



Bhubaneswar Declaration on Women farmers and Conservation of Agricultural Heritage

A Collective and Inclusive Policy Framework for Gender Transformation, Biodiversity Revival and Agricultural Heritage Restoration.

➤ Preamble

The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. Apart from constitutional sanctity, this Bhubaneswar Declaration on Women Farmers and Conservation of Agricultural Heritage emphasises the need for evidence-based policymaking. This declaration aims to optimise and strategically position the State towards the protection and promotion of gender equality as a core element of the human rights framework.

In Odisha and across the world, women play a central role in agri-food systems. They contribute to all stages of value chains, whether preserving seeds, cultivating crops, processing, or trading. Despite this extensive involvement, their contributions often go unrecognised. Also, agri-food system transformation is inextricably linked to gender inclusion and responsiveness. All transformations in the world are marked by increased labour force participation of women and their enhanced wellbeing. From a gender perspective, India exhibits a distinct case of transformation with the agri-food system becoming increasingly characterised by rising female participation. Sensitive to this reality, the Odisha government has shifted towards greater focus on women empowerment in an array of programs and flagship initiatives such as Shree Anna Abhiyan (Odisha Millets Mission), focusing on gender equity, climate resilience and nutrition security.

Odisha's rich cultural and linguistic diversity is blended with its diverse food systems. Millets, for example, have been an integral part of Odisha's agri-food system, reflected in dietary traditions for centuries, where nutritious grains have primarily been cultivated by tribal communities who have safeguarded their legacy through generations. Women stand at the heart of these biodiverse



ecosystems, balancing farming with seed conservation, foraging, and ecological restoration, and evidence from other regions similarly shows that such roles are shaped by intersecting identities including caste, ethnicity, and age.

However, the rapid erosion of agricultural biodiversity, driven by climate shocks, changing consumption patterns, market pressures, and the homogenisation of food systems, calls for urgent policy action. The world once relied on more than 30,000 edible plant species, though only about 7,000 of these have been cultivated or collected as food, and only 20 crops provide 90% of the world's food requirement, with wheat, maize, and rice being the principal staple. In India, over 9,000 plant species, including medicinal and wild varieties, have been part of the diet for over 4,000 years. Indian farmers have played a critical role in conserving and diversifying crops. More than 40,000 landraces or farmer-developed rice varieties have been nurtured in India over thousands of years alone.

The United Nations has declared 2026 as the International Year of Woman Farmer. It has invited all member states to observe the International Year, as appropriate, through activities aimed at raising awareness of and directing policy attention to the barriers and challenges that women farmers face across agri-food systems, as well as the initiatives, policies, and actions that can be taken to address these issues and achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women in agriculture. As the world prepares to observe 2026 as the International Year of Woman Farmer, reflecting this spirit, the Government of Odisha organised a two-day International Symposium on Shree Anna (millets) and Woman Farmer 2025 (ISSWF), on November 10 and 11, at Bhubaneswar (India). The theme of the symposium was "Role of Women in Agriculture Heritage and Conservation of Agrobiodiversity". The Symposium highlighted the indispensable, yet often unrecognised, role of women in sustaining agrobiodiversity, restoring degraded landscapes, and shaping the future of sustainable food systems.

Based on the insights and suggestions received from the Government of India, the United Nations Food & Agriculture Organisation, the World Food Program, the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), State Agricultural Universities (SAUs), CGIAR institutions, experts, civil society organisations, farmer representatives, Women Self Help Groups from the ISSWF, the Government of Odisha reaffirms the vision for a collective and inclusive policy action for Gender Transformation, Biodiversity Revival, and Agricultural Heritage Restoration through "Bhubaneswar Declaration on Women Farmers and Conservation of Agricultural Heritage".

The contributions of women farmers extend beyond cultivation to the preservation of wild edibles, maintenance of community seed banks, conservation of traditional varieties, crafting of cultural practices around food, and balancing household nutrition with ecological responsibility. This declaration further recognises women farmers as architects of resilience, guardians of living heritage, and champions of sustainable agriculture, with the following suggestions: -





➤ Access and control over Resources

- Supporting policy interventions to encourage and nudge families to register land in the name of women, thereby strengthening their land rights and economic security. This would involve developing appropriate mechanisms for joint land ownership and facilitating independent ownership by women.
- Supporting innovative forms of collectivisation among single women, women farmers to enhance their access to government schemes and institutional support systems.
- Recognising women holding titles under the Forest Rights Act and developing strategies to ensure equitable access to FRA land title holders to all relevant agricultural government schemes and entitlements.
- Recognising that women-focused cooperatives and Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) often face challenges during their formative stages, limiting their ability to access benefits and scale up activities such as collective procurement of seeds, fertilisers, and equipment.
- Committing to providing comprehensive technical and financial handholding support to women-led cooperatives and FPOs for a minimum period of five years.
- Facilitating access of women's groups, cooperatives, and FPOs to grants, microfinance, and low-collateral credit facilities, enabling them to strengthen their operations, expand their market linkages, and enhance their collective economic empowerment.



