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From policy to practice: lessons learned from two regional consultations on strengthening the implementation of tobacco control policies in India.

Vivek Dsouza¹ Pragati Hebbar²

¹Institute of Public Health Bengaluru (IPH), India.,

²Department of Health Promotion, Maastricht University, Maastricht, Netherlands.

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Tobacco use is a risk factor to major non-communicable diseases and is a leading cause of death and disability. In India, 1.3 million adults die each year due to tobacco consumption. Since tobacco-related health disparities are complex and varied, multi-sectoral action (MSA) is crucial to support the implementation of tobacco control laws—the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA), 2003 and the National Tobacco Control Program (NTCP) in India. This study looked at ‘regional consultations’ as a public engagement platform in advancing MSA for tobacco control. The aim is to bring together health and other allied sectors to examine the current state of preparedness, identify underlying determinants, and work together in strengthening tobacco control keeping in mind India’s socio-economic, political, geographical, and cultural context. Two regional consultations, one organised online (broadly for southern Indian states) and one involving stakeholders in the Northern states, were held in early 2022. The consultations were led by a public health institute with the support of local government departments and the Asia-pacific regional division of an international civil society organization. 20 Indian states and union territories were represented which included stakeholders from education, health, police, and food safety departments, academia, NGOs, and student groups who participated as observers. The consultations provided a platform to discuss ongoing work on tobacco control implementation. Presentations and group-discussions—which focused on tobacco use prevalence, best buy strategies, and compliance—enabled participants to share practical experiences and address contextual challenges, with each state addressing different problems. The forum validated the importance of key focus areas in tobacco control—education, enforcement, and review systems, and acknowledged the urgency of working together (within and across sectors) in combating industry interference. The regional consultations encouraged leadership, peer-to-peer learning and enabled co-production of tobacco control knowledge. It illustrated the national, regional, and local similarities and differences in tobacco control implementation and the need for multi-level partnerships to scale up effective tobacco control strategies.