

Contributing towards earliest passage of a strong 'Food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations, 2018' in India (Resolve Project)

1. Background

Describe current non-communicable disease (NCD) prevention policies in your country (front of package food labels, trans fat bans, healthy food policies in the public sector, etc.) and how this proposed project fits within that context. In addition, please list organizations or individuals who could affect or can be affected by the proposed project.

The burden and threat of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) constitutes a major public health challenge that undermines social and economic development of India. India is experiencing a growing burden of NCDs claiming over 5.87 million lives in a year¹. The probability of dying between the ages of 30 and 70, from four major NCDs (cardiovascular diseases, cancer, chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes) for both sexes is as high as 26%. In the year 2011, 53% of all deaths were due to NCDs and this proportion has gone up to 60% in 2014². According to some estimates, there are estimated 2.8 million cases of cancer, 39 million with chronic respiratory diseases, 64 million with cardiovascular diseases and 69 million people with diabetes in India³.

Amongst the major reasons cited for increasing cases of NCDs are tobacco and alcohol use, physical inactivity, unhealthy diet rich in salt, sugar and saturated/trans-fats, air pollution. While tobacco and alcohol are popularly termed as evil goods and come with high taxes and warning labels to grab attention of consumers towards their ill-effects, the unhealthy food products sold in market with HFSS and especially oils, fats and foods with trans-fats have gained little attention for their irreversible harmful effects on health leading to NCDs. Studies have highlighted that consumption of *trans* fats increases the risk of developing heart disease and stroke. It's also associated with a higher risk of developing type-2 diabetes.

The Government of India has taken up several initiatives to monitor and control this dangerous trend. In line with **WHO's Global action plan for the prevention and control of NCDs 2013-2020**, India is the first country to develop specific national targets and indicators aimed at reducing the number of global premature deaths from NCDs by 25% by 2025.

¹ World Health Organization: www.searo.who.int/india/topics/noncommunicable_diseases/ncd_situation_global_report_ncds_2014.pdf.

² World Health Organization: www.who.int/nmh/publications/ncd-profiles.2014.

³ <http://www.ijcm.org.in/article.asp?issn=0970-0218;year=2017;volume=42;issue=1;spage=1;epage=3;aulast=Bachani#ref7>

In May, 2018 WHO released **REPLACE (Review, Promote, Legislate, Assess, Create and Enforce)**, a step-by-step guide for the elimination of industrially-produced trans-fatty acids from the global food supply by 2023 as the first global initiative to eliminate the risk factor for CVD.

Taking inspiration from REPLACE and specifically to target trans-fats, amendment have been suggested in **Food Safety and Standards((Food Products Standards and Food Additives) Regulations, 2011** where the targets have been set to reduce trans-fat to 2% by weight by 2022, one year ahead of WHO deadline. The regulations at present have set this target just for fats and oils and have excluded overall presence of trans-fats in all types of food. This is a serious gap as most of processed foods like biscuits, snacks, wafers etc. popular amongst urban dwellers and suitable to their lifestyles contain high amount of trans-fats and HFSS and needs immediate check at the manufacturing stage itself. Also, it is of serious concern that policies present on paper go waste if not implemented and adhered by people. The deadline to reduce TFAs to 10% was set in November 2009 followed by further reduce the limit to 5% in 2014 with deadline of adherence by 2016. At present, there is no proof either with FSSAI, MOHFW or state government to check if these regulations were implemented by industries. To ensure that the fate of these new amendments for elimination of trans-fats from India is not same as above two deadlines, serious advocacy efforts have to be put in place by CUTS taking in confidence governments(both at central and state level), FSSAI and other stakeholders from industries, public health representatives and other CSOs.

2. Purpose

1. To save lives of more than 2.1 millions of people who are affected by Cardio-vascular diseases (CVD) and are vulnerable due to consumption of trans-fats in India.
2. Engaging with the concerned central government agencies and key stakeholders to ensure achieving the target of eliminating the Trans Fats by 2022.
3. Earliest notification of Food Safety and Standards(Labelling and Display) Regulations, 2018 and amendment of Food Safety and Standards((Food Products Standards and Food Additives) Regulations, 2011
4. Generating awareness about healthy eating habits and giving voice to consumers to demand for their right to safe and healthy food.

