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Socio-economic status of finger millet growers in Southern Odisha

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Abstract

The socio-economic standing of finger millet growers in Southern Odisha, an agricultural region where finger millet (*Eleusine coracana*) is an essential staple crop, is investigated in this study. The study is to examine the finger millet farmers' access to agricultural resources, income levels, educational attainment and demographic traits. With the use of a mixed methods approach, 150 faming households from two districts in Southern Odisha participated in structured interviews and surveys to gather primary data. According to the research, most finger millet growers fall into the small-scale and semi-medium farming categories, having little access to financial options and contemporary agricultural technologies. Although finger millet grows a substantial amount of revenue for households, farmers confront a number of difficulties, including unstable markets, poor infrastructure and unpredictable weather. The research emphasizes the necessity of focussed policy initiatives to boost market access, increase agricultural output and help in the development of these rural communities' infrastructure and educational systems. In Southern Odisha, it is possible to support sustainable farming practices and improve the livelihoods of finger millet growers by addressing these socioeconomic barriers.

Keywords: Educational attainment, finger millet, socioeconomic status, Southern Odisha

Introduction

The grain known locally as "ragi" or finger millet (*Eleusine coracana*), is essential to the rural economy of Southern Odisha, India (Sakamma *et al*., 2017) [3]. Finger millet, well known for its high nutritional content and ability to withstand harsh weather, is vital to the region's smallholder farmers' livelihoods and food security (Negi, S., 2022) [2]. This introduction is to give a broad overview of the socio-economic characteristics of Southern Odish's finger millet growers, emphasizing the landholding patterns, revenue sources, demographics and agricultural techniques that define this farming group.

The districts of Koraput, Malkangiri, Gajapati and Rayagada in Southern Odisha are primarily home to tribal populations that primarily depend on agriculture for their subsistence (Meher, R., 2007) [1]. Finger millet blends in nicely with these areas' traditional agricultural practices because it is a crop that can withstand drought and requires little in the way of inputs. It is a staple meal that is mostly grown in rainfed environments and provides important elements like calcium, iron and dietary fibre. The crop is an essential component of the regional agrarian economy due to its capacity to adapt to marginal soils and irregular rainfall patterns.

Materials and Methods

The study was conducted in the Gajapati and Rayagada district of Odisha in 2023-24. The study used an ex-post-facto research design to carry out the investigation. For the study, a total of 150 finger millet growers were selected as respondents. A purposeful sampling technique was used to calculate the size of the respondent sample. The study's block source was finger millet cultivation blocks. Blocks from each of the two districts were selected via purposive sampling. Three blocks – Gumma, Rayagada and R. Udaygiri - of the seven blocks in the Gajapati district were selected for the investigation. Three blocks - Kolnara, Kashipur and Gunupur- out of the eleven blocks in the Rayagada district were selected for the investigation.

A total of 150 respondents were selected for the investigation. A total of 25 respondents were selected from each block in each district so as to reach the target of 150 respondents. Here, respondents were chosen at random from each block within each district using a basic random sampling technique. An interview scheduled was developed in order to collect data for the study. According to specific

earlier research studies that address the farmer's socio-economic status, the variables in the research study were categorised and scored.
Following the tabulation of the collected data into the coding sheet, the data was subjected to suitable statistical analysis in compliance with the goals of the study.

Results and Discussion

Age of the respondents

Age is an important social factor that affects experience, judgement, mental development, knowledge and ability to make decisions.

Table 1: Age distribution of the respondents

Sl. No.	Category	Respondent (n=150)	
		Number	Percentage
1	Young (up to 35 years)	22	14.67
2	Middle (36 to 50 years)	70	46.66
3	Old (51 and above)	58	38.67
	Total	150	100.00

Of the 150 respondents who were chosen, 14.67% belonged to the young age group, defined as those under 35, 46.66% to the medium age group, which included those between 36 and 50, and 38.67% to the old age group, which included those 51 years of age and above.
It is evident from the above table that young people who attended more educational institutions opted for better occupations rather than farming. Due to the physically demanding nature of farming older persons were less likely to labour in the field despite having more experience. Consequently, middle aged people tend to have greater interest in farming. These may be the reasons why most finger millet growers who responded are between the ages of 36 and 50.

Education

Education contributes to the intended improvement in conduct by making people more aware, skilful and perceptive of others. The degree of education of a farmer may also have an impact on the socio-economic culture of a respondent.

