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Odisha's Millet Mission: New Achievements and an Emerging Fiscal Challenge for India's Model Programme

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Since its launch in 2017, the Odisha Millets Mission, now renamed Shree Anna Abhiyan following the national rebranding of millets as Shree Anna, has grown from a small tribal-belt pilot into one of India's most closely studied state-led agricultural programmes. Millet area under the mission expanded from roughly 3,300 hectares to over 53,000 hectares within five years, gross household income from millet cultivation rose sharply, and Odisha became the first state in the country to procure millets under a guaranteed minimum support price. The programme's integration of millets into school meals, anganwadi nutrition schemes, and the public distribution system has been cited by NITI Aayog and the Government of India as a template for other states. This article documents these achievements in detail and then turns to a significant recent development: the state's 2026-27 budget for the mission has been reduced by nearly a third even as fund utilisation in the previous year reached 93 percent, shrinking the area targeted for demonstration and reducing support for non-ragi millets in several tribal districts. The article examines what this fiscal realignment means for a programme widely regarded as a national success story, and what it suggests about the difference between piloting an agricultural transformation and sustaining it at scale.

Introduction

Millets were, for generations, the everyday grain of Odisha's rainfed tribal uplands, sown alongside pulses and oilseeds on land too dry or too sloped for paddy. From the 1960s onward, a national food security policy built around wheat and rice steadily displaced this cropping pattern. Odisha's own agriculture department has recorded that the area under ragi, or finger millet, fell from about 2.48 lakh hectares in 1990-91 to 1.83 lakh hectares by 2016-17, with yields declining over the same period, even as millets remained one of the few crops that continued to perform reliably on marginal, drought-prone land. The Government of Odisha launched the Special Programme for the Promotion of Millets in Tribal Areas, popularly known as the Odisha Millets Mission, in 2017 to reverse this decline. The programme's stated ambition went beyond production alone: it set out to rebuild the entire millet value chain at once, from seed access and farm-level agronomy, through processing and price support, to demand creation in schools, nutrition centres, and urban markets. Following the Prime Minister's 2023 declaration that millets would be officially referred to as Shree Anna in recognition of their nutritional and ecological importance, the state renamed

the programme Shree Anna Abhiyan, and it now operates as one of the largest state government interventions in India built specifically around a single crop group.

From Pilot to Statewide Mission: The Scale-Up

The mission began in 2017 across 72 blocks in 14 districts. By the 2022-23 agricultural year, it had expanded to 142 blocks across 19 districts, and current operational guidelines for the 2024-25 to 2026-27 period place Shree Anna Abhiyan in 177 blocks spread across 30 of Odisha's 30 districts, effectively making it a statewide programme rather than a tribal-belt pilot. This expansion in administrative reach was matched by growth on the ground. The area under millet cultivation supported by the mission rose from about 3,333 hectares in its first year to more than 53,000 hectares by 2022-23. Millet production in the state climbed from roughly 0.12 million tonnes in 2017-18 to about 0.26 million tonnes in the 2022-23 kharif season, a rise of close to 167 percent in under five years, at a time when national millet production overall was growing at a much more modest single-digit pace.

Institutional Firsts: Procurement, Pricing, and Incentives

A defining feature of the mission has been its willingness to build institutional mechanisms that did not previously exist for millets anywhere in India. Odisha became the first state in the country to procure millets under a guaranteed minimum support price, giving farmers the same kind of price assurance long available to paddy and wheat growers, with ragi procurement priced at roughly four thousand five hundred rupees per quintal under recent state budgets. The state was also the first to offer farmers a direct cash incentive for growing millets over a sustained three-year period through direct benefit transfer, reducing the financial risk of shifting land away from more familiar crops. Odisha additionally became the first state to complete formal price benchmarking for little millet and foxtail millet, two of the less commercially developed minor millets, and the first to develop standardised technical specifications for small-scale millet processing machinery through a panel of scientific experts, addressing a long-standing bottleneck in which the absence of appropriate de-husking and de-stoning equipment discouraged farmers from growing minor millets at all. These efforts earned the programme a national award for best government initiative on millet promotion from the Ministry of Food Processing Industries and the Indian Institute of Food Processing Technology.

Bringing Millets Back to the Plate

Alongside production, the mission has pursued an unusually deliberate demand-creation strategy. Odisha was the first state to introduce ragi laddoo into its Integrated Child Development Services centres with support from District Mineral Foundation funds, giving preschool children a regular, nutritious millet-based supplement, and it became the third state in India to include millets in its public distribution system. Millet Shakti cafes, run largely through women's self-help groups, now serve millet-based meals and snacks to lakhs of people across the state, while rural food festivals and urban stalls have targeted the lingering perception of millets as a low-status crop associated only with poverty. This income effect has been documented independently. A NITI Aayog assessment found that the gross value of millet produce per farming household in Odisha rose by roughly 215 percent, from about 3,957 rupees to 12,486 rupees, between 2016-17 and 2017-18 alone, in the mission's very first year of operation, a scale of income change rarely seen this quickly in a state agricultural programme.

A National Model, Studied and Replicated

The mission's recognition has extended well beyond Odisha. The Government of India has formally recommended that other states adopt the Odisha model for promoting millets, pulses, and oilseeds, and NITI Aayog selected Odisha alongside Karnataka as one of two progressive state models for millet promotion nationally. Chhattisgarh has drawn directly on the Odisha template to design its own millet mission, and Maharashtra's state government has been encouraged by its own Governor's office to examine the programme as a model. The

World Food Programme signed a formal agreement with the state to document the mission's operating model, and research institutions including the Odisha University of Agriculture and Technology, the University of Cambridge, and ICRISAT have all partnered with the programme to study and refine its value-chain approach. At Mandia Dibasa, the state's annual millet day celebration held in Bhubaneswar in 2025, the mission's model was formally recognised as a template for the national Shree Anna agenda, with senior state officials describing Odisha's approach as one built around inclusivity and smallholder tribal participation rather than sheer production volume, a framing intended to distinguish it from millet promotion efforts focused primarily on large-scale commercial output.

