



MILLETS IN THE LIFE OF GADABA TRIBES OF THE EASTERN GHATS

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Abstract:

The University of Cambridge's TIGR²ESS project, through its six Flagship Projects (FP), tries to respond to the outcomes of the Green Revolution in India through multi-disciplinary research through a network of partners in India. The FP-6 aims for capacity building and development of entrepreneurship among the rural youth to impact the wellbeing in rural communities. The TIGR²ESS FP-6 initiative with WASSAN includes multiple cross-cutting projects, including the *Dehuller Intervention for Small millets Consumption re-valorisation (DISCovr)*. Initiated in March 2022, this project has helped set up post-harvest processing services of small millets through nano-entrepreneurs. It intends to follow the trajectory of these enterprises to see any change in the local consumption and production of small millets. Here we share an anecdote on how another FP-6 initiative of WASSAN – *Public Procurement of Finger Millet (Ragi/Mandia) in Odisha* – has led to broadening the geographical scope of DISCovr.

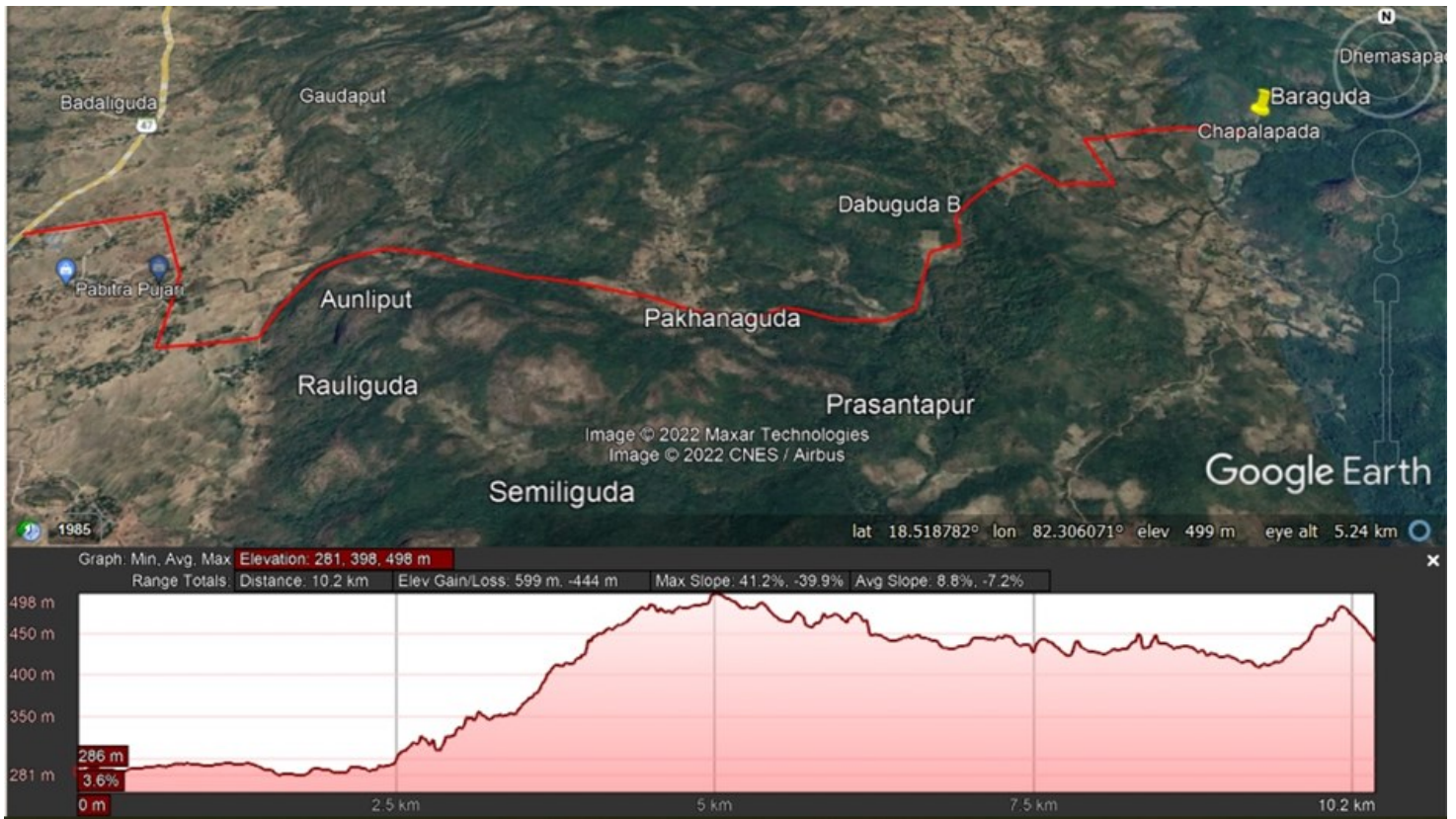
Tucked in the midst of the Eastern Ghats of Malkangiri district is Baraguda village of Kadamguda Gram Panchayat, Khairput Block. Baraguda and its nearby villages made it to the newspaper headlines two years ago. The lack of basic amenities like clean drinking water, health facilities, education, Anganwadi centre, and road connectivity has made life more difficult for the Adivasi communities living in this rugged landscape. To buy basic necessities like rations they have to trek around 8-10 km. The newspaper report also highlights the persisting economic poverty, illiteracy, and backwardness of the region,

indicating the ineffectiveness of government programmes to bring qualitative changes to their lives. - Read the full story here ([link](#))

