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Consumer Awareness and Food Safety: The Role of Education and Outreach

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ABSTRACT

The article looks at the pivotal role played especially by the consumers' practical knowledge in ensuring food safety for certain food products. Further, the paper suggests that through sustainable consumer education, Indians could connect and build consumer knowledge that may enable safer food production and consumption practices. Various codifications of consumer rights – as enshrined in public health literature, prescribed by legal frameworks (i.e., Food Safety and Standards Act (FSSA), 2006) and referenced in the objectives and functions of the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) – are carefully unpacked, analyzed, and distilled into a conclusion on the promising state of food safety in India. From the dependence in food safety on both formal education and financial resources through the role of the consumer as not only a final but also the first defender of a safe food system. From, though, the necessity to “project information through mass media promotions, publicity, etc” in “contemporary times” to the constraints faced by the nation in building food safe practices – the study brings the 2010 Discussion Paper on Internal Trade, which focuses on the Standards & Enforcement Network of the FCI Management Consultant awards, nearer to the people. Yet the recommendations in the paper call for robust educational initiatives and partnerships that better align India's food safety standards with international best practices, and offer comprehensive consumer protections.

Keywords: *consumer awareness, food safety, education, outreach, FSSA, FSSAI, public health, India, legislation, consumer rights.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Consumer rights and food safety – these two are in a major discourse of public health and food safety. Mapping the interactive space between consumer rights, public health knowledge, legal constraints and restrictions, food hazards, and consumer awareness about food safety should be able to give you a fair taste of this relationship. To understand the complex way a consumer is connected to the entity landing on our plate – a food consumer will definitely need objective-based research on how a food product reaches a consumer. The pathway between a layman

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consumer and a product that comes to our plate is unpredictable. Socio-economic conditions of the country pave a way into this path; many unprecedented routes making their places, legally through statute laws, case laws, acts, regulations, the entire framework of food standards, and practical examples such as melamine break out of the labor sector regulations in the US and crosses food regulations.

Here, the risks of governing food safety are exacerbated for a society that possesses one of the world's most diverse and long-lasting culinary cultures, and one of the most complex systems for bringing food to the table. India's food industry is considered an 'old', 'massive' and 'open' 'public-private commons', marked by diverse traditional and modern pathways, commanding a regulatory architecture that is trying to keep pace with a runaway transformation of India over the past two decades during which it grew at an average cop rate of more than 7 per cent. Dimensions along which consumers sharply differ – such as socio-economic status – are also extreme.

The key legislative framework for food safety regulation for India is the Food Safety and Standards Act (FSSA), 2006, which brought together several food legislations and also created the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) that serves as a regulator for the standardization policy, regulating the food safety compliance of food products. The umbrella of the FSSA has generated a number of regulations, standards and guidelines to ensure food labelling, food additives, contaminants, food hygiene, among others.

Despite this, they are difficult to implement: problems due to lack of basic infrastructure, educational issues with food handlers, and the difficulties of monitoring and control at the basal level, all increase. Since the modern food chain is globalizing at an ever-quicken pace, it is all the more important for regulators and consumers to watch out for risk factors that cross borders.

II. IMPORTANCE OF CONSUMER AWARENESS IN ENSURING FOOD SAFETY

Consumer education is the pivotal element of the food safety paradigm. Armed with food safety knowledge, consumers can exercise sound consumer behaviour, discern their rights and know how to deal with their rights violation. Such knowledge cannot be limited to knowing consenting foods but should encompass legal measures that may be taken to deter right violations. Consumer education contribute much to stem the tide of foodborne illness by inducing judicious consumer behaviour and prodding food business entities to soar to higher standards of food safety.

Additionally, consumer smarts promote industry compliance with food safety standards:

between a better-informed consumer and a safer food product, the market incentives for food businesses to meet safety standards are significantly increased. As they face greater risk of blacklisting and litigation, safe business practices become the norm. This in turn promotes an even safer food product the next time around, boosting consumer confidence in the system and keeping it alert.

By educating consumers and increasing their awareness through campaigns and public outreach, it's possible to help fill the gap between elaborate and fragmented legal standards and the day-to-day habits of consumers. Public education can demystify legal standards, especially in foods, and make them easier to understand and exercise in daily life. Effective campaigns and outreach programmes use the media, medical provider forums, social media and other avenues to help shape community consensus about food safety from the grass roots up.

