

# Making millets matter in Madhya Pradesh

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## Overview

Minor millets are central to traditional rainfed farming systems of indigenous Gond and Baiga farmers in Madhya Pradesh but their use is declining as livelihoods have shifted toward wage labor and purchase of subsidized grains of rice and wheat. Nowadays, farmers focus their limited time and land on growing paddy and maize but under increasingly drought-prone conditions, farmers are recognizing that millets are more reliable. Despite their hardiness, weak market channels, low productivity, and difficult processing are constraints to upscale the use of millets. To encourage cultivation and use of climate-hardy millets, Action for Social Advancement (ASA) and Bioversity International have been working to overcome their constraints. A holistic value chain approach is being applied, which involves inter-disciplinary and inter-sectoral initiatives along the value chain to raise supply and demand.

## Millet-oriented farmer producer companies

Farmer producer companies are the key institutions being targeted by the initiative to improve availability of quality millet seed and raise the price farmers receive for millet grain. Three farmer producer companies have been established in Mandla and Dindori districts since 2013 that are being engaged in commercialization of millet seed and grain. The companies have store-fronts, warehouse facilities and other infrastructure that is being leveraged for millet commercialization. The more than 2,500 shareholders in the companies are members of over 200 self-help groups that have been established by ASA in the study area. Profits from the business are distributed to the shareholders, who are mostly women. The initiative is thereby opening a new income-earning opportunity for women.

## Increased availability of high quality seed

Typically the millet seed used by farmers in Mandla and Dindori is of substandard quality—often grain that has been stored for several years and delivers poor yields. To improve the availability and use of higher quality millet seed, participatory selection and production of high quality millet varieties is being carried out (Table 1). Local farmers produce the seed and it is then purchased and marketed locally by the farmer producer companies through their storefronts. The seed value chain involves a small level of value addition in terms primary grading, packing and branding.

Table 1. Varieties evaluated in the participatory selection trials

Variety:	JK-439	JK-41	DPS-9-1	Indra-1	JK-48	JK-13
Production quintal/Ha	16.7	15	14.7	13.4	12.8	11.9
Height (cm)	54	55	59	57	52	50
Tillers (#/plant)	6	5	5	5	4	4
Spike length (cm)	10	8	9	8	7.5	7
Grains per spike (#)	168	139	151	120	114	121
1000 grain weight (g)	12.2	13.2	12.5	11.9	13	13
Grain weight (g/m <sup>2</sup> )	167	150	147	134	128	119