➤ Agrobiodiversity Conservation

- Committing to identifying and promoting indigenous technical knowledge in seed selection, cropping systems, value-added products, and processing, including nutritional profiling of landraces to highlight their contribution to nutritional security.
- Selection, production, and supply of landraces/traditional varieties preferred by women farmers shall be undertaken. Cultivation of landraces and traditional varieties in their native tracts, following the principles outlined in the Standard Operating Procedures for seed systems for landraces, shall be taken up.
- Building capacities of women collectives and custodian farmers in the conservation, multiplication, and sustainable use of traditional crop varieties
- Enabling the transfer of traditional and Indigenous knowledge across generations and geographies.
- Strengthening community-managed seed banks and promoting the cultivation of neglected, and underutilised crops to enhance agrobiodiversity.
- Fostering community seed banks to facilitate the exchange of landraces and traditional varieties through targeted subsidies and legal protections to strengthen seed sovereignty.
- Scaling up seed production of high-demand landraces and traditional varieties and promoting the “Biohappiness” approach that integrates biodiversity, nutrition, and livelihoods.
- Establishing Biohappiness and Resilience Hubs for conservation, training, and climate action.
- Ensuring fair and transparent benefit-sharing mechanisms with communities, especially women custodians of local biodiversity, and creating pilot initiatives to promote cross-learning and contextualised solutions that can be scaled effectively.
- Integrating Indigenous knowledge systems into biodiversity registers and documenting success stories of custodian women farmers from diverse agroecological regions to inspire younger generations to continue the work of agrobiodiversity conservation.
- Strengthening field gene banks and creating enabling mechanisms for improving access to traditional seed varieties for women farmers/collectives.
- Promoting price premiums or subsidies for cultivating local varieties and underutilised crops, with assured market linkages and buy-back mechanisms.





➤ Agricultural Heritage Restoration

- Committing to documenting agricultural heritage across key regions by engaging with older women who hold valuable traditional knowledge.
- Promoting intergenerational learning by involving youth in village-level participatory approaches for understanding resilient agri-food systems.
- Supporting local self-governments to prepare development plans reflecting village histories of food systems, culture, and agriculture, while integrating heritage conservation into school-level curricula.
- Developing biodiversity registers in collaboration with the respective national/sub national biodiversity boards/authorities/agencies.
- Conducting research on women's indigenous knowledge and its application in sustaining traditional socio-cultural practices, food systems, and varieties for resilient and sustainable agri-food systems.
- Raising awareness and building government commitment towards promoting community rights to protect and conserve agricultural heritage.
- Ensuring gender-inclusive approaches across community livelihoods and agricultural activities in agrobiodiversity hotspot regions.
- Integrating gender-responsive elements within the GIAHS (Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems) documentation framework by identifying potential heritage sites.





➤ Health and Nutrition

- Committing to strengthening local procurement and distribution systems by integrating millets, low glycaemic index rice, nutrient-rich traditional rice varieties, and other relevant forgotten crops and foods into government nutrition schemes such as the supplementary nutrition programs, school meal programs, hospital diets, etc, by engaging and empowering women collectives to manage decentralised value chains for nutrition-sensitive food supply.
- Giving special focus on piloting regenerative agriculture and linking it to government programs such as school meals programs, supplementary nutrition programs, public distribution systems, etc.
- Encouraging the incorporation of traditional and modern health systems to promote holistic nutrition and overall well-being.
- Increasing the consumption of traditional Indian diets rich in fibre, legumes, fermented foods, and local ingredients through awareness, education, and policy advocacy.
- Supporting the dissemination of science-backed information through coordinated awareness campaigns, regulatory policy actions, and the development of appropriate nutrition-sensitive menu guidelines across public institutions to reduce consumption of ultra-processed foods.
- Linking agriculture with urban food systems to reduce junk food consumption for better health outcomes.
- Enhancing consumer awareness through comprehensive nutrition education programs designed to promote informed food choices and healthy dietary practices in collaboration with the Health Department, Education Department, doctors, teachers, and others.
- Supporting the inclusion of millets in hospital diets, particularly within medical colleges and public institutions, to set an example of evidence-based nutrition.





➤ Agricultural Mechanisation

- Prioritising the development of women-centric machinery for crops and agricultural operations predominantly handled by women.
- Testing machines and implements from ergonomic and occupational safety perspectives to safeguard women's health and wellbeing.
- Establishing clear procedures to prioritise manufacturers engaged in the development, production, and supply of women-friendly tools, implements, and machinery.
- Establishing community mechanisation centres for the sale, repair, and maintenance of farm equipment operated and managed by women's groups.
- Encouraging and promoting greater participation of Women Self-Help Groups (WSHGs) in the latest technologies, such as using drones for precision agriculture, etc.





