

Traditional grains boost nutrition in rural India

The challenge

Malnutrition afflicts more people in India than anywhere else in the developing world. While staple foods such as wheat and rice are subsidized by the government, the subsidies do not consistently reach those most in need. The availability of affordable and nutritious alternative grains and legumes could help alleviate poverty and nutrition insecurity in rural India, particularly among vulnerable women and children.

The research

This project, supported by IDRC and DFATD through the Canadian International Food Security Research Fund (CIFSRF), will combine traditional knowledge and modern technology to increase the production of high potential, traditional grain crops in four Indian states.

To address household poverty and nutrient deficiencies, researchers in India and Canada, farmers, and local groups will work together to grow and test hardy and highly nutritious grains, including several varieties of millets, grain amaranth, and associated legumes.

Researchers will also introduce simple, labour-reducing technologies to increase the efficiency of post-harvest millet processing. Doing so will create local employment and help women farmers produce nutritious products with greater market opportunities. This approach will improve the quality of life for farmers, and is part of a long-term solution to rural poverty in India.

Expected outcomes

- Increased productivity of local, traditional millets and associated crops
- Reduced poverty and improved food and nutritional security of small-farm families
- Reduced physical labour for women through improved grain-processing equipment
- Improved environmental sustainability on small farms
- Improved social status and income-earning opportunities for women
- Preservation of the genetic diversity of traditional crops

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