

Impact of Odisha Millet Mission on Livelihoods of Tribal Women in Odisha

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ABSTRACT

The Government of Odisha has launched the Odisha Millet Mission (OMM) for the revival of millet cultivation, enhancement of food and nutritional security and livelihood of small and marginal farmers particularly tribal community. Millets have been traditionally a fundamental component of agriculture and food system, considering their nutritional content, climate adaptability and suitability to rain-fed conditions. But over the years the cultivation and production of millets declined sharply, due to changes in agricultural practices and promotion of other types of grains. In this regard, the Odisha Millet Mission has come up as a major intervention to revive traditional millet-based farming systems. The present study basically elaborates the impact of Odisha Millet Mission on tribal livelihood in some selected tribal district of Odisha. Millets natural sources of micronutrients and can control the epidemic of nutrient deficiencies, specifically of iron and calcium and various micronutrient elements.

The study investigated the modifications to agricultural production, household incomes, food security and tribal women's participation in livelihood activities. The study is based on the secondary data such as; Government reports, Directorate Of Agriculture & Food Production Govt. Of Odisha, Ministry of Tribal Affairs and published literature. The findings indicate that the Mission has led to increase in millet cultivation, better market assess,

improved household income and enhanced food and nutritional security of tribal household.

The Odisha Millet Mission has become a key contributor to preserving traditional agricultural knowledge which encouraging climate and smart agricultural practices and enhancing sustainable tribal livelihoods. It's a boon for Tribal Women's livelihood, food security, Women Empowerment and Sustainable Agriculture in Tribal Development of Odisha.

KEY WORDS : *Odisha Millet Mission (OMM), Nutritional Food Security, Livelihood Enhancement, Tribal Women, Odisha*

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INTRODUCTION

1.2. Significance of Tribal Livelihoods of Odisha

Odisha is India's second poorest state and is the home to 62 Scheduled Tribes, making up 22.8% of the state population, the third highest tribal population of the country, for these communities' livelihood is not just income but a system which they tied with the land, forest, identity and culture (Census,.2011). Traditional practices like shifting craft-based work and collection of non-timber forest produce have sustained sustainability household livelihood and ecological knowledge for generations, but the ecological degradation, erratic rainfall and high risk of drought in the area have led to food insecurity and increase migration and continuous deaths by starvation (Annual Report. 2024-25). Ecological imbalance seriously affects livelihood and increases vulnerability. Tribals have been caught in a vicious circle of exploitation arising from rising indebtedness, inadequate land base, poor production in agriculture and low incomes.

Today, tribal livelihoods of Odisha sit at the intersection of displacement and development. Mining, industries and conservation policies have disrupted customary resource access, pushing many tribal households toward wage labour and seasonal migration. It's critical to understand how tribal livelihood function its revels not only the outcomes of policy interventions, but also how Adivasi communities negotiate industrial expansion, market integration and cultural continuity in one of India's most resource rich yet economically marginalized regions.

Why tribal livelihood of Odisha Matters, because Tribal communities form nearly one-fourth of the Odisha's population and occupy resource rich areas. Their livelihood systems which combining agriculture, wage work and forest collection are under direct pressure from land acquisition, environment change and labour market shifts. Studying tribal livelihoods in Odisha is therefore very important to assess whether current models of growth and inclusion are really benefit the tribal communities who mostly affected by industrialization.

1.3. Traditional Role of Millets

Traditionally millets have been an integral part of socio-economic, cultural and agricultural life of tribal community

in Odisha. Multiple millet varieties crops are there such as; finger millet (ragi), little millet, foxtail millet and Kodo millet have been cultivated for generations in tribal households through conventional rain-fed and upland farming system. These crops are well adapted to local ecological conditions and require minimal external inputs and exhibit a high-level tolerance to drought and climatical uncertainties. Thus, millets had been a trustworthy source of food and livelihood security to tribal population in marginal and lack of resource areas. Millets have been part of the food habits of tribal communities, apart from their agricultural importance (Saxena. L.P, 2020).

Advantages of Millets

Nutritious Security

- sources of sustainable food
- Combat Hunger
- Adapted to Climate
- Protection from illness
- Gluten Free
- Low Glycemic index
- Helps in fighting cardiovascular diseases, Anemia, Calcium Deficiency etc.
- Economic security and climate-resilient crop
- Sustainable income source
- Rich in Micro-nutrient like calcium, Zinc, iron, iodine etc.
- Bioactive compound rich improved amino acid profile

Source: -<https://doi.org/10.1186/s40066-018-0183-3>

Millets is not a simple grain in tribal community as millets are woven into culture and faith. The tribal community specifically women are use millet grains and foods in festivals, rituals and community gatherings. And community gatherings. In many Adivasi homes across Odisha, the harvest festival is incomplete without 'Mandua'. The crops have been a vessel for indigenous knowledge women's hold expertise in seeds selection, cultivation on hills slops managing crop diversity and food processing, they are not using any chemicals and maintain biodiversity which is transform within generations (Taraputia. T., Suchen. B and Mishra. C. 2014).