➤ Research and Innovation

- Supporting scientific research on cultivation practices, cropping systems, and bio-inputs related to landraces and traditional varieties to improve income and nutritional outcomes, with special focus on gender and agrobiodiversity.
- Promoting science-led mechanisation and innovations that enable multi-cropping systems and contribute to soil health, climate resilience, and enhanced farmer incomes.
- Advancing focused research on millets and other forgotten, opportunity, and neglected crops, with a strong emphasis on their conservation, agronomic innovations, etc.
- Prioritising studies on the bioavailability and nutritional value of heritage crops to strengthen the scientific basis for their inclusion in sustainable food systems.
- Supporting participatory plant breeding programs that engage women farmers as equal partners in innovation and knowledge creation.
- Fostering global collaboration like the MAHARISHI initiative with ICAR, CGIAR, GFAIR, etc.
- Creating enabling mechanisms for promoting women's voices and expertise in technology validation, dissemination, and decision-making processes within agricultural research and development systems.





➤ Value Chain Advancement

- Creating an enabling environment that fosters women's active participation, leadership, and equitable growth towards sustainable food systems.
- Encouraging women entrepreneurship and collectives to undertake activities across the agricultural value chain, including post-harvest management, processing, value addition, and exports.
- Extending enhanced financial, insurance, and market development support to women collectives for varied value chain engagement.
- Promoting processing centres by women collectives near the farm gate or at primary production sites.
- Prioritising access to government facilities, particularly infrastructure, for women collectives on a priority basis.
- Designing special leadership development programs to nurture and strengthen women's leadership in the agri-value chain.





➤ Extension and Capacity Building

- Building the capacity of farmers and agricultural stakeholders through comprehensive training, extension services, ICT-based knowledge platforms, business development services, digital and AI tools, and skill development initiatives.
- Encouraging and facilitating women's active participation in producer groups, cooperatives, and agricultural value chains.
- Encouraging women's representation of at least 33% in agriculture boards, cooperatives, user associations, and relevant departments to promote inclusive decision-making.
- Introducing leadership fellowships and mentorship programmes for emerging rural women leaders to strengthen their voice in agricultural governance.
- Supporting the observance of the UN International Year of the Woman Farmer (2026) with the same commitment shown during the International Year of Millets, aligning activities with key global observances such as 8th March (International Women's Day), 15th October (International Day of Rural Women), and 25th November (International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women).
- Building the capacity of policymakers, planners, and extension workers on gender analysis and gender-responsive agricultural planning.
- Ensuring that agricultural training centres are equipped with crèche and childcare facilities to enable the active participation of mothers.
- Providing training and capacity building for frontline workers, including ASHA and other community health staff, to enable effective nutrition and millet promotion.





➤ Awareness Generation

- Promoting healthy dietary habits and reducing the consumption of ultra-processed foods through sustained public awareness campaigns.
- Raising consumer awareness on the health and climate benefits of millets and low-GI rice, positioning them as key components of sustainable and nutritious diets.
- Engaging social media influencers, chefs, and public figures to champion healthy, traditional, and millet-based cuisines.
- Encouraging medical professionals to recommend the inclusion of millets in patients' daily diets as part of preventive and therapeutic nutrition.
- Integrating millet and nutrition education into the curriculum of Multi-Purpose Health Workers (MPHWs) and Community Health Officers (CHOs) at the village level to strengthen community awareness.
- Supporting the development and dissemination of Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) materials in local languages, including audio and video resources, across digital and community platforms.
- Organising large-scale rural–urban awareness campaigns and public orientations to promote citizens' rights to agrobiodiversity protection and to celebrate India's food and crop-based heritage through digital libraries and storytelling platforms, and village history methods with students.





➤ Policy Coherence

- Adopting a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach for the promotion of millets and other climate-resilient crops, ensuring cross-sectoral collaboration and inclusivity.
- Shifting the focus from crop science to soil science to restore and maintain soil health and fertility as the foundation of resilient food systems.
- Introducing front-of-pack nutrition labelling to discourage the consumption of unhealthy, ultra-processed foods and to empower consumers to make informed dietary choices.
- Strengthening inter-institutional coordination among ministries, research institutions, civil society organisations, and NGOs to promote convergence and coherence in gender-responsive agri-policy.
- Developing gender-disaggregated data systems to inform policy evaluation, develop output- and outcome-based indicators, monitor progress, and ensure accountability in gender equality outcomes.
- Encouraging participatory approaches to ensure the voices, experiences, and knowledge of women farmers are meaningfully included in agricultural decision-making.
- Protecting farmers' rights under national biodiversity and seed laws, giving special recognition and preference to women engaged in the innovative conservation, cultivation, and consumption of indigenous varieties.
- Ensuring enhanced financial support and risk coverage for women entrepreneurs across the agri-value chain.

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