

Women entrepreneurs in Odisha India boost student nutrition with millet meals

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Over 3,600 students enrolled in 55 government-run schools in the Koraput district of Odisha are now enjoying more nutritious mid-day meals featuring finger millet-based meals upma (porridge), khichdi (millet and lentils) and sweet dishes, designed to boost nutritional intake thanks to an innovative collaboration.

The newly inaugurated millet-based secondary food processing unit, initiated by the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) in partnership with the Odisha Livelihoods Mission (OLM) and the Department of Mission Shakti in Semiliguda, Koraput, is enhancing the nutritional well-being of children across four gram panchayats – or local self-government bodies in India at the rural level – Talagoluru, Kotia, Ampaballi, and Peteru.

Simultaneously, it has nurtured a vibrant business ecosystem for women entrepreneurs there.

Committed to a monthly production of 1,200 kg for each product, the millet processing unit provides cost-effective and nutritious meals to children aged 5-15.

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Pitam Padhi, Member of the Legislative Assembly of Odisha, commended the initiative, –Finger Millet is grown extensively in Koraput and has long served as a dietary staple in tribal communities in this region.

"This initiative represents a significant effort to reconnect with our heritage while encouraging healthier dietary choices among our children," said Padhi.

After trying a sweet millet dish, a student named Raja expressed his delight, calling it delicious and unlike any millet-based product he had ever tasted.

As the initiative gains momentum, the State Government aims to further its reach and assist more students in the Koraput district.

Dr. Jacqueline Hughes, Director General of ICRISAT, praised the collaboration for its contribution to improving economic opportunities and enhancing children's nutrition.

“As we mark the International Year of Millets 2023, this initiative stands as a beacon of success, bolstering local economies and kindling optimism within millet-growing tribal farmers, women entrepreneurs, and schoolchildren,” said Dr Hughes.