

The proposed text of the Constitution of the SASNET-Fermented foods

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Preamble:

The role of advanced research and higher education in the field of Food technology and Applied nutrition in improving public health and social wellbeing of the people of a country is well recognized. However it seems that its importance on poverty alleviation is neither correctly understood by the politicians to any significant degree nor it is rightly addressed by the planners

to any measurable extent. Around 800 million people of the south Asian countries are estimated to be living under poverty level, at present. In fact the number of people living under poverty level of one dollar per day has increased by about 40% during the last 20 Years even though the total food production of the world has been almost doubled during that period. They make 70 % of the workforce in agriculture and contribute only 25% of the GNP. Causes of poverty are many, mode of their operation too complex to be explained in simple formulas and solutions are too complicated to be easily implemented in practice. But, it could be concluded without any doubt that one of the important reasons contributing to low income level of so many people is the fact that the major part of them are integrated in the agriculture of these countries which continues to supply mainly raw materials of very low added value to the world market. The productivity of the agricultural sector in these countries can be improved by integrating food production to food processing, resorting to higher degree of refinement using suitable methods of post harvest handling.

There are many ways of processing raw materials for production of value added finished products. Fermentation is one of the methods for producing value added finished products. Fermentation have many advantages and hardly any disadvantage to mention. It is a low energy consuming technology, produce hardly any waste, completely sustainable, gender friendly method for producing safe and nutritious value added food products. It has the advantage of being generally regarded as safe and at the same time offer immense opportunity for production of products which can be classified as organic foods, natural foods, health foods, convenience foods, ethnic foods, nutraceuticals, functional foods and not to forget food for clinical nutrition. The positive effects of fermented foods with probiotic organisms and prebiotic substrates have become a matter of great interest to scientists, medical practitioners, food companies, and marketing agencies as the demand for such foods is enormous and it is growing fast day by day.

Fermentation is one of the ancient techniques of food preservation that has been learnt by mankind, probably by accident. Fermentation have many positive effects for example, it brings varieties of tastes, flavours and texture to the foods; it makes food more digestible due to pre-digestion caused by microbes; some fermenting microbes synthesis vitamins, amino acids and enrich the nutritive value of foods; it can liberate nutrients locked in the plant structure by the indigestible materials making it more nutritious. Fermented foods have potential to act as natural drugs as the numbers of probiotic bacteria bringing fermentation have been found to give several therapeutic benefits. Fermentation processes are less energy consuming, less complex and do not require costly equipment. It can be used to recycle natural materials and can convert waste material to useful products. Fermentation also reduces anti-nutritional components in food like phytates, tannins, oxalates and trypsin inhibitor (Adams, 1990; Joshi & Pandey, 1999). The WHO food safety unit has given high priority for the research in food fermentation, probably because it helps make food safe by controlling the growth and activity of pathogens in foods (Nout & Motarjemi, 1997).

The popular Indian fermented milk *dahi* is quoted and referred in ancient Indian scriptures like *Vedas* and *Upnishads*, and various hymns for which exact date is not known, but have been referred in the era of *Rama*, which was 10,000 years before. *Ayurveda*, the traditional and highly regarded scientific system of Indian medicine, in its well-recognised treatise, *Charaka Sambhita* and *Sushruta Sambhita* discusses various properties of cow and buffalo milk *dahi* and emphasises on its therapeutic characteristics. *Dahi* occupies a pivotal position in Indian dietary practice. It is consumed with rice in the south, with wheat preparations in north and is also used as a refreshing beverage or dessert. It is also prepared from the milk of "Yak" and "Zomo" in the Himalayas. In India, approximately 9.1 per cent of the total annual production (74.5 million tonnes in 2000) of milk is utilised for *dahi* making for direct consumption.

The *Idli* and *Dosa* of Southern India have each had a long history, though not every detail can be clearly traced. The *idli* seems to be first mentioned in writing in Shivakotyacharya's '*Vaddaradhane*', a Kannada work of A. D. 920. The poet Chavundaraya described it unequivocally as *urad dal* (black gram) soaked in buttermilk, ground to a fine paste, mixed with the clear water of curds, cumin, coriander, pepper and asafoetida and then shaped (Iyengar, 1950). The *dosa* was first noted in the Tamil Sangam literature of about the 6th century A.D. The use of pulses to yield the well known *dhokla* of today was first mentioned in A.D. 1066.