(A) Legal Terminology and Abbreviations

- FSSA (Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006): The principal legislative framework for food safety in India the various stakeholders in the food chain.
- FSSAI (Food Safety and Standards Authority of India): The central agency ensuring food safety and standards in India, working under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
- Consumer Protection Act, 2019: Legislation that lays down the foundation for consumer protection in the areas of rights, duties, responsibilities and complaints.

It is a journey that the government, the food industry and the overall consumer population have to make, in tandem, to ensure food safety and to protect the consumers. Through creating a culture where education and awareness projects are going to be launched and encouraged, India could achieve international best practices in food safety. The crucial role of consumer has been emphasized in the post above and the law, inherently, has been roped in — and education is key.

III. UNDERSTANDING FOOD SAFETY AND CONSUMER AWARENESS

The spiraling public conversations around food safety and the new consciousness of the consumer in India are a tutorial on conversations straddling the deepest layers of law, morality and society. The section is a disquisition on the contours of food safety. It looks into its importance, the status that it enjoys under the law in India and its place as an important component of public health. At the same time, it moves its critical path around the concept of consumer consciousness, its status at the various edges of the consciousness of different strata

of the Indian population, and the barriers against taking this consciousness to a point where it becomes instrumental in market practices and regulatory regimes.

(A) Definition and Importance of Food Safety

Safe food – or food safety – is understood as food that is safe, not contaminated and free of foodborne illnesses, which is part of a broader agenda of public health. People are too well aware of what can happen to health when food is not safe: it could cause acute poisoning or infectious diseases, or chronic diseases in the long-run such as cancers. People's health, their welfare level, the dependence on the food system, the willingness to trust, and economic development – all are dependent on the issue of food safety.

(B) Food Safety Standards in India

India's vision on securing the safety of foods is enshrined in the Food Safety and Standards Act (FSSA), 2006. This food safety authority in India, enactment of FSSA, 2006 is a big leap towards consolidating the previous food related legislations and establishing a strong, modern and science-based food regulatory regime. The act envisages the establishment of Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) as a regulator to set food standards for various food articles concerning food safety and their manufacture, storage, distribution, sale and import to ensure availability of safe and wholesome food for human consumption.

They encompass hygiene and sanitary requirements in food preparation areas, allowable levels of contaminants and toxins, labelling requirements, and codified protocols for food testing, to name just a few. Standards are continually evolving. Were implemented today, they would look different from the standards of the future as new scientific knowledge emerges, or when new food safety hazards crop up.

(C) Impact on Public Health

Food safety and public health go hand in glove. Implementation of stringent food safety standards reduces the risk of foodborne disease, which, according to WHO, affects millions of people in India every year and takes a heavy toll on healthcare systems, holds back socioeconomic development and inflicts a heavy burden in terms of lost productivity. Food safety helps India avert deaths and diseases – and provides a quantum leap in support of crucial Sustainable Development Goals such as good health and well-being; zero hunger; and responsible consumption and production.

(D) Consumer Awareness: Concepts and Challenges

One of the concepts that I use to describe the changes in food culture is consumer awareness:

the extent of public understanding of their rights as consumers and their knowledge about the food they ate and its safety, quality, authenticity, and demands as relevant to health. Why is it important that consumers become more aware? There are a number of reasons. A well-informed consumer demand better food, and their choices directly affect their health and wellbeing. When consumers know more about the food they eat, they expect better quality and safety. So, consumer awareness means higher standards for food producers and suppliers. If consumers reveal their preferences, the companies must comply to respond to changes. Finally, consumer awareness supports or allows for the enforcement of food regulations. Regulators can help with it, but they can't do it alone: they need the support of the consumers, who can act as a watchdog. Consumer awareness levels vary widely but are relatively higher in urban India, where there is generally better access to education and socio-economic status. Rural populations often remain underserved when it comes to food safety education and outreach.

(E) Challenges in Achieving High Levels of Awareness

There are many challenges to increasing consumer awareness in India. For one thing, the sheer diversity of the population typified by many languages, varying literacy levels and ingrained cultural practices makes reaching everyone a formidable challenge. Secondly, there is a large body of misinformation and a lack of general awareness of the meanings behind food labels, nutrition labels, safety standards and general information about where food is coming from. This hampers even the most literate consumers' efforts at purchasing safe food for themselves and their families. Things get further complicated by how much commerce in India is made up of unregulated markets and smaller food vendors that are an important part of India's food culture.

