

State Level Stakeholder Consultation on the Importance of Front of Pack Labelling



March 20, 2024

Hotel Surya, Indore, Madhya Pradesh, India

Background

The State Level Consultation on the Importance of Front of Pack Labelling was organised against the backdrop of rising concerns regarding non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and the need for informed consumer choices. With the collaboration of CUTS International and CECOEDECON, the event aimed to delve into the significance of front-of-pack labelling (FoPL) as a means to empower consumers with essential information about the nutritional content of packaged food items. By fostering discussions and knowledge sharing, the event sought to advocate for policies that promote transparent labelling practices, ultimately contributing to public health and well-being.

Participants

The event witnessed participation from various stakeholders including representatives from government bodies, NGOs, industry experts, and academia. Key participants included **Manju Bala Joshi**, CEO of CECOEDECON, Jaipur; **Pushyamitra Bhargav** (Mayor of Indore); **Dr Tarun Gupta** (CMHO, Indore); **Dinkar Sabnis** (Rashtriya Sanghant Mantri, Grahak Panchayat); Harish Gangrade, Fortification Expert, Dept. of PHED, Government of MP and **Manoj Panchal** (Vice President, Laghu Udhog Bharti, MP), along with around 80 attendees.

Proceedings

The workshop commenced with a welcome by Mohan Joshi, Secretary, CECOEDECON, followed by a welcome speech from Manju Bala Joshi, CEO of partnering organisation CECOEDECON, Jaipur. Following this, Deepak Saxena, Associate Director, CUTS, Jaipur delivered opening remarks, providing context on FoPL and highlighting the urgency of addressing consumer information gaps in packaged food products. A comprehensive presentation followed, covering the background, importance, and necessity of FoPL, supplemented by case studies of global best practices and initiatives undertaken by CUTS International in this domain.



Saxena said that the purpose of FoPL is to help consumers make informed purchasing decisions by correctly, quickly and easily identifying unhealthy ingredients. FoPL is a cost-effective strategy to help consumers make informed decisions. Unfortunately, FSSAI has come up with a draft of Food Safety and Standards (Labelling & Display) Amendment Regulations, 2022, through which the regulator intends to introduce an Indian Nutrition Rating (INR) system voluntarily, similar to the Health Star Rating system introduced in Australia and New Zealand.

Many recent studies have revealed significant flaws in this system. Unhealthy food products can still receive high scores, as the rating is based on overall nutritional value. So, the inclusion of healthy ingredients such as fibre and protein can easily offset the negative impact of unhealthy ingredients like sugar, saturated fats and salt.

Highlights



Keynote speeches by Mayor Pushyamitra Bhargav and Tarun Gupta underscored the critical role of FoPL in combating the rising prevalence of NCDs and promoting public health awareness. Their insights emphasised the imperative of empowering consumers with accurate and accessible information to make informed dietary choices.



Dinkar Sabnis, in his address, highlighted the alarming increase in deaths attributed to NCDs, emphasising it as a major concern for public health. He stressed the importance of implementing warning labels on packaged food products to assist individuals already suffering from NCDs and to prevent others from falling victim to these diseases. He urged the audience not to wait until a loved one is affected by NCDs to take action, but to proactively prioritise health and adopt healthier lifestyles, citing preventive measures as the key to averting health crises in the future.



Deepika Ranawat, a Programme Assistant at CUTS discussed the status of NCDs and the potential impact of FoPL and provided valuable insights into the broader health implications associated with food consumption patterns. Her analysis shed light on the need for proactive measures to address nutritional challenges and promote healthier lifestyles.



Ranawat said that CUTS has been consistently advocating for the earliest possible implementation of consumer-friendly FoPL regulations by FSSAI and the significance of a simple and interpretative FoPL, using terms such as "EXCESS" or "HIGH" thereby restricting manufacturers from manipulating the nutritional profile as desired.

Harish Gangrade, Fortification Expert, Department of Public Health Engineering Department, Government of MP and Manoj Panchal (Vice President, Laghu Udhog Bharti, MP) also spoke on the occasion and presented their thoughts on the importance of the issue and need for FoPL in the presence of around 80 participants.



The engagement of students from the Government New Law College, Indore, brought a dynamic and youthful energy to the discussions. Their adept advocacy for FoPL, supported by evidence from WHO reports and legal frameworks, significantly impacted the audience, underscoring the societal need for transparent labelling practices.

Alok Vyas, in his vote of thanks, extended gratitude to all participants for their valuable contributions. He reiterated the importance of the discussions led by Deepika Ranawat, emphasising the alignment of FoPL initiatives with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and highlighting health as a growing major concern in India. Vyas encouraged continued collaboration and concerted efforts towards achieving holistic health outcomes and sustainable development objectives.



Outcomes

There was a lively discussion between experts and enlightened participants, who raised various questions which were answered by the experts. The participants appreciated the programme and the resource materials provided to them. The event was widely covered in the print media.

Key Takeaways

- The workshop generated several noteworthy recommendations and action points for various stakeholders, including:
 - ✓ Implementation of warning labels, such as "High in" warning signals in FoPL, to significantly reduce purchases of products high in salt, sugar, saturated fat, or other harmful substances, thereby contributing to the reduction of NCDs
 - ✓ Simplification of food labelling to enhance comprehension, support dietary management, and provide information on harmful cholesterol content.
 - ✓ Inclusion of child-friendly illustrations on highly processed packaged foods devoid of language barriers, such as smiley faces
 - ✓ Consideration of consumers of all ages, including youths and the elderly, with labels specifying the quantity of additives used in the product
 - ✓ Placement of labels at eye level to attract consumer attention and ensure legibility of nutrient content on packaging for ease of reading

Programme Schedule

10:30-11:00 hrs	Registration
Inaugural Session	<p>Welcome Address: Ms. Manju Bala Joshi, Secretary, CECOEDECON</p>
11:00-12:00 hrs	<p>Opening Remarks: Deepak Saxena, Associate Director, CUTS International <i>(A Background Information on FOPL, Importance and Need, CUTS Past Work on FOPL)</i></p> <p>Keynote Speech</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shri Pusyamitra Bhargav, Mayor Indore • Dr. Tarun Gupta, CMHO, Indore • Shri Dinkar Sabnis, Rashtriya Sanghtan Mantri, Grahak Panchayat <p>Concluding Remarks: Dr. Alok Vyas, CECOEDECON</p>
12.00 to 12.15 hrs	Tea Break
Technical Session	Status of NCDs and Role of Front of Package Labelling (FoPL)
12:15 – 13:30 hrs	<p>Ms Deepika Ranawat, Programme Officer, CUTS, Jaipur-Brief and Chair</p> <p>Discussants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shri Manoj Panchal, Vice President, Laghu Udyog Bharti, MP • Dr Harish Gangrade, Fortification Expert, Dept. of PHED, Govt. of MP
Closing Session	Open Discussion: Participants
13:30-14:00 hrs	Summing up & Vote of Thanks: Shri Mohan Joshi, CECOEDECON
14.00 hrs	Lunch

