

## Press Release

### Journalists moot for elimination of trans fatty acids (TFAs) from all foods



**August 30, 2023, Islamabad:** Pakistan is suffering from a very high percentage of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), most of them caused by food and beverages that are not fit for human health. According to a 2016 WHO study, six out of ten deaths in Pakistan happen due to NCDs, including three out of ten deaths by cardiovascular diseases (CVDs). Similarly, according to the National Diabetes Survey conducted in 2016-17, every 4th adult in Pakistan is suffering from type 2 diabetes, whereas the International Diabetes Federation (IDF) estimated in 2021 that Pakistan has the 3rd highest burden of type 2 diabetes worldwide with more than 33 million cases with additional 10 million termed as pre diabetic. Unhealthy food supply and consumption also contribute to the growing number of overweight people. It is especially worrying that the number of overweight children had doubled between 2011 and 2018, and the problem may have worsened in recent years due to lack of effective regulations or their enforcement by respective authorities. These disturbing statistics were shared by experts during a training workshop for journalists on “Understanding TFAs, Policy, Human Health, and Reporting”, which was organized by the Centre for Peace and Development Initiatives (CPDI) with the support of Global Health Advocacy Incubator (GHAH).

The training was conducted by prominent health experts and journalists including Mr. Munawar Hussain from GHAH, Dr. Khawja Masood, National Coordinator, Food Fortification Alliance, Mr. Zeeshan Haider, and Mr. Waqar Bhatti. They informed the participants about the major dietary risk factors such as high percentage of trans fatty acids (TFAs), sugar, and sodium in the food supply and dietary practices. For example, Pakistan’s TFA intake is estimated to be the 2nd highest in the WHO’s EMRO (Eastern Mediterranean) region, as it is about 6% of daily energy intake. The experts shared findings of numerous research studies, which highlight that the consumption of industrially produced trans-fatty acids (iTFA) significantly contributes to

the incidence of NCDs. It was also highlighted that inappropriate and unhealthy dietary practices, including higher consumption of TFAs, are responsible for increasing rates of NCDs such as diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular diseases, cancers, and other chronic diseases in Pakistani population.

The participants were informed that the Government of Pakistan has recently taken steps to regulate production and supply of certain types of unhealthy food. For example, the Government has notified that the limit of TFAs cannot be more than 2g per 100g of fat in Vanaspati, shortenings, bakery fats, bakery ware, rusk, and breads. It is a significant step forward, although certain gaps remain, as all types of food are still not covered by this regulation. It is also yet to be seen if the notified standard will be effectively implemented across Pakistan without any delay. More effective regulations and policy measures are also needed to reduce the consumption of sodium and sugar.

The workshop was attended by over 20 journalists from Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Karachi Quetta, Peshawar, and Lahore who got the opportunity to not only learn about the health-related challenges and the relevant major dietary risk factors but also about effective ways of reporting on such issues. In his opening remarks, the Mr. Mukhtar Ahmed Ali, Executive Director of CPDI emphasized the importance of more media attention to unprecedented health related challenges being faced by the people of Pakistan. He said that all stakeholders including media, government departments and civil society organizations must establish cooperative mechanisms to jointly work for public health, especially through public awareness, appropriate policies and regulations, and effective enforcement of food supply standards. Mr. Afshaar Iqbal from PYCA emphasized on the importance of local languages to communicate messages of TFA free food and good health. At the closing of the workshop, Mr. Zaigham Khan said that journalists can influence attitudes on the one hand and policy on the other. They can also be a check on corporate greed". "Therefore, they must remain alert about diseases and methods of prevention in the case of non-communicable diseases".

#### About CPDI

Centre for Peace and Development Initiatives (CPDI) is a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting peace, development, and good governance. With expertise in advocacy and governance, CPDI strives to bring about positive change in Pakistan.

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