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Millets: A Nutrient - Rich Path to Sustainable Development Goals, Bridging the Gap Between Environment and Health

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ABSTRACT

In 2015, the United Nations introduced the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals. Another major company significantly contributes to these goals. In 2015, global leaders united to embrace the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, a groundbreaking initiative aimed at tackling the world's most critical issues. Central to this agenda are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which provide a blueprint for fostering a more just, prosperous, and sustainable world. These goals encompass a diverse array of objectives, including the elimination of poverty and hunger, the promotion of clean energy, and the advancement of gender equality. Halfway through the 2030 deadline, it is important to keep track of completed products and work to be done. In recent times, there has been a growing concern worldwide about the relationship between environmental safety and human health. With the global population on the rise, the urgency for ensuring health and well-being has intensified. Often referred to as the "rich grain," millet has emerged as the promise of bridging the gap between protecting the environment and improving human health. Millets offer a promising solution for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). They address ecological challenges and promote better health outcomes.

Key words: *Millets, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Nutrition, Ayurved Ahara, Types of Millets*

INTRODUCTION

The Importance of Sustainable Development Goals

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), established by the United Nations, consist of 17 interconnected global objectives designed to tackle various human challenges, such as poverty, hunger, health, education, and environmental degradation.

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Goal 2 (Zero Hunger) and Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-being) focus on eradicating hunger and promoting health. Goal 6, "Clean Water and Sanitation," emphasizes the necessity of providing clean, safe, and reliable water sources and proper sanitation for everyone. SDG 13, "Climate Action," aims to combat climate change and its impacts. SDG 15, "Life on Land," seeks to protect, restore, and sustainably manage terrestrial ecosystems, forests, and biodiversity. Key targets of SDG 15 include stopping deforestation, combating desertification, preventing biodiversity loss, and promoting sustainable land and ecosystem use. All are particularly relevant to the discussion surrounding millets.[1] Millet has a thorough explanation in *Ayurveda's Dhanya Varga* (group of grains), which focuses on the food of both healthy and ailing people. Millets have been referred to by various names, such as *Kudhanya* (meaning inferior among grains) and *Kshudra Dhanya* (meaning small-sized grains).[2] Ayurveda classifies *Ayurveda Ahara*(diet) in twelve categories in which millets can be considered

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under *Shukadanya* as *Kshudradhanya*.[3] *Shukadhanya*, as the name implies, are spiked corns. The name originates from two words: "*Suka*," which means bristle, and "*Dhanya*," which means grain. They often have an astringent flavour, are easy to digest, reduce fat (*Lekhana*), Millets are beneficial for metabolic diseases and are described with terms such as *Rasa Kashaya-Madhura*, *Veerya Sheeta, Vipaka Katu, Guna Laghu Ruksha, Karma Lekhana, Vrishya, Kledashoshana, and Baddhamalakara.* They influence *Tridosha* and *Dhatu*, particularly being *Kapha-Pittahara*, *Vatala*, and *Rakta Shaamakas*.[4,5] The term "millet" encompasses various Small-seeded annual grasses, known as millets, are cultivated as grain crops. These grasses are primarily grown on marginal soils in dry regions across temperate, subtropical, and tropical climates. According to Ayurveda and the All India Institute of Ayurveda, New Delhi, they offer various health benefits, divides the millets into two categories: summer millets and winter millets. According to their physical characteristics and physiological effects on the body, Sorghum (*Jowar*), finger millet (*Ragi*), *Kodo*, Little Millet (*Kutaki*), Amaranth (*Rajagira*), and other grains are classified as summer millets, whereas Pearl Millet *(Bajra*), Buckwheat (*Kuttu*), and Foxtail *(Kangani*) are classified as winter millets.[6]

Table 1: Types of Millets [7]

Major Millets	Minor Millets
Pearl millet	Foxtail millet
Finger millet	Barnyard millet
	kodo millet
	Little millet
	Proso millet