All of this was then amplified by the digital divide, as the move online to present food-safety information not only excluded those without access to the internet or digital devices, but with regard to enforcement revealed a visible gap in regulatory capabilities – whether this gap is attributable to resource constraints or logistical limitations – that undermines consumer-confidence in food-safety regimes.

IV. LEGAL FRAMEWORK GOVERNING FOOD SAFETY AND CONSUMER AWARENESS IN INDIA

At the center of India's vision and effort towards food safety and with the end of promotion of greater citizen awareness about foods are the laws of food safety and other related laws that define the responsibility of the state to the wellbeing of citizens, including through food safety,

and the responsibility of citizens to promote food safety. The most foundational and fundamental of these is the Food Safety and Standards Act (FSSAI), 2006. This Act, in particular, is important due to its mandate and its hierarchy. This Act is amplified by the Consumer Protection Act, 2019 and built upon several other acts of parliament.

1. The Food Safety and Standards Act (FSSAI), 2006

The Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 (FSSA) is a significant regulation in the food safety and standards framework of India, consolidating multiple provisions of several older legislations. It claims to ‘cover all issues relating to food safety and standards under a single frame work and create “one point of reference for all issues relating to food safety and standards”.’ FSSA regulates ‘manufacture, storage, distribution, sale and import of food products to ensure compliance with the quality or standards.

The objectives of the FSSAI Act are multifaceted, focusing on:

- Laying down science-based standards for food products.
- Regulating the manufacturing, processing, distribution, sale, and import of foods.
- Ensuring the availability of safe and wholesome food for human consumption.
- Managing the dissemination of timely and reliable information to the consumers regarding food safety.

Role in Consumer Protection

The consumers’ interests are protected, therefore, by the FSSAI, which makes it that much harder for unsafe food to enter a market, but they are also stronger precisely because they are information, providing consumers with the knowledge to make educated choices about what they put in their bellies or bodies, but also empowering them with recourse against sometimes-murky food related practices.

2. The Consumer Protection Act, 2019

A fundamental piece of legislation that permits these protections of consumers is the Consumer Protection Act, 2019 in India. Referencing a law dating back 40 years, it has provisions for food safety. It has one key addition from the most recent legislation, namely product liability. Manufacturers and sellers or providers of product (including food) or service can be liable for claims for harm from products or services that are found to be defective.

The Act lays down six fundamental rights of the consumers namely the right to be protected against the marketing of goods which are hazardous to life and property; to owe the product

purchased without any risk under the prescribed period; to be assured, as far as practicable, the quality of the goods, their prices and matters which form the basis of trade descriptions or labelling; to be informed about such vital matters as may be essential for the product of their decisions; to be compensated for any damages caused to him by the faulty goods; and to be heard before any action is taken under this Act against him by the producer or the seller. The main right of the consumers to be informed can be termed as the pivotal right for food safety as the consumer is entitled to ask for all information of the foods that he purchased and consumed. Likewise, the duty of care in the act is to purchase food products that are of good name and quality. The responsibility devolves to the consumer to be careful, to take all precautions and assure that the food he purchases are of good name and quality.

3. The Prevention of Food Adulteration Act, 1954

Before the FSSAI, 2006, the primary food safety law in India was the Prevention of Food Adulteration Act, 1954. Though this law has now been overtaken by the FSSAI Act, it remains historically significant for its focus on food adulteration, which is relevant to the present day as well. This Act's legacy highlights the way that food safety laws evolve constantly to adapt to new emerging problems and new consumer awareness of their rights to safe food.

4. The Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority Act, 1985

The second of these – the APEDA Act – is also a very important piece of legislation and pertains to promoting and developing the export of scheduled agricultural and processed food products from India. Although its specific objective is to promote export performance, supporting the 'enhancement of employment opportunities through export', it does have indirect effects on food safety standards at home because, by making products for export conform to international standards for food safety, it effectively upgrades the standards of all food produced in the country for the benefit of domestic consumers.

V. THE ROLE OF EDUCATION AND OUTREACH IN ENHANCING FOOD SAFETY

Due to the way that food safety has become mainstreamed into public health in India, reinforcement through a multi-pronged approach that encompasses regulatory standards, education and outreach, and giving consumers the information needed is essential. Education and outreach have become important parts of the food safety void. Food safety involves a broad convergence of governmental and non-governmental (NGO) efforts, public-private partnerships and the use of 'new media' to reach out to diverse sections of society and consumers.

