

Worldwide news and comment

THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY & CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (CSR)

Tobacco industry corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives are increasingly coming under fire from health and civil society groups, with many noting the anomaly of an industry funding health and development projects, using profits from a product responsible for millions of deaths annually. As other avenues of advertising are closed off, and with the tobacco epidemic shifting to low and middle income countries, CSR continues to be an important way for the tobacco industry to position itself as a 'normal' and responsible industry, and build community acceptance. In this issue, we take a look at some of the CSR activities, and protests, which made news in 2012.

INDIA: DISRUPTING TOBACCO INDUSTRY CSR IN CHENNAI

On 1st July 2012 India's largest tobacco company, ITC Limited, celebrated the second anniversary of 'National Recycling Day' as part of its 'Wealth Out of Waste' programme. The event was held in Chennai and organised by Corporate Voice Weber Shandwick, a local branch of the multinational public relations agency Weber Shandwick, which has been associated with British American Tobacco, owner of a 25% share in ITC.

About 10 000 school children attended the event, held under the banner of raising awareness on the significance of reducing, reusing and recycling. It was inaugurated by Mr D Jeyakumar, speaker of the Tamil Nadu State Legislative Assembly, followed by Mr Pradeep Dhobale, Executive Director, ITC Limited, who shared that the initiative was a collaborative action supported by schools, corporate bodies and state governments.

The event was announced through a newspaper advertisement by ITC Limited on the day prior. It mentioned several high profile participants, including local

and state political leaders and popular celebrities.

Pasumai Thaayagam Foundation (Green Motherland) is an NGO with special consultative status to the United Nations Economic and Social Council. The organisation has been involved in a range of tobacco control activities in India, including promotion of Smokefree Chennai and TAPS Free Tamil Nadu. The founder and former president of Pasumai Thaayagam, Dr Anbumani Ramadoss, was previously the Union Health Minister of the government of India, and is popularly known as a tobacco control warrior. When the event was announced, Dr Ramadoss issued a press release condemning the event and asking ministers, government officials and other high profile persons to not attend.

At dawn the next day, posters were displayed all over Chennai by Pasumai Thaayagam Foundation, condemning the event and stating that no official should participate in an event organised by a tobacco company. Pasumai Thaayagam Foundation also submitted a complaint to the mayor which outlined the illegality of the event and the clandestine purpose of ITC Limited.

The event was to be held at a high school at 16:00. More than one hundred Pasumai Thaayagam Foundation volunteers gathered in front of the event venue and displayed banners and placards reading 'Stop selling deaths—prohibit so-called CSR activities by the tobacco industry' and 'Can a death seller talk about cleanliness?'

Handbills were distributed to the public and participating school children. The handbills had brief information about the event, comments about the illegal activity of ITC Limited, and the government's requirements under Article 5.3 and guideline 13 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC).

The event featured cultural programmes, distribution of gifts to students, dances and a competition. As it was coming to a close, a team managed to reach the speaker who was still on the stage and briefed him about the illegality of the event, giving him a copy of the handbills.

As a result of media coverage and the poster campaign, several of the government officials and the two celebrities who had assured their participation did not turn up after all.

Following the event, Pasumai Thaayagam Foundation sent complaints seeking action against ITC Limited and the local organisers for displaying surrogate cigarette advertisements featuring the cigarette brand name Wills, as well as display of the tobacco company name, in the event. Complaints were also filed against the schools that participated, as this collaboration was in clear violation of a January 2011 directive prohibiting schools from participating in such events.

The Tamil Nadu State Educational department subsequently issued a comprehensive government order banning all educational institutions from participating in tobacco



Pasumai Thaayagam Foundation volunteers protest at the ITC event 'Wealth Out of Waste' in Chennai.

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promotional events, further strengthening earlier directives.

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CHINA: ENVIRONMENT AWARD FOR TOBACCO COMPANY CRITICISED

In June 2012, the China Green Foundation, together with the National Forestation Commission and State Forestry Administration, presented an award to the China National Tobacco Corporation, which falls under the jurisdiction of the State Tobacco Monopoly Administration, in recognition of its contribution to the environment. This occurrence highlights the conflicts arising when a tobacco company is also part of a government agency.

The Chinese Association on Tobacco Control requested that the award be rescinded, “in consideration of the health damage and environmental pollution imposed by the tobacco company”. However, the China Green Foundation defended the award, stating that “it is inevitable that enterprises impose some damage to the environment during development, but it’s not an excuse to ignore its contributions and achievements”.