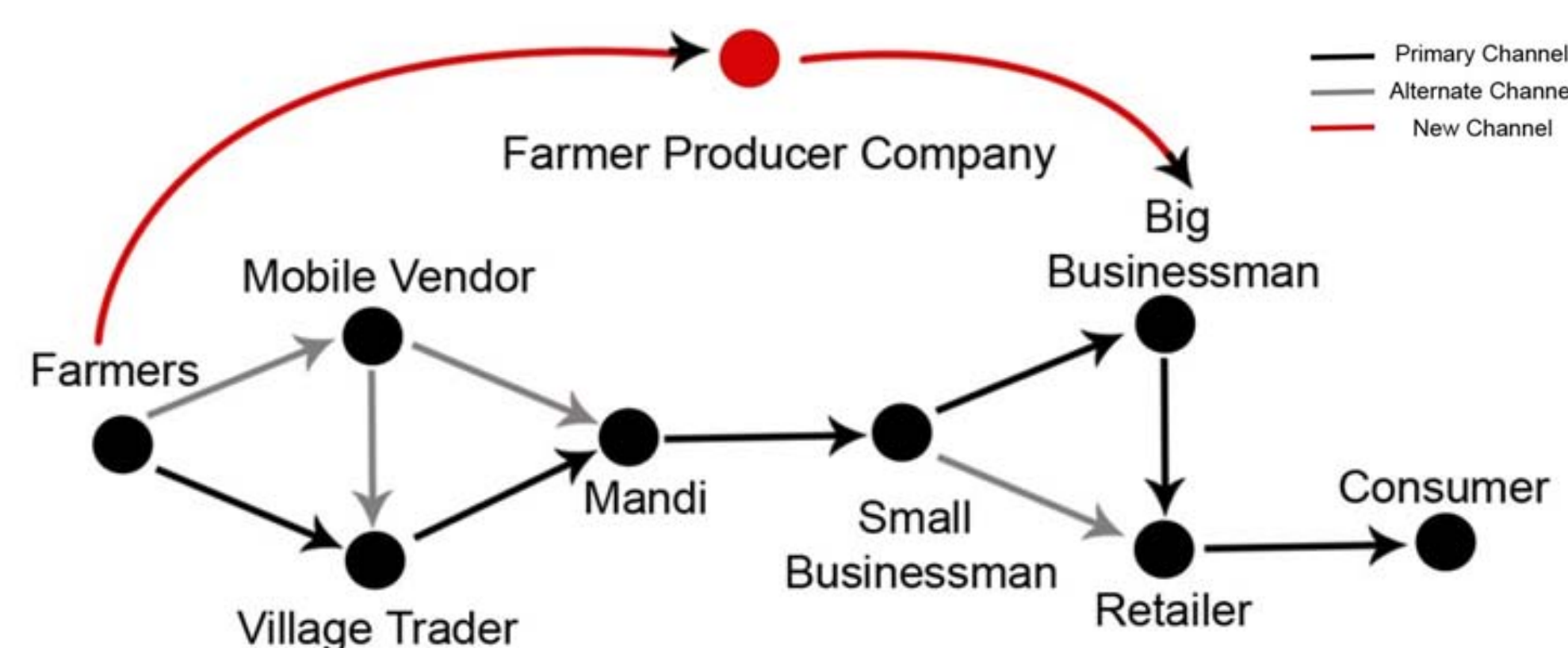


Figure 1. Value chain of minor millets in the Dindori and Mandla districts of Madhya Pradesh. Credit Shambhavi Priyam

## Shortening the value chain by collective action

Aggregation of millet grain is being organized through the farmer producer companies to reduce the number of middle men between farmers and consumers to help them achieve a better price (Figure 1). The farmer producer companies carry out primary cleaning, grading and color sorting, giving farmers a share in the value-added price. In early 2016, the farmer producer companies collected millet grains from producers, going directly to their villages and paying them *mandi* prices at the time of the transaction. Around 100,000 kg of grain was collected. The Madhya Bharat Consortium of Farmers Producers Company Limited (MBCFPCL)—a state level federation of farmer producer companies—was involved in seeking the best possible price for the millet grain, negotiating with dealers locally and in Nashik, Maharashtra (a major aggregation point for agricultural products). This initiative of collective marketing resulted in a better price realization for the producers. The producer companies have made a plan of procuring 500,000 kg in 2016 for which marketing and credit linkage has been already made. Quality control and other operational details for procurement have been put in place. The option of marketing through the National Commodities Exchange Platform (NCDEX) is also being explored.



Kutki/little millet (*Panicum sumatrense*) and kodo millet (*Paspalum scrobiculatum*) are traditional cereals being revitalized in Madhya Pradesh. Photos credit Gennifer Meldrum, Drawing credit Bhajju Shyam



Map of the districts and communities targeted by the Project in Madhya Pradesh. Credit Gaia Gullotta



Farmers participate in a field day to evaluate improved varieties and techniques for farming millet. Credit Gennifer Meldrum

## “Glamorizing” millets to raise consumer demand

Perception of millets as ‘poor man’s food’ is still strong in Madhya Pradesh despite rising awareness of their health benefits. To raise interest and demand for millets among consumers in Bhopal, a Millet Gala was organized on 21 May 2016. The event glamorized consumption of millets by serving them in a high-profile event in novel recipes devised by a local chef. The event was invitation-only but competitions for tickets were held over the radio, which gave opportunity for the general public to attend and brought further attention to the event. The guest list included government actors, local hotel managers, nutritionists, chefs, farmers, and scientists. Gala attendees were sent home with a basket of millets, recipes, and inspiration to cook these traditional cereals at home.



A chef serves millet dishes at the Millet Gala in Bhopal. Credit ASA

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## Further reading:

Mondal, A., King, I.O., Meldrum, G., Roy, S., Priyam, S., Mishra, S., Padulosi. 2016. Making millets matter in Madhya Pradesh. *Farming Matters*. June, pp. pp10-13

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