Millets have been utilized as both a food source and a therapeutic dietary component in Ayurveda since the *Samhita Kala*. These grains can be consumed not only as a preventive measure but also as a therapeutic food for individuals in good health. One of the most effective therapeutic uses of millets is in Pathya, which refers to wholesome food preparations tailored to treat various illnesses. To harness the full health benefits of millets, one can choose from a variety of wholesome food preparations made from millets, known as *Pathya Kalpanas*. These preparations should be appropriate for both the patient (*Rogi*) and the disease or syndrome (*Roga*).

Table 2: Millets mentioned in *Ayurveda*.[8]

Millets	Botanical Names	Synonyms[9]
Sama (Barnyard Millet)	*Panicum sumatrense L.*	*Shayamak, Shyam, Tribeej, Rajdhanya, Trinbeej, Uttam*
Kodo Millet	*Paspalum scrobiculatum L*	*Kodrav, Kordush, Kudyal, Uddalak, Madanagraj*
Gavedhuk (Job's Tear)	*Coix lacryma-Jobi L.*	*Vaijyanti*
Kanguni (foxtail Millet)	*Setaria italica L.*	*Beauv Kanguni, Pitatandula,Vatal, Sukumar, Priyangu*
Cheena (Common Millet)	*Panicum miliaceum L.*	*Varak, Sthulkangu, Sthulpriyangu, Kangubhed,Marha*
Jowar (Great Millet)	*Sorghum vulgare pers.*	*Jurnahwa, Yavnal, RaktikaKrostupuccha, Sugandhika,*
Ragi (Finger Millet)	*Eleusine coracana L.*	*Madhuli, Ragika, Nartak, Madua*
*Bajra (*pearl millet)	*Pennisetum typhoides Burm. f.Stapf. &Habbard*	*Bajranna, Sajak, Nalika, Neelkaran, Agrayadhanya*
Neevara	*Hygroryza aristata*	*Tini, Aranyadhanya, Munidhanya, Trinodbhav*

Millets: A Nutrient Powerhouse

Millets are a nutrient-rich food that offers an array of vitamins, minerals, and dietary fibers. Millets are an excellent source of B-vitamins, iron, calcium, magnesium, and antioxidants. Incorporating millets into diets can aid in fighting malnutrition and enhancing overall health.

According to statistics, from 2019 to 2020, the incidence of malnutrition increased from 8.0% to 9.3%,

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and in 2021, it increased to 9.8%. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, the number of people affected by hunger has increased by nearly 150 million. There will be an increase of 103 million between 2019 and 2020, and 46 million in 2021. Approximately 670 million people are still expected to face hunger. By 2030, it is projected that hungry people will comprise 8% of the global population. In 2021, an estimated 2.3 billion people worldwide faced severe or moderate malnutrition, with 11.7% of the world's population experiencing severe malnutrition.[10]

Millets, small-seeded grains, have been cultivated for thousands of years across various regions of the world. These grains include sorghum, pearl millet, finger millet, and foxtail millet, among others. Millets are rich in dietary fiber, B-complex vitamins, iron, magnesium, phosphorus, and antioxidants. Due to their high nutrient content, millets can play a crucial role in enhancing India's food and nutrition security by addressing malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies. According to the FSSAI, millets contain 7-12% protein, 2-5% fat, 6-75% carbohydrates, and 15-20% dietary fiber. Additionally, millet proteins are a good source of essential amino acids, micronutrients, phytochemicals, antioxidants, and minerals.[11]

