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Introduction of Locally Produced Millets in ICDS, PDS

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Why in News

Recently, **Odisha** has decided to introduce **locally produced millets** for the **first time** into **Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)** Scheme and **Public Distribution System (PDS)**.

- The initiatives will be carried out as a **part of the Odisha's Millet Mission (2017)**.

The State's millet mission aims to **popularise local production of millets** among farmers and **increase local household consumption** for better dietary diversity and nutritional gains.

- It is an attempt to develop decentralised infrastructure for processing and **re-popularising millets**.

Millets

- Millet is a collective term referring to a number of small-seeded annual grasses that are cultivated as grain crops, primarily on marginal lands in **dry areas in temperate, subtropical and tropical regions**.
- Some of the common millets available in India are Ragi (Finger millet), Jowar (Sorghum), Sama (Little millet), Bajra (Pearl millet), and Variga (Proso millet).

Key Points

- **Aim:**
 - The initiative intends to **integrate locally grown millets** as part of public food systems such as **ICDS and PDS, mid-day meals**.
 - It also aims to build **climate resilience among farmers** and **promote agroecological farming methods for cultivation** that draw on chemical-free agriculture practices and locally sustained food systems.
 - Ideally, the aim is to make the districts **self-sufficient** with produce, procurement and distribution.
- **Need:**
 - Odisha has an immense **malnutrition burden** to address, with about **45% children** who are **stunted**.
 - The State also has almost **41% women** who have a **below-normal body mass index**, according to the National Family Health Survey, 2015-16.
- **Features:**
 - The districts will be using their **District Mineral Foundation (DMF) funds** to implement the initiative.
 - DMF is a trust set up as a **non-profit body under the Ministry of Mines through the Mines and Minerals (Development & Regulation) Amendment Act, (MMDRA) 2015**.
 - The objective is to work for the interest and benefit of persons and areas affected by mining related operations in those districts affected by the mining works.
 - The money will be credited in the **farmers' account at the end of the sowing and harvest season** based on the report submitted by local implementation agencies and vetted by the district administration.
 - Additionally, all the districts will provide **1.5 kilogrammes ragi per person** (out of the five kg per person entitlement) **through PDS**.
- **Complementary to Agricultural Practices:**
 - The millet drive is largely focused on **local food diversity** and ensuring **availability of food to farmers** unlike the consumer and urban market-driven approach.
 - Farmers who have adopted bio-inputs and follow the system of millets intensification will be given **incentives for three years**.
 - The state government will also be **incentivising agronomic practices** including pest and weed management through organic methods. However, it **does not exclude farmers** who will be **using chemical-based fertilisers**.

Way Forward

- The focus on non-chemical approaches coupled with a focus on nutrition and food security so far distinguishes the Odisha approach from that of the Union government.

- Often, such interventions are driven towards creating attractive markets and ignore household nutrition and food security. The fact that this endeavour approaches millets from the point of nutrition and safe food is important.

Source:DTE