

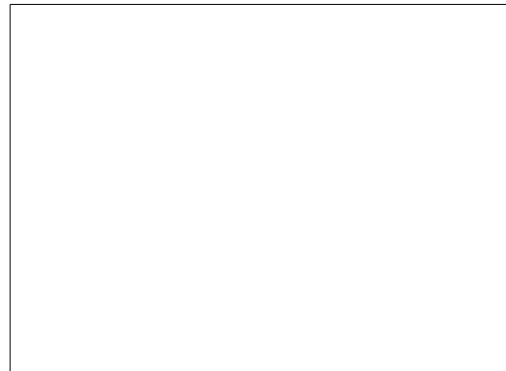
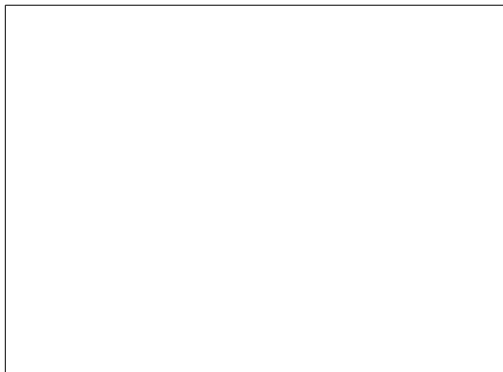
Comprehensive Revival of Millets Programme

Millets refer to small grained cereals and are largely grown under marginal conditions. Currently these are mostly grown under rainfed situations by poor and marginal farmers. Despite their agronomic and nutritional benefits, not much research focus had gone in to this group of crops. However, the recent and haunting issues line “Climate Crisis” brought these crops into lime light again.

Advantages of growing millets :

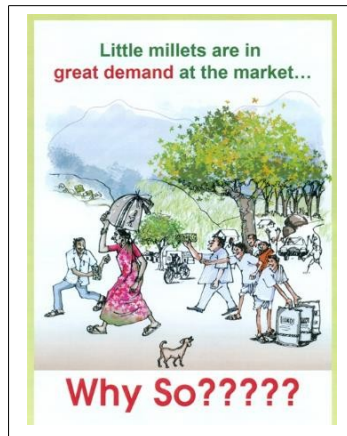
Millets require less water than any other grain crops and provide assured harvests in arid, semi-arid and mountainous regions of tropics and sub-tropics where monsoons fail very often, droughts are frequent, soil fertility is poor and land terrain is difficult. Millet grain forms the main staple for farm households in several old world countries and among the poorest people. Millet straw is a valuable livestock feed, besides having other uses as building material and fuel etc in those farming systems.

Visakhapatnam is predominantly a tribal area and 49% of its geographic area is under forest cover. Out of the total 43 mandals, 11 mandals are under tribal area (25% of the mandals). The major food crop in the tribal area is finger millet followed by little millet.



Earlier, millets were the main food for the tribal and rice consumption was confined to the ritual days, as the productivity of the rice varieties grown by them is very poor. Even the rice consumed by them was hand pounded, so that nutrient loss was minimal. With the introduction of rice in the Public Distribution System at highly subsidised price graduated the tribals from millet based food systems to rice based food systems. Besides, a number of other factors like introduction of high yielding varieties of rice, hardships in hand processing of millets coupled with the complete absence of millet processors, increasing tendency to exchange millets with rice in shandies (weekly market place) and psychological factors like pride in consuming rice over millets led to the decrease in diverse food base.

The changing cash requirements are prompting the tribal to grow high value crops like vegetables in place of the traditional millet crops. While cash crops are necessary to meet their diverse needs, it is also important to grow and consume their traditional food crops like millets. Though Visakhapatnam occupies more than 50% acreage under important millet crop like finger millet the average productivity of this crop in this district is very poor making farmers to look for



commercially viable options like vegetables and growing hybrids in Paddy to improve the productivity to meet their food requirements and cash needs. There is an impending need to address the poor productivity of millets; otherwise these millet crops will vanish from the tribal farming as well as food canvas very soon.

Currently, the children and women are suffering lot of nutritional imbalances. In order to address this paramount issue of malnutrition among the children there needs a concerted action aimed at increasing the nutritional awareness among the tribal so that the diverse crops that are grown by them (*viz.*, millets) are

consumed to have a balanced nutrition for healthy growth of the children as well as adults.

Main issues in millet cultivation and consumption in the tribal areas:

- Non-availability of quality seed (in right time)
- Productivity of the millet crops is low (due to poor seed quality, poor management practices, low inputs – both organic and inorganic)
- Lack of processing facilities – a major constraint leading to selling of all the produce in case of minor millets
- Narrow recipe choices
- Low household consumption of millets (except ragi- as *ambali*)
- Ever increasing cultural disconnect with the local foods in the tribal areas (moving to hostels even at a very early age, where rice is the only food grain)
- All the weaning foods served in ICDS centres and foods served under in the hostels are rice based right from the formative years to the entire schooling and college years leading to changing food habits of younger generation

Recent changes in the market preferences for high fibre and no gluten foods, the millets are assuming importance in the markets as a nutritious choice for addressing the malnourishment as well as therapeutic foods for lifestyle diseases like diabetes. By addressing the above issues in a concerted manner and make these millet crop cultivation as a viable and economic proposition by encouraging millet based livelihoods, it is important work focused manner.

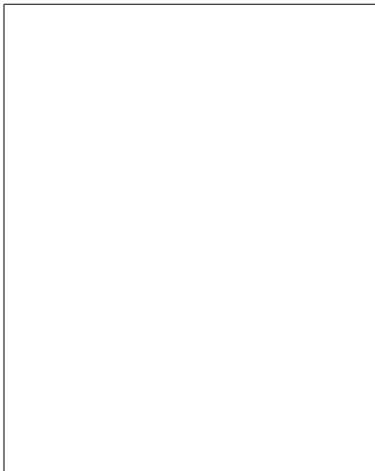
With this backdrop, The State Department of Agriculture initiated a project called **Comprehensive Revival of Millets** with the support from National Food Security Mission to work comprehensively on the millet acreage, production and productivity, address the processing constraints, provide assured marketing for the produce, and work on the value addition aspects of the crops. The main objective of the programme was to revive the millet cultivation, processing, and consumption in the tribal as well as non-tribal areas.

Integrating millets with local festivals



VIIASA is implementing this project in Dumbirguda mandal of Visakhapatnam district. In the last two years, we could reach 2000 farmers in 18 Panchayats by providing trainings, exposure visits, recipe trainings, linking the government sources for millet seed etc.

As part of the productivity enhancement approaches, we introduced GULI method of finger millet cultivation in this mandal on a trial basis with 39 farmers in Demo plots. Out of these, two farmers could reap record high productivity of finger millet from their demo fields and stood tall as the change makers in the mandal.



One these farmers, Mr Jinnu achieved the state's best productivity of 25 quintals per acre and was awarded as model farmer by the Chief Minister of the State during a three day AgriTech 2017 event hosted by the Government of Andhra Pradesh and Confederation of Indian Industry, in Visakhapatnam in the month of November.



In order to address the household processing issues, VIKASA has introduced four processing machines in four villages and we are planning to set up a millet processing hub with the support from State Department of Agriculture as part of this project.