This indicates that fermented foods have a very long history. There are many more traditional fermented foods available, originating from different countries. The medicinal and nutritional properties of several such fermented foods have been “experienced” by several generations. However, the scientific community gave impetus to these beliefs after the publication of book “Prolongation of life” by Metchnikoff in 1908, in which he ascribed the long life of Bulgarian people to the consumption of high amounts of fermented milk, which have been described to check the intestinal putrefaction. Most of the lactic acid bacteria bringing out fermentation are naturally accepted as GRAS (Generally Regarded As Safe) for human consumption. The lactobacilli and bifidobacteria are considered as the most suitable candidate organisms as probiotics as they are indigenous to the intestinal tract of man and animals. These bacteria have strong inhibitory activity against common food-borne and intestinal pathogens like *E. coli*, *Salmonella* spp., *Shigella* spp., *Staph. aureus*, *B. cereus*, etc. Special strains of lactobacilli have shown remarkable effect in control of diarrhoea, lactose intolerance and many miscellaneous disorders including urinary tract infections, anti-allergic actions, etc. Effect of fermented milks with different strains of lactobacilli on immunostimulating and anti-cancer properties have been reviewed (Perdigon *et al*, 1995, Patidar & Prajapati, 1997). The work done on hypocholesterolemic activity of lactic acid bacteria is also compiled (Ashar & Prajapati, 2001).

It is also established that fermentation improves the nutritional status of the food by enhancing protein digestibility and higher amino acid contents, increased mineral absorption (Paredes-Lopez & Harry, 1988) and vitamin synthesis by specific microflora. (Alm, 1982). Fermentation also reduces the amount of anti-nutritional factors like phytates in food (Khetarpaul & Chauhan, 1991).

There is great potential in identifying some of the beneficial microflora associated with traditional fermented foods. Subsequently, controlled fermentation can be brought out by selected probiotic strains. These products may have tremendous application in control of children’s diarrhoea, malnutrition and HIV infections, more prevalent in south Asian and African countries. Recent WHO report indicates that India has the largest number of diarrhoeal deaths. Of 1118 million children of less than 5 years, child mortality is estimated at 3 million. At least 60,000 (2%) of this die owing to diarrhoea (WHO USAIDS, 2000). Similar situations prevail in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and other south Asian and African countries. Several children die due to malnutrition. On the HIV/AIDS front, fact sheet of USAID/WHO states that the rate of HIV infection is 0.7% in India, 0.1% in Pakistan, 0.29% in Nepal, 0.02% in Bangladesh, 0.07% in Sri Lanka and 0.05% in Maldives at the end of 1999 (WHO USAIDS, 2000). This is increasing at the higher speed. These patients suffer from a number secondary infections. The majority of the victims of all above referred ailments belong to low income group of the society, who do not have enough money to buy costly medicines. Considering all these facts, we are interested to evolve a low cost suitable technology to make fermented foods with benefits of medicine and food, both together. This idea has ultimate objective of social welfare, especially in the south Asian countries.

Research and development is considered to be a costly item in the economy of any food company. However research and development could be effective and less expensive when it is carried out as collaborative network projects. Development of new foods and testing its special health benefits need input from many specialized areas of technology and science.

In this background, an international seminar on fermented foods, public health and social well-being was organized at Anand, India. Dr. V. Kurien, Chairman, Institute of Rural Management, Anand, inaugurated the meeting, which was attended by 167 participants. During the first day 25 scientific papers were presented in the form of oral presentation and 36 papers were presented as posters. A number of project ideas were presented by the four groups who took part in the workshop on the following day.

At the concluding session the participants resolved unanimously to form a network for promoting research and development of fermented foods. The participants resolved further to ask the organizing committee of the meeting to function as an interim coordinating committee with Dr. JB Prajapati as the coordinating secretary until the next meeting in two years. The present scientific committee would be requested to continue to be an advisory committee during that period.

The following is the draft for constitution to be edited/revised by the coordinating committee members and finally to be placed before the general body for approval.

Article 1

Definition & Designation

1.1.

