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FOUNDER EDITOR  
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## A picture says a thousand words

IQBAL MASUD

Worldwide, approximately 5 million people die from tobacco related illnesses each year. Every smoker has the right to know the health consequences associated with smoking. And whether literate or not, products need to contain pictorial depictions of the harmful effects from tobacco smoke.

Bangladesh, where one of two adult males are smokers, needs to address these problems. In poor families, tobacco gets priority over food and education.

Health warning labels on tobacco containing packages is an informative and no-cost method in the fight against tobacco use. Photographs enable smokers to visualise the nature of tobacco related illnesses especially for the illiterate.

Currently, under the Tobacco Control Act 2005 in Bangladesh, only written warnings on tobacco products are required to occupy 30 per cent of the main surfaces of the packs. Such warnings include "Smoking Kills" and "Smoking Causes Lung Cancer". Under the FCTC (Framework Convention for Tobacco Control), pictorial warnings accompanied with written messages should account for 50 per cent (front and back) of the total package of tobacco product.

Already, there has been tremendous progress in Bangladesh implementing legislation to mandate pictorial warnings. Seven countries including Thailand, Australia and Singapore require all tobacco containing products to convey health warning pictorials and mes-



A sample of cigarette packet with health awareness image

sages accounting for a minimum of 50 per cent of the total package.

Studies have shown that prominent health warnings and messages on packages have resulted in an increased awareness on health risks and a stronger desire to quit even amongst young smokers. An international comparative study has identified those in countries where health hazards of smoking are depicted on packages are more aware than others of the particular hazard. Other benefits include children of smokers (who are particularly vulnerable to starting smoking) get aware of the risks of smoking as well. Also smokers will continuously be exposed to these images every time they have a smoke.

There are many other issues that need to be raised to deal with tobacco control in Bangladesh. Smokeless tobacco comprises of one third of all tobacco consumed is poorly regulated yet.

The evidence that picture-based warnings are more effective than text-only warnings is growing, as is the belief "size matters" when depicted on the package. There are still major shortcomings that need to be addressed in response to tobacco use in Bangladesh.

An introduction of policies including pictorial warning implementations to the standard of FCTC would assist in dealing with tobacco.

Smoking is a health, social, economical and environmental issue that can not be ignored any longer, since it is the leading cause of preventable death and disease in the world. We need to act now.

The writer is a development worker.