"ଗରୀବ ମଣିଷ ମୁଇଁ, ଏଇ (ଭିକ୍ଷୁଣିନୀ) ଅବସ୍ଥାରେ ଯେତେକି
ପାରିଲି ମାଣ୍ଡିଆ ସୁଆଁ ପେଷି ବିକ୍ରି କରି ସେଇ
ପଇସା ରେ ଚଳୁଛି |

"Poor people we are, in this (disabled) condition whatever comes after selling the ragi and dehulled suan I make out a living on that"

~ Kandri Sisa
(Farmer from Baraguda Village, Malkangiri, Odisha)



(Image 1:- (Google Earth image of the undulating route (in Red) from State Highway 47 to Baraguda village) (Yellow pushpin on the top right))

It's by pure happenstance that Baraguda comes into the study under *TIGR²ESS* titled *Public Procurement of Finger Millet (Ragi/Mandia) in Odisha (Project-1)*. Sometimes sampling becomes a difficult task not because of its statistical complexity, but because of the many 'samples' that gets left out during the process.

Especially when the samples have flesh and blood and years of life stories to tell. Field enumerators Muralidhar Kirsani and Bijaya Kumar Nayak were en route to one of our sample villages near Baraguda when they met

Kandri Sisa. A middle-aged woman from the "Gadaba" tribe, mobility restricted by a health condition, Kandri Sisa was operating her *chakki* (traditional hand-operated grinder) to dehull *Suan* (Little millet).

On any count, this encounter was outside the purview of our project. She was neither on our sample list nor was she processing Ragi - the millet of our interest. She is a marginal farmer living on whatever little she could cultivate from her podu land. She cannot walk without the help of a walking stick. Trekking to the PDS centre 10 kilometres away is well beyond her. Many missed offtakes from the Fair Price Shop mean her name was struck out from the list of beneficiaries. Also, she is not receiving support from any other government welfare schemes including those meant for the differently-abled.



Photo credit: Muralidhar Kirsani/WASSAN/TIGR²ESS



Despite the difficulties, she manages to dehull little millet and along with the other crops that she produces from her field, sells them in the market with the help of her son. Farm and post-harvest processing equipment are still out of reach of this village. Farmers continue using the traditional methods for cultivation & processing. Even though the village is

under the Odisha Government's flagship project Odisha Millets Mission (OMM), hardly any farmer manages to go to Mandi which is 14-15 KMs away for selling his/her Ragi produce through public procurement.

However some improvements in this situation may be expected soon. *Dehuller Intervention for Small millets Consumption revalorisation (DISCOvr)* is yet another TIGR²ESS project of WASSAN, in association with Farm Easy, a social enterprise engaged in designing and fabricating farm implements that reduce drudgery and integrate solar power. Under this project, small-millet dehullers are provided to selected individuals. These entrepreneurs will offer dehulling services for minor millets such as little and foxtail to the community against nominal charges. The project was originally conceptualised to be implemented in the North Coastal and Rayalaseema regions of Andhra Pradesh. However, with the chance discovery of Kandri Sisa and her traditional dehulling process, the project was extended in these parts of Malkangiri as well. Currently, there are two small-millet entrepreneurs operating from Baraguda, the village of Kandri Sisa, and Chapalapada village adjacent to it.

The higher reaches of Eastern Ghats, including Baraguda and Chapalapada villages, have traditionally practiced small millet cultivation. However, the drudgery involved and increased availability of alternate cereals have in recent times led to a decline in its cultivation. Hopefully, in the

months to come this project could cater to their needs. ■

About Dehuller Intervention for Small millets Consumption revalorisation

This FP-6 action research study has been operational since March 2022 across four districts in three regions, viz. Rayalaseema and North Coastal region districts in Andhra Pradesh and Malkangiri in Odisha. The study supported the twenty-five entrepreneurs to own a mini millets dehuller, with the support of Farm Easy - a social enterprise, and one quintal of little millet/foxtail millet to start up the processing. This was supplemented by organising awareness campaigns/food festivals in respective locations for popularizing small-millets based recipes. The research component of the study includes baseline, midline, endline surveys at the intervention locations and fortnightly operational data collection from the entrepreneurs for a year. Currently, baseline survey data on the production and consumption of small millets in households are being compiled.

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