



## State Level Consultation on “Significance of FoPL in Addressing NCDs”

*Organized by*  
**CUTS International**

*In Local Collaboration with*  
**Ram Krishna Shikshan Sansthan, Kota**



## Introduction

Inserting simplified nutrition information into food packages is a cost-effective strategy. This will guide consumers to make healthier choices and discourage them from consuming foods high in salt, sugar, and fat (HFSS) -- the critical nutrients causing a rise in Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs). In short, it is a tool that aids consumers in improving their diets, and it helps them make an informed decision.

In 2012, Chile became the first country to bring in a regulation to check the nutritional content of food and its marketing across the country. It mandated a front-of-package label (FoPL) for most food products high in a certain level of calories, sugars, sodium, and saturated fat. Today, there exists a variety of FoPL with different approaches and designs interpreting the nutrition present across the globe. In India, FoPL regulation for ultra-processed packaged foods has long been pending due to the go-slow attitude of the regulator and stiff opposition from the food industries for various reasons.

FoPL was first recommended in 2014 by an expert committee constituted by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) 2013. After years of consultations, FSSAI published a draft Food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations in May 2018. In 2019, due to stringent thresholds in the earlier draft and industry pressure, FSSAI issued another draft Food Safety Standards (Labelling and Display), Regulations, 2019. But in December 2019, FSSAI delinked FoPL from general labelling regulations again due to the food industry's reluctance.

Therefore, the main objective of this State Level Consultation on “Significance of FoPL in Addressing NCDs” organized by CUTS with local support from Ram Krishna Shikshan Sansthan was held at Kota, Rajasthan on October 12, 2023, to generate awareness on FoPL and the role it could play in curbing NCDs among wider stakeholders.

## Inaugural Session

**Yudhishter Chansi, Secretary, Ram Krishna Shikshan Sanstha, Kota** welcomed all the guest speakers and the participants. He briefly spoke on the objective of the programme and introduced the speakers with participants.

**Deepak Saxena, Associate Director, CUTS** said that the purpose of FoPL is to help the consumers to make informed purchasing decision by correctly, quickly and easily identifying unhealthy ingredients. FoPL is a cost-effective strategy to help the consumers to make informed decision. Therefore, Saxena



stressed that the regulators in India need to cautiously move forward but at a more rapid phase while choosing an ideal label for packaged food products for consumers in India. He stated, according to the National Family Health Survey (2019-2020), 47.7 per cent of men and 56.7 per cent of women have high risk waist-to-hip ratio. An increased consumption of packaged and junk food has also led to a double burden of under nutrition and over nutrition among children. Over half of the children and adolescents, whether under-nourished or with normal weight, are at risk of cardiovascular diseases, according to an analysis by the Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey in India (2016-2018). During the pandemic outbreak, a stakeholder group was formed and regular meetings were held from January 2021 to fast track the process. FSSAI has now reached at the decision that an initial period of four years, as recommended by the scientific panel, may be proposed for voluntary implementation of FOPL from mid-2023 to mid-2027.

Saxena said that FSSAI aims to start awarding health stars from the coming year, grading processed foods based on salt, sugar, and fat content, as well as other ingredients, to give an overall assessment of the product. Companies will then be asked to display the HSR on packaging voluntarily, though the policy is likely to state that ratings will become mandatory from 2027. But India's health and nutrition experts and consumer advocacy groups, including CUTS are collectively opposing this move. What India needs to fight a growing epidemic of lifestyle diseases is mandatory warning labels on ultra-processed and packaged food. A system such as HSR will only create a "health halo" around unhealthy products and confuse and mislead consumers. To help consumers make healthier choices, Australia and New Zealand had introduced the voluntary HSR system in 2014. But studies show that the system is highly flawed as unhealthy products are still able to get a high score. This is because the rating is based on the overall nutritional value, and the inclusion of healthy ingredients (that is, fibre, protein and vitamins) cancel out the unhealthy ingredients (that is, sugar, saturated fats and salt). More importantly, the system does not effectively assist the vulnerable consumers who need it the most.

**Dr. Jagdish Soni, CMHO, Kota** in his keynote address stated that though FSSAI has already taken a decision to go ahead with a Voluntary Health Star Labelling from mid-2023, any discussion in the interest of public health is always welcome. With growing health concern, it has become vital to influence consumer behaviour, this is where the FoPL comes to aid. He stressed that for FoPL to become mandatory there needs to be a public surge in demand for FoPL, which is currently missing.





Dr. Ratna Jain, Gynaecologist and Former Mayor in her special address pointed out that FoPL is a consumer right and the regulators should realise it and thereby take necessary steps to notify an effective labelling system, which is most suited to Indian consumers. Dr Jain discussed how ultra-processed



foods influence our health and contribute to NCDs by raising levels of dangerous chemicals and cholesterol. She pointed out that westernisation in food has been the fastest advancement in the economy. Even the smallest town has the packaged and fast food stalls. Even in our homes, they have entered our cooking culture and added that people are having heart attacks at the age of 25. She added that while people work for long term goals similarly, it is important for them to work hard for long term health.

