

# **Community Food Bank**

## **Addressing Food Stress and Nutritional Insecurity in Tribal Areas**

### **Background and Rationale**

Tribal communities in Odisha's remote regions continue to face chronic food and nutritional insecurities, especially during the lean agricultural months of June to September. Despite state welfare schemes like PDS, ICDS, MDM, and MGNREGA, the outreach and integration of these schemes at the grassroots level remain limited and often inadequate. Earlier interventions by local NGOs through Community Grain Banks have significantly contributed to mitigating food stress, empowering women, and resisting exploitative practices such as money lending. However, the evolving challenges of climate variability, market dependency, and fragmented food systems demand a more robust, decentralized, and participatory approach.

Hence, **Community Food Banks (CFBs)** are envisioned not just as storage points, but as **multi-functional grassroots institutions**—integrating food security, women's empowerment, local governance, and economic resilience.

### **Learnings from Grain Banks**

Experience reveals several critical insights:

- **Grain Banks are the first step toward local food security and autonomy.**
- **Their success is anchored in women's participation and transparent, accountable systems.**
- **However, limitations remain:** small-scale operations, lack of integration with government schemes, weak SHG linkages, and absence of marketable surplus management.

### **The Shift Towards Community Food Banks (CFBs)**

We propose **Panchayat-level Community Food Banks** in Koraput and Rayagada districts with the following **strategic considerations**:

### **Key Questions Addressed:**

- Can the Panchayat house a **buffer stock** to serve the food-stressed population?
- Can **vulnerable households access food grains directly** during distress periods?

- Can CFBs help retain and manage **local food production for both consumption and surplus marketing**?
- Can a **self-sustaining** system emerge through community repayment and corpus building?
- Can the CFB be integrated into **convergence frameworks**—PDS, MGNREGS, ICDS, MDM, FPOs, SHGs?
- Can the CFB become a **hub of inclusive development, equity, and sustainability**?

### Project Objectives

- To set up **Panchayat-level Food Banks** covering **1,000 tribal households per Panchayat**.
- To create a **buffer food stock of 150 MT**, replenished through community contributions and linkages with the World Food Programme (WFP).
- To develop **micro-plans for each Panchayat**, prioritizing women-led management and full community ownership.
- To **digitalize and systematize** food entitlements, storage, and repayment processes.
- To build **capacities and convergence** with existing government schemes and rural livelihoods.

### Operational Strategy and Modalities

- **Micro-Planning:** Each Panchayat will have a participatory micro-plan involving Gram Sabha, SHGs, and youth groups.
- **Food Entitlement:** Each family is entitled to 100 kg of grain during June–September. Repayment with 20% grain interest during Nov–Feb builds a **rotating corpus**.
- **Women-Centric Approach:** Entitlement cards will be issued in the mother's name, ensuring dignity, agency, and food security.
- **Usage in Food-for-Work:** From March–May, CFB stocks can support community labor under FFWP or convergence with MGNREGS.
- **Grain-to-Cash Conversion System:** Standardized mechanisms will ensure transparent exchange, minimizing leakages and mismanagement.
- **Digital Systems:** Passbooks, tracking systems, and grain bank registers will be computerized.
- **Storage Infrastructure:** Each Panchayat will have a 150MT warehouse with moisture-proof, rodent-safe facilities and basic office equipment.
- **Management:** A **three-tier structure** (village, Panchayat, block) with trained local youth and professionals. Centre for Agribusiness Management & SRADHA will legally implement and manage the initiative.

## Risk Mitigation and Challenges

Risk	Mitigation Strategy
Default in repayment	Women-led peer pressure, passbook monitoring, incentives for timely repayment
Weak Panchayat coordination	Regular interface with Panchayat leaders and linkages with Zilla Parishad
Grain to cash/cash to grain complexities	Fixed exchange rates and transparent local oversight
Market linkage gaps	Tie-ups with Farmer Producer Organizations and SHGs for surplus handling
Sustainability	Interest-generated corpus, community contributions, and convergence with government schemes

## Budget & Resource Requirement

- **Grain Requirement:** 1500 MT (approx. 150 MT per Panchayat)
- **Estimated Budget:** ₹ 5 Crores (including infrastructure, grain procurement, logistics, staff, and digital systems)
- **Duration:** 5 Years
- **Funding Support:** WFP, Government Grants, CSR partners, Community Contribution

## Expected Outcomes

- Enhanced **food and nutritional security** for 10,000 vulnerable tribal households.
- Strengthened **women's role** in governance and household decision-making.
- Improved **resilience** during lean agricultural seasons.
- Creation of **model Panchayat-level food security institutions**.
- Contribution toward SDG-2 (Zero Hunger), SDG-5 (Gender Equality), and SDG-12 (Sustainable Consumption).