(A) Educational Initiatives by Government and Non-Governmental Organizations

The Government of India through the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has extensively engaged in a number of national and regional campaigns that focus on raising awareness on food safety and standards. Campaigns such as ‘Eat Right India’ prevalent nationwide, and ‘Food Safety Magic Box’, a kit made available to schools, address key issues related to promoting healthy eating habits along with emphasizing the significance of eating safe and nutritious food. By customizing the campaigns in line with regional dietary habits and health issues reported in different areas, they have greater viability and have been able to make an impact on a broader audience.

(B) School-based Programs

Teaching children more about food safety starts at a young age – hence a range of school-based programmes is now embedded in the school curriculum, including as extracurricular classes. Some of them not only include some beginner-level education on the basics of nutrition and food safety, but also compulsory elements in the school programme intended to foster the establishment of lifelong habits of safe food practices. Kitchen gardens in schools and education of students about food preservation and safety equip students not only with the knowledge but also practical skills.

(C) Outreach Programs

Community outreach goes directly to the grassroots by taking food safety education to the doorstep of people in need, through workshops, interactive sessions, and demonstration projects that can be custom-made and taught by local NGOs or community-based organisations who identify the needs and address the concerns of specific communities. In doing so, these programmes aim at teaching people about safe food handling, reading food labels and identifying safe or adulterated food. This is particularly important in rural and underserved urban areas where access to formal education and digital platforms are limited.

(D) Public-Private Partnerships in Outreach and Education

The global scope and complexity of food safety issues mean that no one sector holds all the answers; solutions require collaboration. Public-private partnerships (PPPs) provide a practical model for scaling up education and outreach programmes by using the private sector’s resources, expertise and networks to support the implementation of innovative, large-scale programmes. For example, collaboration with major food companies can enable the creation of educational content and modules that reach schools, communities and digital platforms.

(E) Media and Awareness

Traditional media including television, radio and newspaper are still the best avenue of informing the public about food safety issues. We all know that traditional mass media can reach a large segment of the population easily. For example, on a cooking show on television, a cook will prepare some meals for the hosts while explaining some food hygienic process. Also, on some radio stations, some jingles are played occasionally reminding the public to always check for food labels before buying or eating outside. Hard-hitting newspapers articles for instance expose some cases of food poisoning or adulterated foods most times.

(F) Impact of Social Media and Digital Platforms

Ever since the emergence of social media and digital platforms, how information is transmitted and received has undergone a radical shift. Social media campaigns, mobile apps disseminating tips on food safety and online platforms for exchange of food information have provided food security education on an interactive and targeted basis. Moreover, the viral feature of social media content assures that important messages reach the public at large in a short span of time.

VI. CHALLENGES TO EFFECTIVE CONSUMER EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

There is no easy path to beget food safety for consumers through education and awareness in India. Consumer-centric approaches to food safety that are gaining momentum at the global level encounter several challenges in their implementation in India at different levels.

(A) Lack of Awareness and Misinformation

One is the widespread lack of awareness and the widespread presence of misinformation (an issue that we have seen addressing in other contexts too via open systems thinking). The harms of misinformation can be felt pretty much across the board; they can influence the adoption of unhealthy dietary habits and practices; they can hinder the uptake of food safety practices and guidelines; and, most dangerously perhaps, they can undermine public health initiatives by sparking unnecessary fears. For example, panic over the reported dangers of vaccines (fed by rumors) is a well-documented global health crisis. In India, we have plenty of examples of ineffective public health initiatives because people have difficulty visualizing the role of a healthy balanced diet, and tend to overconsume or eschew certain foods based on misguided ideas of their nutrient content and safety.

Another was the mass hysteria about rumors of plastic rice and eggs in the bazaars that caused widespread loss of consumer confidence, even as official assurances – including ‘explanations’ from regulatory bodies such as the FSSAI – greeted these concerns. Such events highlight the

particular opportunities and risks of the ‘information environment’.

(B) Cultural and Socioeconomic Barriers

The sheer diversity of India – human as well as socioeconomic – makes it challenging to build and communicate singular messages on food-safety and hygiene. Pre-existing ideas about food, locally embedded religious customs and traditions, as well as diversity in eating habits and food practices, all pose obstacles to large-scale outreach initiatives, such as consumer-education campaigns.

These would include any group with the traditional emphasis on vegetarian diets (where relevant nutrition and safety messages about plants would increase). Another example would be those populations in coastal areas with large seafood consumption (where seafood storage and cooking messages would be appropriate). Responsive consumer education is informed by cultural differences and socioeconomic factors that integrate diverse audiences to make messages relevant, respectful and understandable.