3. Objectives

The project will focus on two major objectives to fulfill the desired purpose.

1. Strengthening the TFA related provisions of the Food Safety and Standards (Food Products Standards & Food Additives) Regulations, 2011, Promoting earliest notification of the Food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations, 2018 and promoting effective implementation of the both.

2. Empowering common consumers to generate public demand to support 2% TFA limit adoption and implementation at the earliest.

4. Strategies and Activities:

CUTS has been advocating since April 2018 with FSSAI to strengthen the proposed **Food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations, 2018** and notify for implementation. These regulations will form a major stepping stone for India to target HFSS and Trans-fats in packaged food products. Consumers will get an opportunity to select and choose products based on front-of-package information about amount of Salt, added sugar, saturated fats/transfats. The advocacy which started in April 2018 will be continued in this phase also and strategy will be framed according to developments.

Objective 1: Support a strong and earliest formulation of ‘Food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations, 2018’.

Strategy 1.1: Engage with FSSAI for earliest finalisation of a strong ‘Food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations, 2018’

The vested interest lobby is very strong and will try to dilute the draft regulation bill which shall be countered and prevented.

Activity 1.1 Meetings (& Follow up meetings) with targeted and concerned senior officials of FSSAI

Activity 1.2 Attending the Meeting of Regulation making committee of FSSAI

Activity 1.3 Taking part in the public meetings related to the Draft Food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations, 2018 and giving feedback and advocate for inclusion of the same in consultation with GHAI and Resolve partners.

Activity 1.4 Developing and publishing briefing paper with key provisions in the draft regulation and related issues.

Activity 1.5 Media outreach and advocacy about front of package labelling and trans fat elimination and global standards and way forward.

Strategy 1.2: Media Advocacy to support a strong and earliest formulation of ‘Food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations, 2018’.

Activity 1.2.1 Issues media releases and stories on draft ‘Food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations, 2018’ to the national and state media.

Activity 1.2.2 Regular posting of the relevant news, views, research findings on project specific social media page and twitter handle.

Objective 2: Support FSSAI to gather wider evidence, comments and feedback from selected states, subject matter experts, key stakeholders and common consumers on the draft ‘Food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations, 2018’ for its refinement.

Strategy 2.1 : Engage with stakeholders to gather views and comments for a strong ‘Food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations, 2018’

Activity 2.1.1 Literature review and desk research on Trans-fat and HSSF related issues in India and global standards for the same.

Activity 2.1.2 Clause by Clause review of the draft Food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations, 2018 and submission of the comments to FSSAI within due date.

Activity 2.1.3 Key stakeholder Interviews and one to one discussions about the Draft Food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations, 2018.

Activity 2.1.4 Organizing national level consultations in Delhi on the Draft Food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations, 2018 and related issues. Consolidation and advocacy of the same

Activity 2.1.5 Consolidating the comments, suggestions from all levels and submitting to the FSSAI for consideration within the given deadline of submission of the same to the concerned in the FSSAI

Activity 2.1.6 Sharing the key comments and suggestions with wider stakeholders and common consumers through mails, social media and e platforms for sensitisation and further submission to FSSAI

Strategy 2.2: Engage with concerned state departments and officials related to the food safety and standards in targeted states.

Activity 2.2.1 Scoping visit to States (Kerala, Punjab and Madhya Pradesh)

Activity 2.2.2 Organizing state level FGDs in the targeted three states on the Draft Food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations, 2018 and related issues and consolidation

Objective 3: Support FSSAI to put in place the institutional mechanism for effective enforcement of the ‘Food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations, 2018’ at central and State level across India.

Strategy 3.1: Engaging with FSSAI officials

Activity 3.1.1 Discussion on the proposed institutional mechanism in the finalised ‘Food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations, 2018’ with key concerned officials

Activity 3.1.2 Follow up meetings with key concerned FSSAI officials to putting in place the proposed institutional mechanism and on any action plan if any.

Strategy 3.2: Engaging with national Media

Activity 3.2.1 Media engagement and advocacy for strong institutional mechanism for food safety and standards in India and wider public sensitisation

5. Results:

Earliest provisions of elimination of trans fats from all fats, oils and foods in the regulation related to Food Safety and Standards ((Food Products Standards and Food Additives) Regulations, 2011 and earliest notification of the same.