Definition

In this constitution, unless the context otherwise requires "Fermented foods" mean all kinds of foods produced using microorganisms and/or their enzymes at household level or at industrial level for human consumption and/or for animal feed.

1.2.

Designation

1.2.1.

Name

The scientific organization functioning under this constitution shall be known as the SASNET – Fermented Foods. (SOUTH ASIAN NETWORK for promotion of research and development of fermented foods) and in the following text it will be referred to as “The Network” and will be abbreviated as “SANFood”.

1.2.2.

Status

SASNET-Fermented foods shall be a non-political, non-sectarian and non-profit making scientific body of professionals working or interested in promotion, development, application and other areas of fermented foods.

Article 2

Objectives

The aims and objectives of SASNET- Fermented foods shall be:

2.1

To develop a network for scientists of south Asian countries in association with those of Sweden and other countries through exchange of information and experiences in the fields of Food fermentation

2.2

To initiate, develop, promote, and coordinate research and training in the areas of fermentation of food and its application for the improvement of public health and social well being of the people.

2.3

To promote collaborative research in development of fermented foods as well as foster and maintain research links with scientists of similar interest all over the world.

2.4

To organize conferences, workshops, seminars and symposia.

2.5

To provide information on scholarships and/or fellowships for Food Scientists and Nutritionists for further training and/or research, as well as design and implement short-term training programs in Fermentation of foods.

2.6

To develop and maintain a data base on fermented foods, food scientists & nutritionists, food industries, research institutes, and training institutions interested in fermented foods of south Asian countries.

2.7

To collaborate with food industries in product development and marketing of fermented foods.

2.8

To collect and disseminate knowledge on Fermentation of foods from south Asian countries.

2.9

To honor the scientists, social workers or organizations promoting the development and application of fermented foods and carryout social and welfare activities for the members of Network.

Article 3

Power and Functions

In pursuance of its aims and objectives and for a better and proper performance of its functions in terms of this Constitution “SASNET-Fermented Foods” shall have powers to:

3.1

Engage in any activity or undertaking for the purpose of mobilizing or generating financial and other material resources to be applied exclusively to the fulfillment of its aims and objectives,

3.2

Solicit donations, gifts and other forms of materials aid acceptable for meeting the financial requirements and other needs for promoting the aims and objectives of The Network.

3.3

Act as agent of any person or body or persons, public or private institution or organization on such terms and conditions as The Network may determine or accept in respect of any matter falling within the scope of the aims and objectives or power of The Network.

3.4

Exercise any other power, perform any other function, or do any other thing that lawfully is so exercised, performed or done by The Network for the purpose for which The Network has been established.

3.5

Make rules prescribing:

3.5.1

The rates and modes of payment by individual or institutional members, as applied from time to time in respect of membership fees, annual or periodical subscriptions and contributions towards the fund of The Network.

3.5.2

The circumstances in which and the conditions upon which members of “The Network” may or shall be suspended or terminated.

3.5.3

Such other conditions relating to membership as may be necessary or desirable to ensure the integrity, independence, honor and dignity of “The Network” as well as efficacy in its operations.

Article 4

Organization

Central organs of The Network

The Network shall have three categories of principal organs for the management of its affairs, namely:

4.1

General Assembly (GA)

4.2

Advisory Committee (AC)

4.3

Coordinating Committee (CC)

4.1

The General Assembly

4.1.1

The members of the general Assembly will be the individual participants of The Network who has been admitted and registered as members of the network by the coordinating committee or an executive officer who has been entitled/entrusted to do so by the CC, following an application made by an individual requesting a membership.

4.1.2

All adult individuals who in one way or other are interested in research and development of fermented foods are basically eligible for obtaining a membership of The Network.

4.1.3

Ordinary meetings of the GA shall be held biennially in connection with international congress, if not decided otherwise.

4.1.4

The coordinating committee, by two third majority, may decide to call extra-ordinary meeting of the GA and shall call such assemblies upon request of more than half of the members of The Network.

4.1.5

In the general assembly, each member will have one vote. The voting power can be delegated in writing. Voting may occur through acclamation, show of hands or secret ballot.

4.1.6

Members of the advisory committee may attend the meetings of the GA with right to vote.

