



Our people
lives
future

Smokescreen

Tobacco-free Bollywood

In a country with a population of 1.2 billion people and the largest movie industry in the world, there are huge opportunities to collaborate with the Indian film industry to change people's behaviour. A partnership between the Government of India and civil society, the World Health Organization (WHO), including research and advocacy organizations, led to groundbreaking legislation regulating how tobacco products are displayed on screen.

"The film industry will partner with the health promoters in this war against tobacco, not with the tobacco industry,"¹ said renowned film Director Mahesh Bhatt in a Government/WHO supported workshop in 2013, adding that it took time to sensitize the entire film industry.

Tackling the pervasive influence the film industry has on tobacco use required a strong and committed partnership. Impact depended first on acknowledging that the entertainment industry is a channel for both destructive and constructive messaging, and that by partnering with the industry it is possible to move together towards healthy outcomes for all.

Each partner has worked towards an agreed and common objective: to reduce tobacco consumption through regulating the depiction of tobacco products in film and television.



*Mr Devendra Singh,
cancer survivor and
anti-tobacco activist.*

School teacher Devendra Singh, used chewing tobacco and smoked cigarettes for 12 years before being diagnosed with throat cancer. Following surgery he now speaks through an assistive device. Devendra believes that the tobacco control messages in films represent an awakening. Another throat cancer patient, Ashish Jain, said he believed "1000%" that there was a causal link between depicting smoking in films and television and youngsters taking up the habit. "It is promoted as a cool thing, glamourizing the product".

Project partners:

Government of India (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting); WHO; Salaam Bombay Foundation; Burning Brain Society; HRIDAY (Health Related Information Dissemination Amongst Youth)-SHAN (Student Health Action Network).

The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) recognizes that films can strongly influence tobacco use, particularly among young people. India is making an average of nearly 1000 feature films and about 1500 short films every year.² The link between exposure to tobacco imagery and tobacco initiation in youth has been demonstrated.³ Smoking is often associated with rebellious behaviour, independence and self-assertion.⁴ Following prohibition on all forms of tobacco advertisement, under the Indian Tobacco Control Act (COTPA), tobacco use in films increased significantly. A study conducted in 2006 reviewed 110 Hindi language movies made from 2004 to 2005 and found that almost 90% depicted tobacco use.⁵ A further study concluded that top-grossing Bollywood films deliver about 14.3 billion separate tobacco images to Indian audiences (in terms of numbers of images multiplied by number of viewers).⁶

Amit Baliyan, a courageous 27-year-old activist shared his very personal experience at an advocacy meeting, saying "...trying to ape heroes who smoke cigarettes ruined my life. After losing 28 kilos in two years, I got treatment and I am slowly returning to normalcy. No one should face what I had to". Sadly, in December 2013 Amit lost his battle with cancer and passed away.

Significant progress has been made since coordinated campaigning began a decade ago. In 2005, the tobacco control legislation was amended to include all depictions of tobacco products and their use. Today, all films and TV programmes displaying tobacco products or their use have to provide a strong editorial justification, and must include health spots, disclaimers and static messages. Non-compliance with the rules may lead to cancellation of license.



Since India ratified the WHO FCTC in 2004 the Government has been working to reduce tobacco consumption. A dedicated National Tobacco Control Programme (NTCP) was launched in 2007. Efforts have been supported by WHO since 2001 through the Tobacco Free Initiative (TFI).

The Government has played a highly proactive role in developing effective related legislation based on comprehensive evidence-based research. The WHO country office has provided critical technical assistance and normative guidelines, as well as support to implementation of the FCTC and COTPA.

The nongovernment sector has also been very vocal. HRIDAY-SHAN, the Burning Brain Society and Salaam Bombay Foundation have been very active in the partnership with WHO and the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. The Voice of Tobacco Victims (VoTV) is a campaign led by the Healis – Sekhsaria Institute for Public Health and supported by the Tata Memorial Hospital in Mumbai. It sensitizes law- and policy-makers about the dangers of extensive tobacco usage, tobacco industry activities, lack of stringent action against tobacco companies and the plight of victims across the country.





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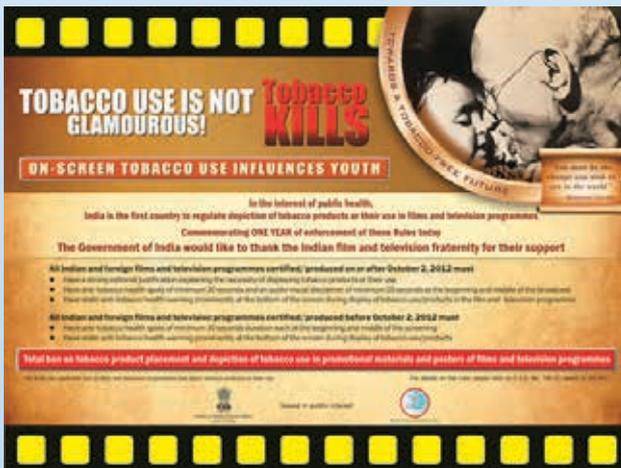
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There have also been critics of the legislation, the loudest coming from the film industry itself, alleging that the legislation somehow restricts creativity and freedom of expression.

The partnership between the Government, WHO and civil society – and the dialogue and collaboration with the film industry – has been highly effective. The key remaining challenge is to maintain this dialogue and to use film and TV for innovative and constructive health messaging.

“ Films in India have played a key role in the process of social change and in influencing behaviour of youth. The said provisions are prescribed keeping in mind the strong influence of movies on youth and children of impressionable minds, who not only adopt the mannerism of film stars but also idolize them, at times to an incredible extent. ”

Amal Pusp, Director, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India



In October 2013, the MOHFW published this advertisement to thank the film and television industry for their support, It was published in 258 national and regional newspapers.

The estimated number of tobacco users in India is 274.9 million.¹ Nearly two in five adults in rural areas and one in four in urban areas use tobacco in some form. Prevalence of tobacco use among students from 13–15 years of age is 14.6%.¹

“India has often implemented innovative tobacco control approaches. Reducing tobacco imagery in films through strong policies and its implementation has presented one of the best practices with very high impact especially among youth. Countries worldwide may learn from this innovative approach.”

Dr Poonam Khetrpal Singh, WHO Regional Director for South-East Asia

“We believe the film fraternity can play a very powerful role in bringing about positive change. It is important that we harness the power of the media to bring about this change.”

Dr Nata Menabde, WHO Representative to India

- ¹ Report on advocacy meeting of the film fraternity and television channels with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, in collaboration with WHO, to discuss *Regulations governing tobacco depiction in movies: The Way Forward* - April 17, 2013, Mumbai (WHO report).
- ² Central Board of Film Certification, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. Government of India, 2011.
- ³ Arora M. et al. *Tobacco use in Bollywood movies, tobacco promotional activities and their association with tobacco use among Indian adolescents. Tobacco Control* doi:10.1136/tc.2011.043539.
- ⁴ *Bollywood: Victim or ally?* Geneva; World Health Organization: 2003.
- ⁵ Goswami H, Kashyap R. *Tobacco in Movies and Impact on Youth*. Chandigarh; Burning Brain Society: 2006.
- ⁶ Bhaumik S. *Bollywood delivers 14.3 billion tobacco images to Indian audiences each year*. *BMJ* 2013; 346:f2608.
- ⁷ Dr Nata Menabde, WHO Representative to India, press release.

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