Note: this information was drawn from an article published by China Daily. The full original article is available at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2012-07/19/content_15598570.htm

INDIA/WORLD: UNDP VOWS TO TIGHTEN ELIGIBILITY FOR DEVELOPMENT AWARDS

Tobacco control advocates were shocked when ITC Limited (formerly the Indian Tobacco Corporation) received the World Business and Development Award (WBDA) for its Social and Farm Forestry Programs at the Rio+20 United Nations Summit in June.

The aim of the awards is to draw attention to the role that the private sector can play in supporting the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is a partner to the WBDA, which is also sponsored by the Swedish and Dutch governments.

UNDP head Helen Clark, a former prime minister of New Zealand, has a strong record as a champion of tobacco control. Alerted to the incongruity of the award by tobacco control advocates, a statement was posted on the UNDP website on 17 July 2012.

Ms Clark noted she was “shocked to learn that the award was given to a company which derives a substantial proportion of its profits from tobacco. Unfortunately the criteria for the World Business Development Awards did not exclude projects implemented by companies from certain sectors like tobacco. This has clearly been a serious oversight. UNDP is reviewing its rules and regulations to ensure that an incident like this never happens again. UNDP will not participate in these awards in the future unless companies like this are excluded”.

SWITZERLAND: DISASTER CONFERENCE SUPPORT AWARD CANCELLED

In April 2012, the Davos-based Global Risk Forum (GRF) announced an award sponsored by the Japan Tobacco International (JTI) Foundation. The award, “intended to provide funding for a project to increase resilience on a community base and support 20 participants from developing countries to participate in IDRC (International Disaster and Risk Conference) Davos 2012” was to have been presented at the IDRC conference, held in August. However, within weeks of its announcement, the award was withdrawn due to opposition from within the GRF community. It is particularly noteworthy that opposition came



Screenshot of the planned JTI headquarters, taken from the website of architects SOM (Skidmore, Owings & Merrill LLP).

from organisations and individuals outside the health sector.

In an open letter to GRF protesting the sponsorship, Terry Cannon at the Institute of Development Studies, UK said “(JTI) is part of the problem, not the solution. Tobacco causes the premature deaths of many more people in the world than all the natural hazard disasters put together”. According to GRF Davos, they “...were surprised at the strength of opposition to the award but we are—as always—keen to listen to our community and respect their opinions, concerns and wishes”. They advised on their website that they have “...concluded that it is not in the best interests of GRF Davos in general and of the IDRC Davos 2012



Map showing Switzerland as the only country in Western Europe that has not signed the FCTC. Map kindly provided by Pascal Diethelm.

conference in particular to continue with this initiative”.

Sponsorship of natural disaster relief and recovery is the overall focus of the JTI Foundation; a cynic might be inclined to observe that focusing on natural disasters is a strategic way of diverting attention away from human-caused, and entirely preventable, disasters such as the global tobacco epidemic.

This cancellation of the award is a rare example of a tobacco company being thwarted in Switzerland. As the only country in Western Europe that is not a signatory to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) (see map), Switzerland places fewer constraints on tobacco industry activities than many other countries.

Geneva is headquarters to many humanitarian and United Nations (UN) agencies, and JTI has positioned itself as part of the international community, aided by sponsorship of cultural and artistic initiatives and investment in a new international headquarters building. The impressive structure, located in the neighbourhood of the World Trade Organisation, will house 1100 employees. JTI has also announced that the site will host a day care centre with capacity for 105, including a quota to be taken by the City of Geneva.

BOLIVIA: INTEGRATING TOBACCO CONTROL INTO DEVELOPMENT

While debate continues about tobacco industry CSR projects, Bolivia has placed tobacco control firmly on the national development agenda. Supported by a project funded by the Framework Convention Alliance (FCA), the FCTC is a key priority of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) for 2013-2017, signed between the UN and the Bolivian government.

Promoting tobacco control within the development agenda is a long-term strategic objective that engages multilateral and bilateral stakeholders to contribute to full implementation of the FCTC. It supports countries to prioritise the tobacco epidemic and address the health, social, economic and environmental burdens of tobacco. Addressing the tobacco epidemic recognises the link between tobacco and poverty, and the challenge it presents to development, as well as contributing to achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

UNDAF outlines the United Nations strategies, expected outcomes, funding allocation and partners to address national development priorities. It brings together



Screen shot from <http://www.thaitobacco.or.th> featuring YouTube channel ihere.TV. Translation: They say tobacco...bad for society. They say tobacco...full of bad things. They say tobacco...loaded with adversity. Open your mind...let's take a deep breath. But we're going to show you a good view of tobacco.

government, international cooperation, and civil society efforts and resources to treat tobacco as a national development priority. Bolivia is the first country in the world to achieve FCTC inclusion in the national development agenda.