Tribal communities in Odisha have long cultivated multiple local millets varieties using mixed cropping which

helps in maintaining agro-biodiversity and reduce risk during drought or erratic rainfall. Millets have historically practiced as an important role in ecological sustainability, cultural heritage and tribal livelihood in Odisha (Taraputia. T., Suchen. B and Mishra. C. 2014).

1.4. Reduction of Millet Cultivation

The cultivation and production of millets in Odisha have reduced considerably in past three decades due to both market demand and supply related factors. The area under finger millet declined from 2.48 lakh hectares in 1990-91 to 1.83 lakh hectares in 2016-17, mean while productivity fell from 10.23 q/ha to 8.96 q/ha during the same period. Major reasons for this reduction which include, lack of incentives, quality seed availability for millets, state-led promotion of rice through procurement and PDS, lack of incentives absence of suitable processing technology, competition from commercial crops like cotton, maize cashew and eucalyptus and social stigma associated with millet consumption and underdeveloped or no market facilities for millet production. (Mission, 2019-20)

On 27th of January 2016, the Planning and Convergence Department, Government of Odisha convened a consultative workshop on millet revival. Chaired by Shri R. Balakrishnan, IAS, Development Commissioner and Additional Chief Secretary, the workshop was organized in collaboration with the Nabakrushna Choudhury Centre for Development Studies (NCDS), the ASHA network, and the revitalising Rained Agriculture (RRA) Network. Participants include civil society organizations from Odisha and other millet growing states, along with officials from the directorate of Agriculture and food production and the department of ST, SC and minorities' welfare, women and child development and Panchayati raj. The main aim was to draw on field experiences of CSOs and department staff to identify constraints in the millet ecosystem and develop strategies for reviving the crop. The 2016 consecutive workshop proved decisive. Following its recommendations, the Government of Odisha initiated the 'Special programme for promotion of Millets in Tribal Areas', which was later renamed the 'Odisha Millets Mission' (OMM). The programme had five core objectives. (Mission, 2019-20)

1. Increase household consumption of millets
2. Establish decentralized processing units to reduce drudgery
3. Enhance productivity of millet crops
4. Strengthen farmer collectives and develop market linkages
5. Integrate millets into state nutrition programmes and the public distribution system

Lunched in 2017, Odisha Millet Mission (OMM) began in 30 blocks across 7 tribal districts in southern Odisha. It expanded to 25 additional blocks across 7 districts in 2018-19, including 4 new districts. In 2019-20, the programme added 17 blocks in 3 new districts. Notably, all 7 blocks in Keonjhar district were covered using District Mineral Fund (DMF) support. (Mission, 2019-20)

1.5. The Odisha Millet Mission (OMM)

India's millet production reached 180.15 lakh tonnes in 2024-25, registering a year-on-year increase of 4.43 lakh tones. Rajasthan was the top producer, followed by Maharashtra and Karnataka. In terms of trade, India exported 89,164.96 tonnes of millets valued at \$37 million during 2024-25.

On the policy front, the Union Cabinet approved the MSP for ragi for the 2025-26 marketing season in May 2025, announcing the second-highest absolute hike of 596 per quintal. Among millets varieties, bajra accounted for 60.3 % of total national production, making it the dominant crop. (PIB, 2025)



Sources: - PIB, 2025

The Odisha Millet Mission was launched by the Government of Odisha in 2017 as a targeted initiative to revive millet cultivation, with a focus on ragi in tribal regions. The programme adopts a value-chain approach, addressing production, processing, consumption, integration of millets into public food schemes. Notable interventions include conditional cash transfers for millet farmers, introduction of ragi laddoos in Anganwadi centers for preschool children and the establishment of Millet Shakti Cafes that have served lakhs of consumer(PIB, 2025).

- **Implementation Approach**

The FPOs implement the programme directly. Local NGOs help with planning at the grassroots level and capacity building. District and block level division monitor and supervise the progress of the mission.

- **Odisha to set up Millet Processing units**

Millet-based products have been chosen as the One District One Product (ODOP) in two districts of Odisha, Malkangiri and Nuapada as of February 2025. Millet processing incubation centers also sanctioned. So far, 17 millet-based incubation centers have been approved in the country under the PM formal Registration of Micro Food Processing Enterprises (PMFME) Scheme. Similarly, 21 entrepreneurs in Odisha have been sanctioned loans of Rs. 1.44 crore under the same scheme to set up millet-based processing unit.