India is undergoing a major health transition, where non-communicable diseases (NCDs) now surpass communicable diseases like tuberculosis, HIV, and water- or vector-borne illnesses in prevalence. It is estimated that about 60% of all deaths are due to NCDs such as diabetes, cancer, chronic respiratory disorders, and cardiovascular diseases.[12,13] In addition to medication, lifestyle and dietary changes are crucial for the efficient control of diabetes. Low glycaemic index foods are becoming increasingly significant in this situation since they support maintaining normal lipoprotein levels and euglycemia. Due to its regional specificity, low glycaemic index, and high content of phytochemicals as dietary fibres and antioxidants, millets have gained attention as a dietary choice for preventing and treating diabetes. Research studies on the glycemic index of traditional recipes made from millet-based food mixes have demonstrated a significant reduction in fasting blood sugar (FBS) and HbA1c levels. These findings indicate the potential effectiveness of millets in managing diabetes mellitus, particularly among pre-diabetic patients.[14]

International year of millets - 2023

The International Year of Millets is a global observance designated by the United Nations to promote the importance of millet crops for both nutrition and sustainable agricultural practices. The goal is to raise awareness about the nutritional value of millets, their role in enhancing food security and combating climate change, and their potential to support rural livelihoods. The year-long campaign includes various activities, events, and initiatives to highlight the benefits of millets and encourage their cultivation and consumption.

The year 2023 has been designated as the International Year of Millets by the UN General Assembly, following the support of 72 countries for India’s proposal. The Hon’ble Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi, inaugurated the two-day Global Millets Conference, during which he released a postal stamp and unveiled the official coin for the International Year of Millets 2023. He stated that this marks India's growing commitment to global well-being. India, currently holding the G20 presidency, embodies the motto 'One Earth, One Family, One Future' through this initiative. The International Year of Millets is anticipated to boost the economy via entrepreneurship and start-ups while aiding in the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in poorer and underprivileged nations.

During the 97th episode of Mann ki Baat (MKB), the Prime Minister stressed - *“The burden of making this endeavour a success falls on Indians as well because they are the greatest millet producer in the world. He asserted that it has to become a nationwide movement and that there should be greater public awareness about millets.”* [15]

Agriculture and Climate change

The three sub-pillars of *Ahara, Nidra,* and *Bramhacharya* are mentioned by Ayurveda as being necessary for health. Food, or *Ahara*, is seen by Ayurveda as a fundamental human requirement and a crucial foundation supporting health. *Ahara* can be

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used effectively to cure many different disorders just like a pharmaceutical. The human body naturally processes and absorbs foods that are locally available to them on a regular basis. Any non-native edibles that are imported or adopted may not be acceptable and may cause problems. These problems may not become apparent right away; instead, it may take generations for people to discover their negative consequences. Therefore, safeguarding people's well-being and health largely hinges on the traditional food system. Millets were among the first food crops to be domesticated and consumed by early societies. Several millet species cultivated globally today were originally grown in India, with evidence showing that Indus Valley inhabitants consumed them around 3,000 BC. References to foxtail millet (*Priyangava*), barnyard millet (*Aanava*), and black finger millet (*Shyaamaka*) in the Yajurveda suggest that millet consumption was widespread and predates the Indian Bronze Age.[16]

Millets are resilient crops that demand much less water compared to other primary grains such as rice and wheat. Their capacity to flourish in semi-arid conditions positions them as a sustainable choice, particularly in areas susceptible to water shortages and unpredictable rainfall. By growing millets, farmers can alleviate strain on water sources, fostering conservation efforts and mitigating the effects of climate change. Moreover, millet cultivation promotes biodiversity. These crops are well-suited for mixed-cropping systems, supporting a variety of other plants and insects. This diversification of crops can lead to healthier ecosystems, reduced pesticide usage, and enhanced soil fertility, ultimately contributing to the conservation of biodiversity.

Millets Map of of india[17]

Millet cultivation typically demands fewer inputs such as synthetic fertilizers and pesticides. This leads to lower greenhouse gas emissions, promoting sustainable agricultural practices and contributing to climate change mitigation.