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ASIA: TOBACCO GROWERS MOBILISED TO FIGHT THE FCTC

In the lead up to the fifth session of the WHO FCTC Conference of the Parties (CoP5), the International Tobacco Growers Association (ITGA) stepped up resistance to implementation of articles 17 and 18 FCTC. The Asian chapter of the ITGA set up an initiative called 'Save our Farms'. Claiming 'there just aren't enough viable crop alternatives to tobacco', it planned to mobilise protests against strengthened guidelines for Articles 17 and 18 of the FCTC which were to be discussed at CoP5 in Seoul in November 2012. Updates and analysis about the initiative, and the outcomes of CoP5 are available on our website.

THAILAND: RESISTING TOBACCO CONTROL THROUGH FARMERS

Thailand recently proposed a new tobacco control law, which will position it as a leading nation in tobacco control. Predictably, the tobacco industry in Thailand has been anxious to stop this from happening. In line with the strategy of using related groups to argue their case, it appears that the Thai tobacco industry has been boosting the profile of tobacco growers to use them to advance arguments against the law.

A growing number of items promoting tobacco growing in major media outlets and social media have been observed, coinciding with the proposed new law. According to the Thai tobacco industry watch project, during July-September, 2012, there were at least 15 news reports in national newspapers, three articles in magazines, and three programmes on YouTube promoting tobacco farms and tobacco growers.

The reports and programmes typically claimed that tobacco farmers are significant contributors to the local economy; that they have a superior quality of life and enjoy higher income than other farmers, allowing them to provide for their children's higher education; that tobacco is not a dangerous plant, but similar to tomato and potato and has a good fragrance like cocoa (implying cigarettes are not dangerous); that tobacco growing promotes self-sufficiency, a popular concept promoted by the Thai king; and that tobacco farms are not just an agricultural business but also a tourist attraction.

The positive portrayal of the tobacco industry is suggestive of a concerted campaign to increase positive perceptions of the industry in the face of the proposed tobacco law.

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JAPAN: TRUTH STRANGER THAN FICTION

In September, 2012, a tobacco festival was held in Hadano City. Although the city stopped growing tobacco in 1984, the festival celebrates the tobacco

growing history of the region. The tobacco industry clearly sees it as an opportunity for promotion, with Japan Tobacco providing sponsorship to the tune of US\$50 000. A hospital and a university also support the festival, which runs over two days, and several events are held in a school.

In other news about Japan Tobacco, it was announced in October that it had cancelled the purchase of tobacco from the Fukushima region after routine checks revealed contamination with radioactive caesium was above the company's safety limit. As one wag put it on Twitter: 'it's

like White Star Line recalling Titanic for splinters in handrails'!

TOBACCO CONTROL NEWS ONLINE

2012 saw a number of countries introduce new tobacco control laws, among them Togo, Ghana, Brunei, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Lebanon, Russia and Ukraine. Norway also won a court victory for its display ban. There were a number of other major stories which continue to develop, including European Union Commissioner for Health John Dalli's resignation and the subsequent likely delay of the Tobacco Products

Directive; as well as fresh legal challenges to Australia's plain packaging laws.

Regular updates of these and other stories are provided on the news section of our website, together with links to videos and other online resources. Go to <http://tobaccocontrol.bmj.com/> and click 'Join the discussion now' under the TC News and Views Online tab. We welcome contributions from our readers—please contact marita.hefler@sydney.edu.au. You can also follow us on Twitter @TC_BMJ.

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Essential reading for everyone with an interest in tobacco control, including public health professionals, researchers, policy makers and educators.

Editor's choice
Support for removal of point-of-purchase tobacco advertising and displays: findings from the International Tobacco Control (ITC) Canada survey
For decades, tobacco marketing has been used to portray tobacco use in a favourable light, normalise smoking, underplay the associated health risks and ultimately undermine tobacco control.

TC News and Views Online
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Free sample
This recent issue is free to all users to allow everyone the opportunity to see the full scope and typical content of Tobacco Control.



A show of support at the fifth session of the WHO FCTC Conference of the Parties in Seoul, Korea. Full reports and analysis are available on our website.
Photo credit: Geoffrey Fong.