Table 2: Educational status of respondents

Sl. No.	Category	Respondent (n=150)	
		Number	Percentage
1	Illiterate (No formal education)	15	10.00
2	Primary school (1st to 5th standard)	34	22.67
3	Middle school (6th to 10th standard)	53	35.33
4	High school (11th to 12th standard)	36	24.00
5	College level (Graduation)	12	8.00
	Total	150	100.00

10% of the respondents in this study were illiterate and had never attended formal schooling. 22.67% of the respondents fell into the first trough fifth standard elementary school category. 35.33% of the participants had completed middle school or grades 6 through 10. 24% of the respondents had completed high school or grades eleven and twelve. 8% of the respondents had completed their college education and were hence graduates.
It was observed that the respondents' level of education was insufficient. The farmers who answered the survey needed adequate exposure and training to become proficient and educated about farming finger millet. Furthermore noteworthy is the fact that people of all educational backgrounds- from illiterate to college graduate – were cultivating finger millet, a sign of their excitement for the plant.

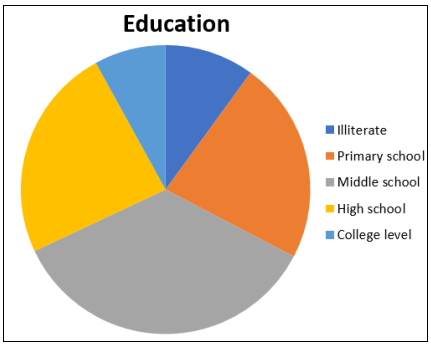

Fig 1: Education level of respondents

Occupation

The employment history of a family discloses their social and financial status. It also displays their primary revenue streams. Therefore, a family member's level of involvement in various income-generating activities is significantly influenced by their professional background.

Table 3: Occupational background of the respondents

Sl. No.	Category	Respondent (n=150)	
		Number	Percentage
1	Primary	42	28.00
2	Secondary	94	62.67
3	Tertiary	14	9.33
	Total	150	100.00

Of the respondents who were chosen, 28% had farming as their primary occupation. 62.67% of all occupations are classified as secondary, which includes raising cattle, fishing and poultry. 9.33% of all occupations fall under the category of tertiary occupations, which includes all business and secondary occupations in addition to primary occupations.
The information in the table demonstrates that the respondents choose various jobs to support their families and were fully aware of their means of survival. All of the respondents' finger millet cultivation methods, however, were a good indicator of the crop's profitability.

Total Land holding

A farmer's total land holdings are a reflection of his farming endeavors and financial situation.

Table 4: Total land holding distribution of respondents

Sl. No.	Category (ha)	Respondent (n=150)	
		Number	Percentage
1	Marginal (up to 1)	8	5.33
2	Small (1.1 to 2)	39	26.00
3	Semi-medium (2.1 to 4)	62	41.33
4	Medium (4.1 to 10)	25	16.67
5	Large (above 10)	16	10.67
	Total	150	100.00

Among the total no of respondents chosen for this study, 5.33% were marginal farmers with up to 1 ha of land, 26% were small farmers with 1.1 to 2 ha, 41.33% were semi medium farmers with 2.1 to 4 ha, 16.67% were medium farmers with 4.1 to 10 ha and 10.67% were large farmers with more than 10 ha of land.

Overall, finger millet was grown by all land holding groups of the respondents, ranging from small-scale farmers to large-scale farmers, indicating their preference for the crop in order to boost their income-generating capacity.

Annual income

Income has an impact on the decisions made by a family. Their yearly income fundamentally dictates their ambitions and objectives. Estimating the respondents' annual income is quite challenging because of their poor memory and lack of record keeping. The researcher probed enough to assess the activities completed and ascertain the annual household income.

Table 5: Distribution of Annual income of the respondents

Sl. No.	Category (Rs.)	Respondent (n=150)	
		Number	Percentage
1	Up to 50000	15	10.00
2	50001 to 100000	32	21.33
3	100001 to 150000	70	46.67
4	150001 to 200000	33	22.00
	Total	150	100.00

We can determine this study that, of the respondents, 10% respondents had an annual income of up to Rs. 50,000, 21.33% had an income between Rs. 50001 and Rs. 100000, 46.67% had an income between Rs. 100001 and Rs. 150000 and 22% had an income between Rs. 150001 and Rs. 200000.

Conclusion

The socioeconomic characteristics of Southern Odisha's finger millet farmers depict tenacity and age-old farming knowledge in the face of hardship. In Interventions that are specially designed to meet their needs and overcome obstacles can help them become more resilient and enhance their quality of life. The well-being and prosperity of this crucial agricultural group can be greatly enhanced by policymakers and development practitioners by utilizing the advantages of traditional knowledge and incorporating appropriate modern approaches.

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