## Community Food Banks: A Tribal Innovation for Food Security and Dignity

In the remote tribal heartlands of Odisha—where farming is life, monsoons dictate fate, and lean seasons stretch into silent hunger—**Centre for Agribusiness Management & SRADHA** is reimagining food security. The idea is simple but revolutionary: establish **Community Food Banks** that are **self-managed**,

**sustainable, and people-led.** Rooted in the success (and lessons) of grain banks, this new model aims to fight seasonal food insecurity, reduce dependency on exploitative lending, and build resilient communities.

### □ **The Why: Addressing a Deep Hunger**

Despite decades of development programs and food schemes, **many tribal households still face acute food and nutritional insecurity**, particularly from **June to September**, before the new harvest arrives. Government schemes like **PDS, ICDS, and MDM** often fall short or fail to reach the last mile. Grain banks, introduced as a grassroots solution, have helped but remain **isolated, under-resourced, and poorly linked** with other welfare programs.

### □ **The Vision: Community Food Banks That Work for the People**

SRADHA and a consortium of grass root NGOs vision takes grain banks a step further. **What if food banks could buffer the entire Panchayat's food needs during stress periods?** What if they were run by the people, for the people—especially women? What if local surplus could stay local, processed and stored for lean months, and marketed for fair prices?

This vision is now taking root in **10 tribal Panchayats** across **Koraput and Rayagada** districts.

### **How It Works**

The **Community Food Bank model** is structured around a few core principles:

- **Each family receives 100kg of grain as entitlement** during the lean season.
- **Women, especially mothers, are central**—entitlements come in their names, ensuring dignity and empowerment.
- **Food is repaid with a 20% “interest” in grain**, creating a self-sustaining corpus over five years.
- **Food for Work** initiatives use stored grain for community development projects.

- **Warehouses with 150 MT capacity** will be built in each Panchayat with proper storage, weighing, and digital management.

This isn't just about food—it's about **local governance, transparency, and people's ownership**.

### **Integration Is the Key**

What makes this model different is its **integration with wider food security programs**—like PDS, mid-day meals, MGNREGA, and ICDS. It also links with **Self Help Groups**, encourages **marketable surplus retention**, and could eventually evolve into a **cooperative marketing enterprise**.

In time, these food banks may become **hubs of development**—centers of equity, gender justice, and cooperative governance at the Panchayat level.

### **Risks and Realities**

Of course, there are challenges.

- What if families default on repayment?
- Can Panchayats and block administrations stay committed long-term?
- Will market surpluses really feed into the bank?
- And can women's participation be ensured in traditionally patriarchal setups?

Centre for Agribusiness Management & SRADHA acknowledges these risks—but believes the **participatory model, transparency, and community contribution** can help overcome them.

### **The Impact We Envision**

- **10,000 families** shielded from seasonal hunger
- **1500 MT of food grain stock** managed locally
- **Women leading the change**
- A **replicable model** for tribal and rural food security

This is not just a project. It's a **movement for food justice** and a template for **local resilience**.

## □ Final Thoughts: Dignity, Not Dependency

Community Food Banks show that **fighting hunger is not just about aid—it's about agency**. By trusting communities, especially women, to manage their food needs, we empower them to take charge of their future. It's time we stopped seeing the poor as passive recipients of help and started seeing them as partners in progress.

**This pilot by a consortium of NGOs is not just feeding people—it's feeding hope.**

## Conclusion

The Community Food Bank (CFB) model proposed by the Centre for Agribusiness Management and SRADHA represents a transformative approach to addressing food and nutritional insecurity among tribal populations in Odisha. Building on the learnings from earlier Grain Bank initiatives, CFBs are designed to be more than food storage units—they are envisioned as dynamic, community-owned institutions that empower women, strengthen local governance, and enhance resilience against seasonal hunger and market vulnerabilities. With decentralized management, digital tracking systems, and integration with government schemes, the CFB model aligns with broader goals of sustainability, equity, and inclusive rural development. By rooting food security efforts within Panchayats and emphasizing women's leadership, this initiative redefines the narrative from dependency to dignity, fostering self-reliant and food-secure communities.

## Recommendations:

- **Strengthen Women's Leadership:** Ensure continuous capacity building and leadership development among women managers to enhance decision-making power and promote gender equity.
- **Institutionalize Convergence:** Forge formal linkages with government programs like PDS, MGNREGS, ICDS, and MDM for better resource pooling and long-term sustainability.
- **Build Market Linkages:** Support SHGs and Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) to manage surplus produce, ensuring local income generation and reducing distress sales.

- **Incentivize Timely Repayment:** Introduce positive incentives for families who repay on time to foster a strong culture of accountability.
- **Develop Scalable Digital Systems:** Invest in simple, mobile-friendly digital platforms for real-time tracking of stocks, entitlements, and repayments.
- **Create Peer Learning Networks:** Facilitate inter-Panchayat exchanges to share best practices and promote scaling up across tribal districts.
- **Monitor, Evaluate, and Adapt:** Establish robust monitoring and periodic review systems to assess impact, identify challenges, and fine-tune operational strategies.
- With the right investments, partnerships, and community engagement, the CFB model holds the promise to become a pioneering model for achieving food security with dignity in India's tribal regions.