1.6. Impact on Tribal Women's Livelihood

The Odisha Millet Mission (OMM), launched in 2017, has positively impacted tribal women's livelihoods by enhancing income opportunities, food security and social agency. (Sahoo, B.K, 2025) By reviving millet cultivation in tribal and rainfed regions, where women constitute a large share of the agricultural workforce and the mission has expanded their role beyond farming. A key outcome has been rising their household incomes. Tribal women now participate across the value chain, including seeds conservation, processing, packaging and marketing of millet-based products. Many have established micro

enterprises producing millet flour, biscuits, laddoos and snacks which generating steady income and local employment. Odisha Millet Mission (OMM) has also improved household food and nutritional security. Millets has high iron, calcium, Fiber and protein content. Has contributed to reducing malnutrition, Anaemia among tribal women and children. As drought-resilient, low-water crops, millets further reduce climate-related risk for women farmers facing erratic rainfall. (Sahoo, B.K, 2025)

Beyond income and nutrition, the Odisha Millet Mission has strengthened women's empowerment and agency. Engagement with SHGs and millet-based enterprises has improved tribal women's financial autonomy, leadership capacity and participation in local decision-making many women who earlier relied on precarious seasonal wage labour now derive livelihoods from sustainable farming and village level entrepreneurship (World Food Program, 2022). The mission has also contributed to conserving indigenous agricultural knowledge. Tribal women, traditionally custodians of millet biodiversity and food practices and are increasingly acknowledged for their role in suitable agriculture in Odisha. (Majhi, Khatua, Panda, Mohanty. 2025)

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To Analyse the role of tribal women in millet-based livelihood activities.
2. To review the impact of Odisha Millet Mission on tribal women livelihood.

METHODOLOGY

The present study is based on secondary sources of data collection. Secondary data which are already collected, published and documented by government agencies, official websites, books, journals, reports and research institutions. This study focuses on analysing of the existing literature and documents concerning the impact of Odisha Millet Mission on tribal women's livelihood in Odisha.

The data for the study were collected from various sources like Press Information Bureau, India, Odisha Millet Mission, Government of Odisha, research articles, policy papers, census reports, NGO reports, books and peer reviewed journals. Data were also collected from national institutes such as Ministry of Tribal Affairs, NITI Aayog and various reports related to tribal development and millets related information.

REVIEWS OF LITERATURE

Sahoo and Samantaray. (2021), studied the millet cultivation and food security in the tribal dominated Koraput District of Odisha. The study revealed that millet cultivation is an important contributor to household food security and climate resilience of tribal farmers and it's a sustaining livelihood in the resource-poor areas.

Saxena. (2020), explained that the indigenous millet system in Odisha is preserved through community-based initiative such as the 'Burlang Yatra' seeds festival etc. it also highlighted the role of traditional millet farming practices in ecological sustainability and cultural identity of tribal communities.

Pandey, et. al. (2024) elaborately assessing the millet-based entrepreneurship among tribal women in Odisha. Research shows that millet processing and value addition activities have created new livelihood opportunities for women.

Majhi, et al. (2025) have made an elaborate study on millet farming and food security of Sundargarh district of Odisha. The study shows the socio-economic participation and decision-making power within households and communities after millet cultivation improved.

RESEARCH GAPS

While some studies have talked about women's empowerment, food security and agricultural development in Odisha, there is inadequate research on the specific as the study pivotally focused on the impact of tribal livelihood in millet production and the role of

Odisha Millet Mission (OMM). Available study majorly emphasised on revival of millet, Nutritive benefits, climate resilience and agricultural productivity but there is lack of sufficient empirical studies on the impact the scheme on the livelihood condition of the tribal women of Odisha. At the grassroot level. Most of the earlier studies have been focused on policy enforcement and agricultural conclusions instead of examining women involvement with millet cultivation. Also, there are no comparative studies at district level on the differential impact of the Odisha Millet Mission on Tribal women.

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The present study is significance as it highlights the role of Odisha Millet Mission in improving the livelihood of tribal women of Odisha. Tribal women are backbone of agriculture, seed conservation, household nutrition and food production but they are often economically and socially excluded. This research will help to understand the contribution of millet-based interventions on women's financial stability, employability as well as food security. The study also has relevance for policy in assessing the effectiveness of major state led livelihood program mission.

CONCLUSION

The Odisha Millet Mission (OMM) has emerged as a key intervention for enhancing tribal women's livelihoods by integrating sustainable agriculture, nutrition and empowerment. Through the revival of millet cultivational tribal area and Odisha Mining Mission (OMM) has expanded income opportunities for women across the value chain from cultivation and processing to value addition and marketing. Participation in SHGs and millet-based micro-enterprises has further improved women's economic autonomy and influence in household and community decision making. Moreover, Odisha Millet Mission (OMM) has supported the conservation of indigenous farming knowledge and traditional food system. Collectively, the program exemplifies an inclusive rural development model that interlink agriculture, nutrition and gender empowerment.

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The authors declare no competing interests.

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