Dr. Sanjay Pandey, National Consultant, Global Health Advocacy Incubator (GHAI) in his welcome address, introduced the panelists and dignitaries, and briefed about the importance of the Consultative Workshop.

## Technical Session

Dr. Sanjay Pandey, National Consultant, Global Health Advocacy Incubator (GHAI) presented the 'Status of NCDs in India and Rajasthan and the role of FoPL'. FoPL Schemes have been introduced by governments in over 40 countries around the world and are being considered by many countries. In India, FoPL regulation



for ultra-processed packaged foods have been long pending due to the go-slow attitude of the regulator and stiff opposition from the food industries, for their own vested reasons. Regardless of the FoPL System chosen, efforts must be put forth for stakeholder mobilization and for awareness generation programs to encourage the understanding and use of a FoPL. While public awareness on food hygiene has significantly enhanced during the Covid pandemic, knowledge about nutritious and safe food has not witnessed due positive changes. The key highlights of Pandey's presentation are:

- Food sector contribution in India was around US\$ 1 billion 15 years ago and it has now climbed to US\$ 19 billion, suggesting a significant increase in consumption, both in rural and urban areas, and among rich and poor people.

- Consumption of cakes and pastries, savoury snacks, sweet snacks, and confectionery has also increased from 4.1 to 11.2 ml or gram per capita per day from 2006 to 2019, owing to an increase in obesity and diabetes among consumers.
- India has the third largest packaged food market after China and the US.
- A Lancet study found that processed food accounts for 10 per cent of total calorie intake in India, with urban households consuming 30 per cent daily. And a report by CSE said 53 per cent of children consume salted packaged food, while 56 per cent consume sweet packaged food on average twice a week.
- The consumption of processed/packaged foods has decreased significantly in several other nations that have implemented the warning label, including Peru, Brazil, Thailand, Mexico, Chile, Finland and Sri Lanka. To be more precise, after the introduction of the policy package, households' purchases of highly sweetened beverages decreased by 23.7 per cent in Mexico and Chile.
- FSSAI has introduced the star rating concept in 2022, but a lot of consumer organisations are against it.
- AIIMS, IIPS, and NIN studies have clearly demonstrated the need for warning labels rather than star ratings to reduce the intake of unhealthy food.



This was followed by an Expert Panelists' Discussion led by Dr. R.C. Sahni, Deputy Superintendent (Retd.), MBS Hospital, Kota; Yashwant Sharma, Director, Vibrant Academy; Yagyadutt Hada, Retd. Director, Medical and Health; Smt. Gunjan Sanadya, Home Scientist, Food Processing and Value

Addition Unit, Kota; Ashok Maheshwari, General Secretary, Vyapar Mahasangh, Kota; Pankaj Sharma, Chairman, State Consumer Counselling Center Kota and Hari Vallabh Meghwal, State President, Journalist Association of Rajasthan, Jaipur.

Looking at the areas, from where all the speakers had represented, we see that majority of areas were covered. Dr. R C Sharma, spoke on the basis of his vast experience in the medical field; Yashwant Sharma, representing coaching institutes in Kota messaged to participants about the changing food pattern of students but also assured to deliver the key objective of the event to all the coaching institutes of Kota, which have students from all of over India. Gunjan Sanadya, who represented Food and Consumer Affairs Department., spoke on the subject highlighting the role of food processing units. Another important person was Ashok Maheshwari, who represented traders and manufacturers association and had assured that manufacturers will take due diligence of the issues with FSSAI in every aspect. Hari Vallabh Meghwal also assured that media should also take a serious note of the issues and can play an important role here. Others included Richpal

Pareek, Secretary, Red Cross Society; and Pankaj Sharma, Chairman, State Consumer Counselling Centre, Kota.

## **Open House Session**

In the Open Discussion (or Open House Discussion?) the participants unanimously expressed their views, which can be summed up as follows – “Insertion of simplified nutrition information on the front of food packages is a cost-effective strategy to guide consumers to make healthier choices and discourage them from consuming foods that are high in salt, sugar and fat - the critical nutrients causing rise in Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) and thereby making a positive intervention in the Prevention and Control of NCDs”.

## **Vote of Thanks**

**Yudhishter Chansi** proposed the vote of thanks. More than 70 delegates representing Government Departments, Consumer Organizations and other stakeholders participated.

