millet in many places. Hence, it has good potential for expansion in certain finger millet areas, certain low-yielding upland and midland rice areas, and *kharif* fallow lands.
- **Potential of little and foxtail millet:** Cultivation area can potentially be expanded to about 50,000 hectares if we can improve farmers' access to seed, need-based machines, and markets. At the country level, little and foxtail millets fetch comparatively higher prices than finger millet. Mapping the potential areas where it can be more competitive can help in designing further strategies.
- **Building on millet traditions:** To achieve a better outcome, initial efforts may concentrate on regions where millets have traditionally been grown, such as Koraput, Rayagada, Nuapada, Kandhamal, Keonjhar,

and Sundargarh. These areas have the knowledge and ecological conditions favorable for millet cultivation, providing a strong foundation for scaling up production and mainstreaming millets in the state's agrifood system.

- **Expansion of seed systems and scale-appropriate mechanization:** The government's current efforts need to be further strengthened to improve access to seed and small machinery for enhanced production and post-production activities efficiency and reducing transaction costs and post-harvest losses. A comprehensive seed rolling plan for at least five years can guide a steady supply of high-quality seed, as this timeframe allows for the necessary cycles of seed production, farmer adoption, integration into value chains, and alignment with policy frameworks to ensure sustainability and scalability. The strengthened seed may include the promotion and distribution of new local varieties of finger millet, such as Laximpur Kalia, Kundra Bati, Gupteshwar Bharati, and Malyabanta Mami, as well as short-duration varieties.
- **In situ seed conservation through crop diversity blocks and local evaluation of traditional landraces:** Initiated under SAA, it should be scaled up and streamlined. The Seed System for Landraces needs to be further strengthened by having a robust seed production program for landraces as a sustainable business.
- **Participatory machinery development** may be scaled up, focusing on rainfed/upland regions of the state of Odisha and reducing drudgery for women farmers. However, there is need to support sustainable business models for improving farmers access to appropriate machinery.
- **WSHGs for millet promotion:** Successful convergence between *Shree Anna Abhiyan* and Mission Shakti has created several empowered WSHGs. Harnessing the full potential of WSHGs can result in transformative outcomes. Market access for grains, as well as value-added products, is still a major constraint for farmers, WSHGs, and FPOs. A few expert entities can help in facilitating the process of getting FSSAI certification for all relevant WSHGs. The market for millets is expanding; there is a need to target the market not only in Odisha but also in other states and exports.
- **Improving business sustainability:** The WSHG-led enterprises should include one or two more commodities for value addition and marketing while keeping millet as their core business.

- **Special sub-activities with increased support should be provided to single women for undertaking the project activities:** This should be scaled up in a phased manner to other blocks. In addition, learnings from SAA can be expanded to other projects in DA&FE.
- **A simple storage solution at the farm-family level:** Solutions such as metal bins, can reduce significant losses and ensure good quality grain for family nutrition and seed for next season.
- **Millet Procurement Automation System (M-PAS):** This platform for public procurement of millet needs to be made more effective along with a robust system of registering millet farmers.
- **To create a level playing field and make millet remain competitive:** There is a need to provide additional input assistance for millet farmers similar to being provided ₹ 800 to paddy farmers over its MSP.
- **WSHGs/FPOs-Agtech startup and R&D institution linkages:** A few capable agri-tech start-ups engaged in market and product innovations may be linked with the federation of SHGs or FPOs to harness the power of scale, technology, and market by adopting sustainable business models. The policy may encourage linkages between Agtech startups and FPOs/Farmer Producer Companies/WSHGs. This will be a win-win solution. One startup can engage with maybe 50 to 500 FPOs or WSHGs. WSHGs/FPOs get innovation/tech support and access to the market, and startups get sizable numbers and scale and earnings for their services.
- **Millet need to be part of the regular menu:** The Government has made commendable strides in integrating millet into *Anganwadi* centers and mid-day meal programs in a few districts. However, the coverage remains inconsistent and insufficient. The current limit of cost for food per child per day under these schemes also constrains the regular inclusion of millet, which needs flexibility.
- **Inclusion in PDS:** The PDS cardholders in Odisha receive millet once every 2-3 months, and there are several locations where the incorporation of millet into the PDS is irregular. As the supply supports, millets need to be regularly included for all PDS cardholders. We may experiment with providing the option to the PDS cardholders to get 1 kg millet in place of 1 kg rice per member per month for the interested households. The additional expenditure

may come from the state. However, continuing programs and interventions are needed to enhance awareness of the benefits and recipes of millet along with its inclusion in PDS.

- **To track the progress of millet mainstreaming initiatives, a robust monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) framework is required:** This framework should focus on tracking key performance indicators such as production levels, market access, farmer income, risk reduction, contribution to net-zero targets, and nutritional outcomes to ensure the success and sustainability of millet interventions.
- **Highlight the role of millets in state climate action plans:** Millets' resilience to droughts, low water requirements and lower GHG emission positions them as crucial crops for climate adaptation. Facilitating market mechanisms that incentivize millet farmers through carbon/green credits would go a long way to promote millet cultivation.

By addressing these strategic priorities, Odisha can position itself as a leader in millet mainstreaming, achieving a resilient, inclusive, and sustainable agrifood system while transforming rural livelihoods and advancing climate adaptation goals. The mainstreaming of millets offers a pathway toward sustainable agricultural practices, economic empowerment, and improved nutritional outcomes, contributing to the state's broader vision of food and nutritional security and resilience in the face of climate challenges.

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## About

The International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) is a pioneering non-profit organization focused on scientific research for development, committed to transforming dryland farming and agri-food systems. Working with global partners, ICRISAT develops innovative solutions to address hunger, poverty, and environmental degradation, benefiting 2.1 billion people across the drylands of Asia, Africa, and beyond.

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