The New Scenario: A Significant Budget Realignment

Against this backdrop of recognition and measurable results, Shree Anna Abhiyan has entered 2026-27 facing a substantial reduction in state funding. According to an official notification from the Directorate of Agriculture dated May 2026, the mission's financial outlay has been cut from six hundred crore rupees in 2025-26 to four hundred and fifteen crore rupees for 2026-27, a reduction of close to 31 percent. This comes despite the mission having recorded a fund utilisation rate of 93 percent in the preceding year, a level of spending efficiency that would ordinarily support a case for maintained or increased funding rather than a cut. The practical effect of the reduced allocation is already visible in the mission's revised targets. The area planned for millet demonstration under the programme has been reduced from 150,000 hectares to 100,000 hectares for 2026-27, and support has reportedly been withdrawn from thirteen districts that were previously covered. Of the reduced 100,000-hectare target, only about 17,680 hectares have been earmarked for non-ragi millets such as little millet, foxtail millet, barnyard millet, and sorghum, crops with a long traditional cultivation base in Odisha's tribal belts but with markets and processing infrastructure that remain considerably less developed than those for ragi.

What Farmers and Civil Society Are Saying

Farmer groups, farmer producer organisations, and civil society organisations working alongside the mission have publicly raised concerns that the funding reduction could reverse gains made in tribal nutrition, crop diversification, and household income, particularly in districts that depend on mineral-fund and tribal-development linked support that is now being scaled back. Their central argument is that the state's broader push to shift land away from a paddy-dominated cropping pattern toward millets, pulses, and oilseeds requires deeper and more assured procurement and market support, not reduced public investment, if that transition is to hold. A parallel experience with oilseed promotion in the state illustrates the underlying concern. Farmers growing groundnut in rainfed districts such as Nuapada have reported that, in the absence of an established mandi system for oilseeds, they are frequently forced to sell to traders at prices well below the declared minimum support price, losing several thousand rupees per quintal in the process. Farmer groups argue that without comparable procurement infrastructure, minor millets risk following the same pattern, strong policy intent and a genuine income opportunity undermined by weak market access at the point of sale. The withdrawal of support from thirteen districts is being read by some civil society groups as a particularly sensitive signal, since several of these districts include the rainfed, tribal-dominated blocks where the mission's original pilot began and where alternative livelihood options remain limited. Programme staff and partner organisations who built farmer trust over several years of field-level engagement, often overcoming language barriers across the sixty-four distinct tribal communities the mission works with, note that this kind of relationship capital is not easily rebuilt once support is withdrawn and later reinstated.

Lessons for Other States Considering Similar Missions

Odisha's experience offers two lessons that are already shaping how other states approach millet promotion. The first is that an end-to-end value chain design, covering seed access,

agronomy, processing infrastructure, procurement, and demand creation simultaneously, appears to matter more than any single intervention in isolation. Programmes that focused narrowly on production incentives without corresponding investment in processing and market linkage have generally shown weaker and less durable results elsewhere in the country. The second lesson, becoming clearer only now, is that the transition being promoted, from a paddy-dominated cropping system to one built around millets, pulses, and oilseeds, unfolds over a much longer horizon than a typical state budget cycle. Farmers require several consecutive seasons of price assurance and market access before a new cropping pattern becomes a durable habit rather than a response to a temporary incentive. A funding reduction introduced just as this transition is gaining momentum risks testing farmer confidence at precisely the stage where it is most fragile, a risk that states designing their own missions on the Odisha template may need to plan for explicitly through multi-year, ring-fenced budget commitments rather than annual allocations subject to fiscal pressure.

Odisha Millets Mission at a Glance: Then and Now

Indicator	2017 (Launch)	2022-23 to 2026-27
Blocks covered	72 blocks	177 blocks
Districts covered	14 districts	30 districts (statewide)
Area under mission	About 3,333 hectares	Over 53,000 hectares (2022-23); demonstration target cut to 100,000 hectares for 2026-27
Millet production (state)	About 0.12 million tonnes (2017-18)	About 0.26 million tonnes (2022-23 kharif)
Procurement	No formal MSP procurement	First state with guaranteed MSP procurement for millets
Annual budget outlay	Modest pilot funding	Rs 600 crore (2025-26); Rs 415 crore (2026-27, a 31% cut)

Conclusion

The Odisha Millets Mission has, by most available measures, been one of the genuine success stories of Indian state-level agricultural policy over the past decade: a rapid, well-documented expansion in area and production, a striking rise in household income, a series of institutional firsts in procurement and pricing that other states are now copying, and a demonstrable shift in how millets are perceived from a subsistence crop of the poor to a mainstream feature of school meals, nutrition programmes, and urban diets. That the Government of India and NITI Aayog now hold it up as a national template is a rare instance of a state pilot programme achieving the scale and credibility to reshape national policy design. The sharp reduction in the mission's 2026-27 budget, coming immediately after a year of high fund utilisation, introduces a genuine test of whether that success can be sustained rather than merely demonstrated. The concerns raised by farmers and civil society groups, that diversification away from paddy requires assured procurement and market infrastructure rather than reduced investment, echo a pattern already visible in the state's parallel oilseed programmes. How Odisha resolves this tension between fiscal discipline and mission momentum over the next two years is likely to be as closely watched by other states as the mission's original achievements have been.

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