(C) Regulatory and Implementation Gaps

In spite of India having robust regulations in place for food safety and consumer rights, gaps in compliance and implementation continue to adversely impact effective consumer education and outreach. The Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 and the Consumer Protection Act, 2019 are important pieces of legislation that lay out a strong policy framework to protect consumer rights. However, implementation of these laws at the ground level is hampered in various ways, such as insufficient resources, lack of infrastructure and reach in rural and remote parts of the country.

Furthermore, the very nature of food safety risks (including GM foods [i.e., foods that are the product of genetic modification], new uses for food additives, and new mechanisms for supply, such as online delivery services) is constantly changing, requiring periodic review and amendment to existing law and regulation. The ‘About us’ page makes it clear that legal regimes are needed that can evolve and develop to encompass new issues; that consumer education has an important part to play within these regimes; and that consumer education must also evolve.

But the limits are not merely to the laws themselves but to the remedies that are available for them, as well as to the enforcement mechanisms for those redressal mechanisms. Such bureaucratic paths discourage complaints and grievances, which detracts from the spirit of consumer education programmes that empower people to demand food that’s safe and of good quality.

(D) Case Studies and Examples of Successful Strategies

Many successful consumer awareness campaigns, food safety education efforts and contests fill the global landscape in both developed and developing countries and can provide for Indian practitioners' good examples of how to design and deliver and adapt such programmes and approaches internationally. This section examines both national and international examples of consumer awareness campaigns and innovative food safety education and outreach in detail and makes some comparisons with Indian programmes.

(E) National and International Examples

A key Indian programme is the 'Eat Right India' initiative launched earlier this year by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), which brings together regulatory efforts with widespread outreach activities designed to promote healthier diets. The programme involves fortification, limits on trans fats, sugar and salt, and hygiene ratings for restaurants, all conducted under a coordinated national umbrella, including the involvement of schools and businesses, and the consumers themselves.

In public health interventions, one particular approach appears to be extremely effective internationally. The world-famous '5 A Day' campaign first created in the US, then passed on to many other countries, is a good example of a successful international public health intervention. Its simple message ('Eat five portions of fruit and vegetables a day'), its well-designed (and frequent) promotional material and its use of scientists and community networks to promote healthier eating has had a big effect on what people eat in public.

VII. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF INDIAN AND GLOBAL PRACTICES

The universality and relatability of ideas such as 'five a day' or 'move a little more' are mirrored in some of India's initiatives, and both allow for a person- rather than just disease-centred approach. However, the more complex socio-cultural landscape that Indian strategies have to work through – combined with wide-ranging preferential and economic variation, as well as educational differences – means that campaigns such as 'Eat Right India' have to be much more segmented and targeted.

(A) Innovative Approaches to Education and Outreach

Technology and digital media, in particular, are at the top of forward-thinking initiatives that aim to enhance consumer education and engagement. The FSSAI (Food Safety and Standards Authority of India) currently operates the Food Safety Connect app, designed to educate the user on food safety, report grievances and receive safety updates, for consumers. The Arogya

app offers advice on health and nutrition, specifically tailored to Indian food habits.

AR and VR technologies teach food safety education, allowing learners to get hands-on experiences and in-depth knowledge about food handling practices, nutritional information and more. These technologies are used in educational settings and public health campaigns to introduce learners with a virtual kitchen environment to train them in hand washing and knife handling practices.

(B) Collaborative Efforts and Their Outcomes

Resulting actions from such collaboration between government, NGOs and private sector have had beneficial outcome in the area of consumer education and food safety, for example, in India, the FSSAI's presence shows a partnership with the Global Food Safety Partnership to build capacity around food safety training and education in SMEs in the food sector. The synergy of resources from a range of government and private entities enables the leverage required to build strong consumer health programmes.

One of the best examples of international collaboration is the Codex Alimentarius Commission, a joint venture of the FAO and WHO, which consists of food-safety standards, guidelines and codes of practice to protect the health of consumers and ensure fair practices in the food trade. These guidelines are a reference point for food-safety standards all around the world and can inspire a country's national policies and conducts consumer education programmes.

VIII. SUGGESTIONS

In light of the complex and extensive nature of consumer awareness and food security through education and outreach, especially given the vibrant and multifaceted background of developing and advanced nations like India, this discussion tries to addresses ways in which such efforts can be improved by supporting legal and regulatory frameworks, innovations in education and outreach programmes and cross-sectoral collaborations.