The Chairman of the session shall have a deciding vote.

4.1.7

A preliminary agenda for the meeting of the GA shall be prepared by the secretary of the coordinating committee and approved by the coordinating committee of The Network, should be available to the members of the GA at least one month in advance of the GA meeting.

4.1.8

The agenda of business to be transacted at the GA shall be distributed by the Secretary of the coordinating committee to the participants at least 15 days before the meeting. No questions that have not been placed on the agenda shall be discussed or put to a vote unless a proposal to that is approved by a two-thirds majority vote at the GA. However, the Chairman of the meeting may include in the agenda any other matter which is in the best interest of the Network.

4.1.9

The GA may be held only in a south Asian country from which The Network has registered members. Generally more than two consecutive GA may not be held in the same country.

4.1.10

The location of the next GA shall be decided at the preceding GA and the Coordinating committee may decide the exact dates of the GA.

4.1.11

The Coordinating committee may decide a registration fee (or scale of registration fees) for the next GA and may waive registration fees either partly or wholly for individuals attending GA .

4. 2

Advisory Committee (AC)

4.2.1

An advisory Committee composed of prominent and influential individuals who are interested in supporting the objectives of The Network may be established to assist the Coordinating committee in policy matters. The AC may consist of a minimum seven members and a maximum number equal to 10% of the of the total individual members.

4.2.2

Nomination of Advisory Committee members may come from any ordinary member. The Coordinating committee will decide on which individual will be invited to join the Advisory Committee.

4.2.3

The Advisory Committee provides advice to the Coordinating committee in consultation and correspondences with the Coordinator/Executive Secretary or another member of the Coordinating Committee designated by the coordinator of The Network for this purpose.

4.2.4

Membership to the Advisory Committee will be reviewed by the Coordinating committee every two years. Coordinating committee may terminate any membership and add or replace the members in the best interest

of the Network.

4.3

The Coordinating Committee

4.3.1

The Coordinating committee shall consist of members nominated/ elected/approved by the GA including the chairman, the coordinator and treasurer of The Network. The secretary of the coordinating committee the coordinator of the network will also be its Executive officer. The committee should try to choose as its members at least one representative from each south Asian country. The CC will consist of a minimum seven members and a maximum number equal to 10% of the total individual members.

4.3.2

The coordinating committee may choose to adjunct any person of its choice to strengthen its base/competency. There could also be invited members from a non-governmental organizations or international organizations to attend the Committee meeting as an observer/advisor with no voting rights.

4.3.3

It is proposed that during the interim period starting from 14 Nov 2003 to 15 Nov 2005 the members of the organizing committee of the international seminar held in Anand could be asked to be the members of the coordinating committee of The Network and the members of the scientific committee will be asked to be the members of the advisory committee. The coordinator may contact prominent individuals to invite/request them join the advisory committee for broadening its base.

4.3.4

The Coordinating Committee shall meet at least once a year.

4.3.5

In case of important urgent matters, the Coordinator may take consent/opinion/authorization of the members through email/phone/fax or meeting can be coordinated by video-conferencing.

Article 5

Powers and Functions of the Central Organs

5.1

The General Assembly

5.1.1

To give general directions and guidelines to the administration of the activities of The Network.

5.1.2

To elect/nominate/approve once every four year, members of the Coordinating Committee according to the Rules and Procedures as stipulated else where in this constitution. The GA can also suggest the names of the office bearers.

5.1.3

To consider and approve proposals for any short or long-term development plan of activities and strategies for implementation, the budget of The Network, approve the annual report, auditor's reports/audited accounts and financial statements relating to the accounts of The Network presented by the coordinating secretary.

5.1.4

To receive, review and evaluate reports on implementation of projects and other reports submitted by the Committee and issue appropriate directions for compliance by the competent organs or officers of The Network.

5.1.5

To consider and approve proposals by the Coordinating Committee to appoint a Committee to perform any special tasks if necessary

5.1.6

To receive, consider and resolve any issue of question for determination in respect of which this Constitution makes inadequate or no provision for its resolutions.

5.1.7

The power of GA to recall or remove from office any of the members of AC or CC or any member in individual capacity or organization in any of the circumstances prescribed by this Constitution shall be exercised on its behalf by the coordinating committee. But this delegation of power shall not be valid in the case of a vote of no confidence.

