Fluoride Knowledge and Action Network

Background

India is one of several countries having large parts affected with high Fluoride in groundwater. Consuming high amount of Fluoride can cause the disease known as Fluorosis. Since the dependence on groundwater for drinking purpose is high in India, especially more so in the rural areas, Fluorosis is today a widespread problem affecting millions in the country.

Fluorosis is a disease which has potentially damaging effects on human life. There are several forms of this disease; one of them is Dental Fluorosis where teeth get affected with yellowish stains, making the teeth brittle and fragile.

The more serious form of Fluorosis is Skeletal Fluorosis where bones and tissues of the body are affected leading to partial or even complete immobility depending on the severity of the disease. Skeletal Fluorosis has a crippling effect on a person’s body functions and if not detected early, there remains very little chance of recovery later on.

From estimates done in 1999, in India about 66 million people (including 6 million children) are at risk of fluorosis. The deficiency of some nutrients worsens the condition of fluorosis. This makes the malnourished and poor people more prone to severe forms of the disease, making them crippled for life. Fluoride can also enter the body through the food chain if food crops are irrigated with high fluoride water. This is a risk especially in places where there is greater dependence on such type of locally grown food.

The social costs of fluorosis are twofold: the first is on human health and the second is on depreciation in value a person holds in contributing economically to his family as well as to the society.

There have been several efforts made to tackle fluorosis in the country especially through programmes on drinking water by the government and by multi-national agencies. However, inspite of such efforts, the intensity and spread of fluorosis seems to be rising with more areas and more cases being reported constantly.

Though several solutions are available to tackle the safe water aspect as well as the nutrition aspect of the problem, the information about these solutions have not spread widely. One
reason for this is the lack of an active platform where information on fluorosis can be easily shared and interchanged among people.

Along with increased sharing of information and building upon each other’s experiences, there is need to spread the emerging lessons and solutions further. The “Fluoride Knowledge and Action Network” has been thought of specifically keeping these things in mind.

The network is expected to play a defining role by:

a) Bringing people together on a shared platform
b) Collating, analyzing and updating all information on fluorosis available till now
c) Building on this information further and
d) Getting people to direct their efforts in a focused manner in executing fluorosis awareness and mitigation related activities.

Proposed Network Structure

The network’s Advisory body, which provides inputs on strategic issues of the network and provides overall governance and leadership. This group would include people who are experts on the issue of fluoride/Fluorosis and other experts on communication, organization strategy and advocacy as well.

The network’s Core group, a set of members operationalizing the activities of the network under the guidance of the Advisory body.

Different Working groups that are formed based on specific activities the network foresees itself getting into from time to time. The working groups would be formed under the advisory body’s approval with specific terms being laid out by the advisory body for them for their working and functionality.

A wider general body of the network which is made up of all of the above as well as interested individuals, prominent NGOs, government bodies, CSRs, industries, media etc.

A Secretariat facilitating between the advisory body, working groups and the general body of the network for proper functioning of the network.
The functioning of the network will be facilitated and coordinated by the secretariat.

**Proposed Structure of Network**

Network initiation

A start would be made with communication with potential members i.e. advisory body members, core group and general body members which would be inclusive of NGO’s, CSR’s, Media, Government. Working groups will be formed based on the advise of the Advisory group out of members of the network.

We plan to start with a general body meeting of the network within which there would be break-out sessions by the Advisory body, core group and working group members for discussion and formalization of relevant issues.

This meeting will lead us into the start of activities of the network.
**Network functions**

In general the activities that the network would engage in would be -

a) Knowledge creation, updation, analysis and sharing,
b) Customization of knowledge that comes out or is created so it can be used for advocacy by influencing upon the Media, the government, industry, NGO’s to stand up, take action and play a role in fighting fluorosis.
c) Assisting the development of innovative field efforts by NGOs and government agencies and getting funding agencies involved in taking the agenda forward.
d) Supporting the work of relevant government departments to act on fluorosis through existing programmes or by starting new initiatives.

The initial set of activities being planned are to launch a fluoride portal, produce a white paper on fluoride issues and synthesize existing information from network members towards the portal content. Eventually following the first meeting of the network, it is planned to discuss further line of activities for the network.

**Secretariat**

The secretariat of the network, INREM foundation would be the body that coordinates and cross-facilitates exchange of ideas between members.

The secretariat, INREM Foundation would also coordinate efforts once the network is functional by way of arranging sharing platforms i.e. meetings, workshops, events and also by way of processing the knowledge and information that is generated, documenting and organizing it and converting it into documentation to be used as communication tools for network advocacy.