

Health Care Without Harm's India partners take innovative approach to COVID-19 and gain global attention



March 2020

Colleagues at the Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research, Chandigarh (PGI) and Panjab University (PU) transformed a superhero comic character who fights air pollution - which they were developing as part of a Health Care Without Harm project¹ - into the central character in a comic book to educate children about the coronavirus. The comic book has been adopted by the Indian Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and translated into multiple Indian languages. There are requests from individuals, doctors, and public health experts from countries like China, Japan, Canada, Malaysia, Czech Republic, Greece, and Indonesia to adapt the book in their respective languages.

Background

In addition to developing materials for training medical professionals on public health impacts of air pollution under the Climate and Health Air Monitoring Project (CHAMP), the team at PGI Chandigarh and PU have also been developing ideas that would reach the message of air pollution and health to the masses. The team led by Dr. Ravindra Khaiwal (School of Public Health, PGI) and Dr. Suman Mor (Department of Environmental Studies, PU) zeroed in on children between the age groups of 6-14 years based on discussions with their children aged 8 and 14 and the CHAMP team members.

The idea of the comic book shaped up over dinner time: the superhero **Vaayu** (Sanskrit for wind) would play the protagonist while Smokey the antagonist. **Vaayu** was to be accompanied by **Megha** (rain-bearing clouds) and Surya (the sun). The message of air pollution and health would be delivered with the help of human characters: **Doctor Aunty** on health, **Chatur Nani** (clever grandma) on biomass and indoor air pollution, and **Kisan Kaka** (farmer uncle) on crop burning.

The task of developing the appearance of the characters was taken up by 8-year-old Aditya and 14-year-old Lakshya.

From air pollution to COVID-19

The launch of the air pollution comic book was on the agenda for April 2020. The emerging COVID-19 pandemic, however, prompted the team to pivot its attention and build on the legwork of the air pollution work, to produce a comic book explaining COVID-19 to children. The superhero **Vaayu** was the messenger.

The English and Hindi version of the comic book was produced in less than 5 days and was vetted by the National Center for Disease Control (NCDC) and Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), Government of India. The MoHFW endorsed the book and decided to have it translated in all Indian languages for a larger reach.

The book has become very popular because of its simple format, easy to understand text, and vibrant characters. The Central Board for Secondary Education (CBSE) has put up the book on its website and is sending copies to schools around the country. CBSE is a division of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, and is one of the nodal bodies in India for school education. There are about 21,500 schools under CBSE in India.



¹Supported by the Association for India's Development, www.aidindia.org

Makers of a popular animated television series – Chhota Bheem – have reached out to the PGI/PU team to adapt the comic book in their show. Chhota Bheem is considered India’s largest children’s entertainment brand. It is highly successful among younger children due to its relatable characters and vernacular nature. The show has a viewership of 40 million in India and beyond.

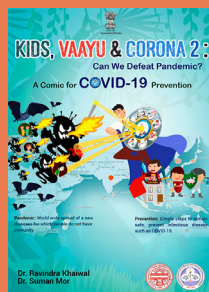
Permissions have also been given to Google Bolo, which is a learn to read app for ages 6-11 years, to adapt the content for worldwide circulation. Google Bolo is a free app for the Indian market; it is Google’s way of using its capabilities in artificial intelligence and machine learning to create meaningful social impact.



Online PDF versions

Kids, Vaayu & Corona: Who wins the fight? [Download](#)

Kids, Vaayu & Corona 2: Can we defeat the pandemic? [Download](#)



Media coverage

Articles from various Indian newspapers highlight this educative, interesting comic book aimed at helping children understand more about the coronavirus.

A few representative examples are provided here. For a full list of media coverage, [visit this document](#).

Hindustan Times



The Hindu



Medical Dialogues