5.1.8

It shall also be the function of the GA to determine the general policy, location and timetable for the next GA.

5.2

The Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee shall perform the following functions:

5.2.1

Take actions and policies between the meetings of the GA,

5.2.2

Serve as a planning body for The Network and shall present each meeting of the GA a written report of action taken and recommend further activities.

5.2.3

Propose membership categories and dues to the GA for adoption.

5.2.4

Provide the necessary leadership and directives for the effective implementation of the objectives of The Network.

5.2.5

Lay down and change from time to time such rules as may be thought necessary for the proper functioning of The Network.

5.2.6

In consultation with members of “The Network” present proposals to GA for ratification or amendment of the Constitution as it deems appropriate for the better fulfillment of the aims and objectives.

5.2.7

Enter into agreements with other organizations for enhancing the capability of The Network in pursuit of its objectives.

5.2.8

Delegate the exercise of its powers under this constitution to the Coordinating/Executive Secretary for conducting the affairs of The Network smoothly and efficiently

5.2.9

Report to the GA a summary of activities that has taken place and an audited financial statement since the last Assembly.

Article 6

Location and Office Bearers

6.1

Location

6.1.1

The Coordinating Office shall be located at the country of residence of the Network Coordinator/Executive Secretary and the Program Officer for the duration of their term of office, which is four years.

6.2

Office bearers

The executive secretary of the coordinating committee will be the Chief Executive Officer/The network coordinator of the network who shall also act together with the treasurer and sign the financial documents

Article 7

Membership

7.1

Membership categorization: The members of the Network shall primarily be the individual scientists who are engaged in research and development of fermented foods. However the network may have members of different categories namely; professional, associate, student, honorary, institutional and corporate members.

7.1.1

Professional membership granted upon application by any scientist engaged in any aspect of Food fermentation with at least one publication in peer-refereed journals of Food Science/technology/Nutrition or a person who can show documentary evidence to the effect that he/she has acquired equivalent or higher scientific merit by being engaged in research and development of fermented foods at a scientific level.

7.1.2

Associate membership could be granted upon application by any person actively working in the field of Fermented Foods

7.1.3

Student membership granted upon application by a student of any university taking a course in Food Science/Technology/Nutrition/Biotechnology/Microbiology or closely related discipline.

7.1.4

Honorary membership may be granted to individuals with outstanding contribution in the field of interest to the Network.

7.1.5

Institutional membership granted upon application by research institutes, training institutions and statutory bodies.

7.1.6

Corporate membership granted upon application by food industries, food service industries, United Nations agencies, NGOs among others.

7.2

Membership Obligations, Rights and Privileges

7.2.1

All applications for membership of The Network shall be made to the coordinating secretary of the coordinating committee.

7.2.2

By making an application it is implied that the applicant on registration agrees to be bound by the provisions of this constitution

7.2.3

The Network Coordinating Committee shall in all cases have absolute discretion in deciding whether any applicant shall be admitted to The Network or not.

7.2.4

At any meeting of The Network when a vote is taken either by show of hands or secret ballot, all full members who have paid the membership fee shall be entitled to one vote each.

7.3

Membership fees

7.3.1

There shall be an annual membership and life membership subscription for each category of membership, except for honorary members.

7.3.2

The size of the membership fee shall be determined by the Coordinating Committee and ratified by a simple majority vote at the GA.

7.3.3

Payment of the annual membership fees shall be made by end of the each calendar year.

7.4

Cessation of membership

7.4.1

Membership shall cease upon the approval by the coordinating committee of a resignation letter from a member received by the Coordinating secretary of the network. However, no membership fees will be refunded.

7.4.2

The Coordinating Committee shall have the right to terminate membership for any member whose conduct is deemed to be prejudicial to the good name of The Network

7.4.3

Membership of any member who has not paid the membership fees of the last three years will be considered terminated. The member will not have any voting right or any other benefits as member during the period for which the member has not paid fees.

Article 8

Powers and duties of Office Bearers

8.1

The Network Coordinator

8.1.1

will be the secretary of the coordinating Committee meetings,

8.1.2

is authorized to use of network funds as per the approved proposals.