## **Key Takeaways**

More than 70 delegates representing government departments, consumer organizations and other stakeholders participated in the half-day consultation. Some of the key recommendations that stakeholders agreed include:

- Need to sensitize more key stakeholders and through them enlighten consumers across the country about FoPL.
- Warning label is the best tool to guide those consumers who are medically advised to reduce the intake of fat, sugar, or salt in their diet, thereby encouraging them towards a healthy eating habit.
- Only a warning label can help cut across the barrier of multiple languages and can be easily understood by even those who cannot read.
- Policymakers must be encouraged to take a balanced approach that can adequately protect the public from harmful products.
- There is a need to set minimum standards for the locally prepared foods, while focusing on packaged foods. Both types of food categories need to be made safe for good health of public.
- Adopting a warning label that is more popular would be a major boost for increasing exports of packaged food products especially those produced by MSME units.



## Media Coverage

### सभी व्यापारी उद्यमी पैकड फूड सामग्री में गुणवत्ता का विशेष ध्यान रखें

#### एफओपीएल के महत्व पर परामर्श कार्यशाला का आयोजन

संदेश न्यूज। कोटा.

कट्स इंटरनेशनल के सह निदेशक दीपक सक्सेना एवं रामकृष्ण शिक्षण संस्थान कोटा के सचिव युधिष्ठिर चॉनसी ने बताया कि एफओपीएल पर एक राज्य स्तरीय परामर्श कार्यशाला का आयोजन स्टेशन रोड स्थित होटल लिलेक पर किया गया। इस कार्यशाला में कोटा व्यापार महासंघ के महासचिव अशोक माहेश्वरी सीएमएचओ डॉ. जगदीश सोनी नगर निगम की पूर्व महापौर डॉ. रत्ना जैन, डॉ. आरसी साहनी, डॉ. एस पांडे, रिछपाल पारीक सहित कई वक्ताओं ने भाग लिया।



कार्यशाला को संबोधित करते हुए कोटा व्यापार महासंघ के महासचिव अशोक माहेश्वरी ने कहा कि पैकड फूड के व्यापारी उद्यमी फूड सामग्री गुणवत्ता का पूरा ध्यान रखें। साथ ही फूड एक्ट के नियम इतने कठोर होते हैं कि सैंपल लेने के दौरान कभी-कभी सम्मेलन सही होने पर भी उसको

एक्ट के नियमों में सरलीकरण हो ताकि फूड प्रोडक्ट के व्यवसाय में भी बढ़ोतरी हो सके। साथ ही सभी व्यवसायी फूड पैकेट में शामिल होने वाले सामग्री की मात्रा की जानकारी सरल भाषा में लिखी जाए ताकि लेने वाले व्यक्ति को उस के बारे में पूरी जानकारी मिल सके।

नौजवान व बच्चों में फूड पैकेट एवं जंक फूड खाने का रुझान काफी मात्रा में बढ़ गया है, जिससे छोटी उम्र में बच्चे कई बीमारियों से ग्रसित हो रहे हैं।

उसका कारण इसका पैकड फूड एवं जंक फूड है।

कार्यशाला को संबोधित करते हुए डॉ. आर सी साहनी ने बताया कि आज देश में जो मौतें हो रही हैं वह सर्वाधिक तंबाकू नशे एवं

### एफओपीएल पर राज्य स्तरीय परामर्श कार्यशाला बीमारियों से बचाव के लिए खान-पान पर विशेष ध्यान देने की जरूरत: सीएमएचओ

कोटा | एफओपीएल पर एक राज्य स्तरीय परामर्श कार्यशाला स्टेशन रोड स्थित एक होटल में हुई। कार्यशाला में कोटा व्यापार महासंघ के महासचिव अशोक माहेश्वरी, सीएमएचओ डॉ. जगदीश सोनी, नगर निगम की पूर्व महापौर डॉ. रत्ना जैन, डॉ. आरसी साहनी, डॉ. एस पांडे, रिछपाल पारीक ने शामिल हुए। कट्स इंटरनेशनल के सह निदेशक दीपक सक्सेना एवं रामकृष्ण शिक्षण संस्थान के सचिव युधिष्ठिर चानसी ने बताया कि सीएमएचओ ने कहा कि देश में सर्वाधिक बीमारी डायबिटीज, हार्ड ब्लड प्रेशर, हाइपरटेन्शन से देश में



सर्वाधिक मौत हो रही हैं। हमें चाहिए कि आने वाली पीढ़ी को अगर इन बीमारियों से बचना है तो उन्हें जागरूक करना होगा और खानपान पर विशेष ध्यान देने की आवश्यकता है। पूर्व महापौर जैन ने कहा कि फूड पैकेट में जो सामग्री होती है, उसने कौन सी चीज कितनी मात्रा में है, सरल भाषा में लिखी जाए। डॉ. एस पांडे ने बताया कि देश में प्रति घंटे 700 मौतें गैर संचारी रोग के कारण हो रही हैं। महासंघ के महासचिव अशोक माहेश्वरी ने कहा कि पैकड फूड के व्यापारी उद्यमी फूड सामग्री गुणवत्ता का ध्यान रखें।