- **Review and synchronize standards:** Not only should Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) review and synchronize its standards on a regular basis but also keep it up-to-date with international standards such as those set by Codex Alimentarius, which improves the competitiveness of these food products in the international market. Consumers, who remain skeptical about the food produced in the country, will be reassured due to such conformance.
- **Control Trade:** A well-enforced regulation can force increased traceability of a supply chain based on public trust. For example, simply requiring that products include QR

codes that consumers can scan to follow a product from farm to fork has the potential to be a game-changer.

- **Improve Labels:** Making food labeling stricter, including showing precise information about nutritional values, warning about allergens, and printing safety directions can empower the customers to make informed choices. This should also apply to online food sales that are increasingly growing.
- **Legal Literacy and Empowerment:** Legal literacy is a right of every citizen. The Consumer Protection Act (2019) should be amended to include specific clauses which talk about food safety issues and help consumers understand their legal rights. These rights must be imparted through legal literacy workshops and easy-to-use grievance redressal systems.
- **Food safety curricula:** The school curricula include food safety and nutrition from an early age can be facilitated and integrated, encouraging lifelong safe food consumption and processing habits.
- **Community-targeted programmes:** Designing targeted programmes to fit the needs, cultures and languages of diverse communities could enhance the impact of outreach. Engaging local leaders and influencers to disseminate information could increase community uptake.
- **Digital Platforms:** Use of social media, mobile apps and online portals to disseminate food safety messaging can reach larger sections of the audience; gamification of educational material can make learning fun for the younger section of the population.
- **New Technologies:** New technologies such as augmented reality (AR) could be used to revolutionize how information is presented and consumed for teaching, with AR simulations to illustrate cooking processes or the impact of bad food handling.
- **Joint Campaigns:** While Aadhaar is synergized into a Single-overarching ID, public-private partnerships for running nationwide awareness campaigns will optimize the spread of information. Corporates should be further incentivized under the CSR (company social responsibility) mandates to invest in food safety awareness programmes.
- **Food safety Research and Education:** Collaboration between government, academia and industry in food safety research can fuel development of more effective, targeted education.

- Community kitchens and gardens: Fostering community pride and ownership while directly engaging individuals in food safety and nutrition education; can be located in hubs around the community and house workshops and live demonstrations.
- Grassroots mobilization: Local NGOs and community-based organisations can do significant advocacy work from the ground up. Grassroots campaigning ensures that the food-safety message is heard at the most local level. Building community networks of food-safety volunteers can help in reaching deeper into urban neighborhoods and rural populations.

IX. CONCLUSION

It explores the Indian context of consumer awareness and education to strengthen food safety from the mélange of challenges and opportunities. The persisting issues and methods are analyzed within the paradigm of the extant law regarding food safety, mainly the Food Safety and Standards Act (FSSA), 2006, and the consumer protection legislations. Enacted in 2019 as the Consumer Protection Act, 2019, the new laws pave the way for a changed approach of food safety regime in India by calling for stringent food safety regulations and an empowered consumer base.

According to the analysis, proper consumer education will not only provide consumers with the knowledge to make safer purchasing decisions, but also the means to request food producers and suppliers to be compliant and responsible. This paper claims that consumers informed about food safety are important means of implementing specific attitudes and practices in food producers and suppliers, and the latter, motivated by market pressure, will adopt higher food quality and safety standards.

Outreach and education programmes are highlighted as key mechanisms to move from abstracted but sophisticated legal standards to much more diffuse, but materially important silences in everyday consumer practices. Whether through small-scale pilot programmes that can be replicated across socio-economic and cultural divides in India, or through expanding public-private partnerships so that the information-gathering, marketing and message-crafting capability of the private sector can help to solve approaches to outreach that are hindered by government-only programmes, these efforts to narrow the gap between the law and ‘what is on the ground’ is crucial and timely.

However, with robust legal frameworks in place, the enforcement of food laws faces huge challenges in the complex and diverse landscape of India. Continuous legislative and regulatory reforms are needed to adjust to new food safety challenges, and to reflect the best practices

across the globe. Digital tools have the potential to help bridge the digital divide across India, where there is currently low awareness of new food risks (especially among those who lack smartphones or access to the internet) and a substantial misinformation problem.

To summaries, a comprehensive consumer education program in addition to sustained outreach strategies are vital for bolstering food safety in India. Building a literate consumer population and frequent reform of laws and educational methods are vital for India's goal of becoming a global leader in food safety while promoting good health and sustainable development.

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