8.1.3

will supervise and coordinate the activities of the office of the network,

8.1.4

will Submit periodic reports on the activities of The Network to the members of the Coordinating Committee

8.1.5

will take initiative in fund raising efforts

8.1.6

will organize the GA meetings

8.2

The Program Officer/Treasurer

8.2.1

Work in close collaboration with the Regional Network Coordinator/Executive Secretary in managing the affairs of The Network,

8.2.2

Be the chief custodian of all office records,

8.2.3

Act as the treasurer, prepare The Network's regular financial matters and documents,

8.2.4

Coordinate the day to day affairs of the Coordinating Office,

8.2.5

Prepare The Network's draft annual budget, programs and progress reports

8.2.6

Take minutes during all Committee meetings,

8.2.7

Take minutes during GA

8.2.8

Organize fund raising activities,

8.2.9

Serve as editor of The Network newsletter and

8.2.1

Perform such other duties as the Network Coordinator/Executive Secretary charges him.

Article 9

Terms of Office Bearers

9.1

The Network Office bearers shall hold office for a period of four years.

9.4

The terms of office of the Committee shall be four years and shall resume duty at the close of the regular meeting of the GA at which they were elected and end at the closing of the succeeding regular meeting at which a new Committee will be elected.

9.5

No member remains for more than two consecutive terms as member of the Coordinating Committee in the same office. The immediate past Network Coordinator/Executive Secretary may be invited to attend the meetings of the Committee and/or GA but without the right to vote.

9.6

Any position that falls vacant between regular GA may be filled by a majority of the Coordinating Committee until the next regular GA.

9.7

The duties of the Coordinator/Executive Secretary of the network are as follows:

9.7.1

Coordinating The Network activities, prepare budget proposals and implementation reports and submit them to the Committee for approval,

9.7.2

Preparing, publishing and distributing The Network's biannual newsletter and other information pertinent to The Network ,

9.7.3

Organizing scientific meetings, workshops, conferences, symposia and training courses for members in collaboration with the Coordinating Office.

9.7.4

Preparing The Network's annual, financial and progress reports.

9.7.5

Performing any other business as directed by the Committee.

Article 10

Financial matters

10.1

Financial Resources

The Network shall generate its income from membership fees and subscriptions, contribution by well wishers, donation and grants from governmental, bilateral, non governmental and United Nations organizations and research funds. All decision regarding fund raising activities are taken under the authority of the coordinating Committee

10.2

Management of Funds

10.2.1

The Coordinating Office shall open an account in the name of The Network

10.2.2

All The Network funds shall be deposited in the The Network account,

10.2.3

There shall be three signatories to any of The Network account and the treasurer together with either the executive secretary or the chairman will sign to give legal effect

10.2.4

Signatories to The Network account shall be the Network Coordinator/Executive Secretary, the Program Officer and/or the chairman of the Coordinating Committee of the network

10.2.5

A portion of network's funds shall be allocated for discharging the duties of Coordinating Office provided by this constitution.

10.2.6

All The Network accounts, records and documents shall be open for a yearly auditing by an external accountant approved by the Committee.

Article 11

Properties of The Network

11. 1

All movable and fixed assets of The Network shall be entered in a register, which shall be reported during the GA meeting.

11. 2

The income and property of The Network shall be applied solely towards the promotion of its objectives as set forth in this constitution and no portion there of shall be paid or transferred directly or indirectly, by way of dividends, bonus or profit to its members.

11. 3

Upon completion of the coordination term, the The Network ' s file and financial document will be transferred to the next Coordinating country while the bulk assets shall remain in the former Coordinating country .

11. 4

If upon dissolution of The Network, there shall remain any property whatsoever, after settling all its debts and liabilities, the same shall be given or transferred to some institution or institution having charitable objectives, and the assets of The Network shall be donated to such non-profit making educational and/or research institutions as the Committee may decide at the time of dissolution.

Article 12

Dissolution

12.1

The Network shall be dissolved by a resolution passed by not less than two-thirds of live active members.

12. 2

The assets of the network after payment of all the debts will be disposed off as mentioned elsewhere in this constitution following what is mentioned under 11. 4.