NEWS | POLICY

NHRC, India organises meeting on tackling food adulteration in India

Among various suggestions, developing cost-effective AI tools to identify food adulteration highlighted

By **Sanjiv Das** | April 8, 2026



NHRC

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The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), India organised a meeting of the Core Group on Right to Food and Nutrition on the theme 'Tackling Food Adulteration in India: Understanding the Scale, Challenges and Reforms' in hybrid mode at its premises in New Delhi. NHRC Chairperson, Justice V Ramasubramanian chaired the meeting which was attended by Members, Justice (Dr) Bidyut Ranjan Sarangi, Vijaya Bharathi Sayani; Secretary General, Bharat Lal; Director General (Investigation), Anupama Nilekar Chandra; Registrar (Law), Joginder Singh; Joint Secretaries, Samir Kumar, Saidingpuii Chhakchhuak; along with senior government functionaries from the centre and state governments, statutory bodies, human rights defenders, consumer activists, members of academia, civil society and domain experts.

In his address, Justice V Ramasubramanian provided a comprehensive overview of India's legal framework to combat food adulteration, tracing its evolution from the Madras Prevention of Adulteration Act 1918 to the Food Safety and Standards Act 2006. He underscored that consistent efforts have been made over the decades to curb adulteration at multiple levels. He said that increase in life expectancy should also translate into improved quality of life, as guaranteed under the Constitution. He said that every individual has the right to live a healthy, disease-free life, urging stakeholders to reflect on the deeper impact of adulterated food rather than relying solely on statistics.

Referring to the idea that 'food should be medicine,' he remarked that this principle has eroded over time. He also expressed concern that some food adulteration cases under the Prevention of Food Adulteration Act 1954 continued to be brought before the court even today, often based on reports as old as 15 years, which render the evidence obsolete and the prosecution weak. While noting the rise in food production and the existence of testing infrastructure, including mobile labs, he raised concerns about their effectiveness and maintenance. Highlighting consumer indifference as a key issue, he urged participants to propose concrete, actionable recommendations for government intervention.

NHRC, India Member, Justice (Dr) Bidyut Ranjan Sarangi stressed the need for widespread awareness on food safety. He raised concerns over excessive pesticide use in food production,

calling for urgent measures to prevent adulteration. He also highlighted the importance of educating farmers at the grassroots to promote safer practices and ensure better quality food grains.

NHRC Member, Vijaya Bharathi Sayani called for a multi-level special task force to curb food adulteration. She advocated mobile food testing in schools and public places alongside monthly checks. Emphasising strict enforcement, she urged fines for violators, 24/7 helplines, inclusion of food adulteration in school curriculum, timely victim compensation and fast-track grievance redressal systems.

Earlier, NHRC, India Secretary General, Bharat Lal highlighted the serious threat posed by food adulteration, particularly to vulnerable groups such as children, pregnant women and the elderly. He said that food adulteration is a global issue affecting both formal and informal sectors despite existing laws, regulations and guidelines. Stressing the scale of the challenge, he noted that it is nearly impossible to trace or recall adulterated products once they enter the supply chain. Even a single failed sample can impact hundreds. The NHRC has received several complaints related to mid-day meals and other adulterations and has taken cognizance of such matters to ensure accountability. He emphasised the urgent need to guarantee safe and nutritious food for all. Shri Lal also urged the participants to go beyond diagnosis of the problem and focus on collectively working towards identifying actionable and implementable solutions.

Rajit Punhani, CEO, Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) highlighted the work of FSSAI which through a simple and continuous drive encourages food vendors to register themselves. He said that states also give licences to vendors. He underscored the need to fill the vacant positions to effectively monitor and check for adulterated products at different levels by the concerned state governments.

Anusree Raha, Deputy Secretary, Department of School Education and Literacy called for greater involvement of communities and Self-Help Groups in tackling food adulteration. She said that capacity-building programmes are being organised to raise awareness and suggested using school laboratories to test food samples, helping familiarise students and youth with the issue.

Dr Richa Kumar, IIT Delhi called for farm-level monitoring. She flagged the issue of chemical adulteration; hazardous pesticide uses and its health risks. She urged a comprehensive systemic ban of hazardous chemicals. Prof. Bejon Mishra, International Consumer Policy Expert said that product standards must be ensured through stakeholder consultations. He called for transparency and accountability in food testing, a 24/7 consumer helpline, proper use of the ConsumerWelfare Fund, stronger vigilance mechanisms as well as public awareness on adulteration. Ms. Pushpa Girimaji, Consumer Rights Activist and senior journalist, emphasised the need for a national and comprehensive study to identify areas and materials prone to adulteration.

The participants included; Satyen Kumar Panda, Advisor (Quality Assurance), FSSAI; Dr Alka Rao, Advisor (Quality Assurance), FSSAI; Dr Bharati Kulkarni, Director ICMR–National Institute of Nutrition (NIN) in Hyderabad; Dr Shweta Khandelwal, Senior Advisor, Jhpiego; Dr Monalisha Sahu, Associate Professor, All India Institute of Hygiene Public Health; Vandana Singh, CEO, Food Security Foundation India, India Food Banking Network; Monika Singh, Director, Ministry of Women and Child Development; Rajesh Sharma, Deputy Secretary, Department of Food and Public Distribution; Dr Giridhar Parvatam, Director, CSIR, Central Food Technological Research Institute; Dr Mamoni Das, Principal, Department of Food Science & Nutrition, Assam Agricultural University; Shri N. Venkateswaran, Chief Executive, National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories (NABL), among others.

Read online: https://nuffoodsspectrum.in/news/4/23316/nhrc-india-organises-meeting-on-tackling-food-adulteration-in-india.html

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