The Blueprint for Change

Diet is crucial for maintaining health and preventing disease. The nutrition of both healthy and ill people is extremely important in Ayurveda, and Ayush in particular. The FMCG industry presents enormous opportunity for Ayurveda, which views the entire human body as a product of food. The FMCG industry in India is pushing towards a larger use of Ayurveda and other conventional Indian medical systems under the Ayush banner. Conversely, India's Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector, ranked as the fourth-largest industry, is experiencing rapid growth. It constitutes half of the country's FMCG sales, with food and beverages making up 19% of the sector across its three main subsectors. Healthcare holds a 31% share, while household and personal care dominate with the largest share at 50%.[18]

The Ministry of Ayush (MoA) and the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), which operates under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), have developed regulations to ensure the safety and quality of Ayurveda food products, classified under the "Ayurveda Aahara" category.[19] As millennials place greater emphasis on healthy eating, this new food category guarantees the production of high-quality Ayurvedic food products while also promoting the growth of the international market for products made in India. Additionally, it will promote entrepreneurship within the Ayurveda food sector. As the overseer of the Ayush system, this regulation will undoubtedly bolster India's position as a global player in the entrepreneurial market.

Startups in the Ayush industry are developing innovative millet-based products to cater to the growing consumer demand for nutritious and sustainable diets. This includes prepared meals made from millet, baby foods made from millet, products made from millet that are gluten-free, foods made from millet that are high in protein, and functional foods made from millet. By highlighting the adaptability and health advantages of millets, these entrepreneurs aim to develop new product categories and increase the market for millets. The All India Institute of Ayurveda (AIIA) has established the AIIA-ICAINE (Incubation Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurship) incubation centre to promote entrepreneurship by utilising a network of cutting-

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edge companies in the Ayush industry. These Ayush start-ups are receiving support from AIIA-ICAINE on a number of platforms. The Ministry of MSME has designated AIIA as the Host Institute (HI) to find innovators, give them opportunities, and nurture and develop their ideas into products that are ready for the market and are financially viable.[20]

Promoting Millets: Challenges and Solutions

Despite their numerous advantages, millets face challenges related to awareness, market access, and policy support. Governments, NGOs, and the private sector can work together to educate consumers about the benefits of millets and offer incentives for their cultivation. Investing in research and development can improve millet varieties, making them more attractive and adaptable to changing consumer preferences.

While presenting the first Amrit Kaal budget, the government highlighted the importance of promoting millets, also known as Shree Anna, both within India and internationally, aligning with the International Year of Millets. The Ministry of Ayush is also undertaking various initiatives to encourage millet consumption and is utilizing multiple channels to engage with communities and inform them about the health benefits of millets.

Ayush Initiatives for the Promotion of Millets

a) Millet Canteen (Pathya Ahara Unit): Established on January 2, 2023, at the All India Institute of Ayurveda in New Delhi, this canteen provides millet meals, known as *Pathya*, tailored to various medical conditions for both inpatients (IPD) and outpatients (OPD).

b) Health and Millets Expo-2023: Held from March 18 to March 21, 2023, by the Institute for Teaching and Research in Ayurveda (ITRA) Jamnagar, this expo aimed to raise public awareness about the "Use of Millets and their Recipes." The event featured a wide array of millet-based dishes, including Ragi Idli, Cereal and Ragi Soup, Sorghum Based Pizza, Jawar Khichu, Kodo Millet Khichari, Millet Dahi Vada, Millet Dhokla, Ragi Barfi, Ragi Drinks, Sattu, Chilla, Millet Kofta, Khakhra, Cookies, Cake, and Chocolate Roll. Attendees could taste 86 live food items and 80 packed items prepared by ITRA scholars. Informational materials such as standees, banners, and pamphlets were displayed, and digital access to all information was provided through QR codes, in line with the Digital India initiative. Approximately 60,000 visitors, including school and college groups, attended the expo to learn about millet-based foods.

c) Millet-based Food Product Development Workshop: The All India Institute of Ayurveda, in collaboration with NIFTM Sonipat, Haryana, hosted a workshop on developing millet-based food products in the AIIA nutrition lab.

d) Millet and Natural Food Festival: The Government Yoga and Naturopathy Medical College and Hospital in Chennai hosted this festival to promote millet-based foods.

e) Ragi Cookies Production: The National Institute of Ayurveda's pharmacy in Jaipur crafted Ragi Cookies as part of their millet initiatives.

f) Partner in *Poshan* Abhiyaan: The *Poshan* Abhiyaan program, launched by the Hon'ble PM, aims to enhance the nutritional status of children under six, adolescent girls, pregnant women, and breastfeeding mothers. The Ministry of Ayush, along with National Institutes/Research Councils and State Ayush Departments, serves as a knowledge partner, actively participating in various millet promotion activities under the POSHAN Abhiyaan program. Key initiatives like Poshan Maah and *Poshan Pakhwada* have been instrumental in changing nutritional practices.

g) Ayush Startup for Millet: Agastya Foods, affiliated with the Institute of Teaching and Research in *Ayurveda* - Jamnagar, developed millet-based products under the "Ayurved se poshan" concept. They created a nutritious and delicious *Poshak* Pancake premix incorporating sorghum, finger millet, and pearl millet, suitable for all age groups and supporting the International Year of Millets.

h) Other Initiatives: Ayush institutes are engaging in various activities to promote millet consumption,

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including displaying millet-based recipes, distributing millet calendars and cookbooks, delivering awareness lectures, and organizing quizzes for OPD patients.[21]

Discussion

Nutrition is vital for both individual and community health, serving as both an economic asset and a key indicator of development. The Ministry of Agriculture's initiatives play a significant role in promoting health, preventing disease, and reducing malnutrition and non-communicable diseases (NCDs) over time.

In his "Mann Ki Baat" address, the Hon'ble Prime Minister highlighted the increasing adoption of millets, noting, "Just as people have embraced yoga and fitness on a large scale, they are now incorporating millets into their diets. This shift is not only improving dietary habits but also encouraging entrepreneurs to market millets and make them more accessible to the public."[22]

Achieving the goals of eradicating hunger, food insecurity, and all forms of malnutrition remains challenging. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exposed the gaps and weaknesses in global agri-food systems, significantly contributing to the increase in hunger and severe food insecurity. In order to ensure that healthy diets are more widely available, inclusive, and sustainable, it is essential that the current agri-food systems be changed to produce less expensive, safe, nutritious foods.

Millets are ideal for small-scale farming because they require minimal inputs and are highly resilient to challenging conditions. By promoting millet cultivation, especially in rural areas, communities can achieve food security, improved livelihoods, and reduced dependence on external agricultural inputs. As the demand for healthy and sustainable foods increases, millets have gained attention in both local and global markets. This offers opportunities for farmers to diversify their income streams and increase their resilience against market fluctuations. Millets have been staples in various cultures for centuries, forming an integral part of traditional diets. Reviving the consumption of millets not only preserves cultural heritage but also promotes the consumption of foods that are often deeply rooted in local traditions.

Conclusion

In the pursuit of a sustainable future, the adoption of millets as a nutrient-rich food source presents an opportunity to address key Sustainable Development Goals. Through their ecological resilience, low resource requirements, and exceptional nutritional content, millets exemplify a harmonious approach to fostering better health and protecting the environment. By embracing millets, individuals and communities can contribute to a healthier planet while securing a more nourished and vibrant future. Millets offer a remarkable avenue for bridging the gap between environment and health while contributing to the achievement of multiple SDGs. Their nutrient-rich profile, environmental resilience, and potential to empower local communities make them a valuable tool in building a sustainable and healthier future for all. By recognizing the significance of millets, we can forge a path towards realizing the interconnection between environmental sustainability and human well-being envisioned by the SDGs.

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