



Join the HIV / AIDS movement

**Heroes Project** is a three year national initiative launched in July 2004, by Richard Gere and Parmeshwar Godrej to work with media organisations and other societal leaders in India. It seeks to develop coordinated campaigns to address the spread of HIV/AIDS and reduce stigma and discrimination by educating the public and advocating for change in policies.

The project has its beginning in a fund raising event for paediatric AIDS, jointly organised by Richard Gere and Parmeshwar Godrej, called 'A Time for Heroes, India.' This event, held in December 2002, was hugely successful and brought together Indian media, entertainment and business houses who committed to use their combined strength to advocate on issues relating to HIV/AIDS. To translate the momentum gathered by this event into a sustainable long-term programme, the project founders have partnered with the Avahan Initiative of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation to establish the necessary infrastructure for this project. The latter also provides technical expertise to the project.

With a population of over one billion people, India is poised to suffer the world's largest HIV/AIDS epidemic if timely action is not taken. As one such response to this, Heroes Project has begun to bring together celebrities and the media to educate the public and increase the involvement of key sections of the Indian society in a manner that is sustained and long-term. In July 2004, the Heroes Project announced its first public education partnership with Star Television Network. Messages that featured international cricket star *Rahul Dravid* talking about HIV prevention and supporting people living with AIDS, began to appear across the country on Star's many television properties. On World AIDS Day 2004, new messages with much revered actor *Amitabh Bachchan*, began airing across various channels as part of phase two of the campaign.

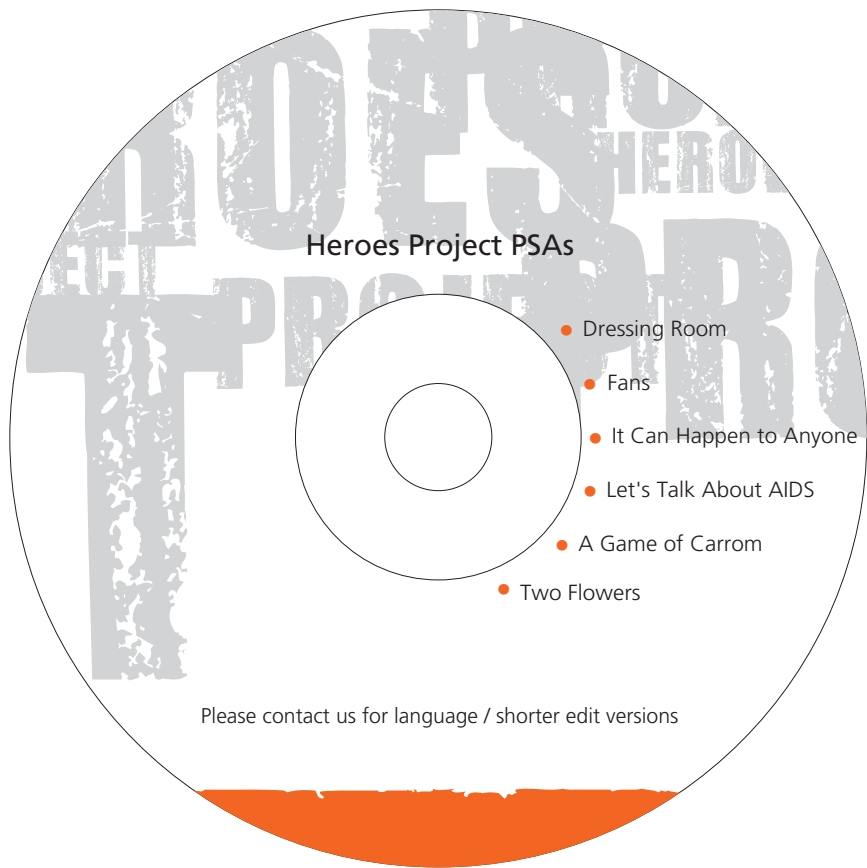
India has the highest volume of mass media in the world, which provides an unprecedented platform for building consensus and promoting action. By using this platform as a springboard, Heroes Project hopes to convert the passion and ideals of a small but powerful core of concerned individuals into tangible actions by the government and public in India. At the same time, the project seeks to advocate with the Indian government to strengthen the existing methods of information distribution; and create a range of audio-visual, online and print materials to complement advocacy and media initiatives so that the public is connected to important HIV/AIDS related services.

#### HEROES PROJECT CO-CHAIRS

Richard Gere  
Parmeshwar Godrej

#### HEROES PROJECT PARTNERS

Avahan Initiative, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation  
The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation



#### AREA OF WORK - A TWO PRONGED APPROACH

Heroes Project seeks to harness India's communication power and potential to address the spread of HIV/AIDS and reduce stigma and discrimination, by influencing public perception and policy through two platforms: *mass media* and *advocacy*. It correspondingly works through two avenues in its initiative: a mass media campaign and a societal leaders programme.

The **Mass Media Campaign** seeks to create widespread awareness on HIV/AIDS, promote positive attitudes towards people living with HIV/AIDS, and influence groups to change high risk behaviours that make them vulnerable to the infection. It will use a series of public service announcements (PSAs), online and print content, television and radio programming as well as educational events to do this. In order to best address HIV/AIDS through the various mass media, Heroes Project has developed a strategic communications approach to address diverse groups such as sexually active men, married women and youth across all levels of society.

One of the main objectives during the course of the mass media initiative will be to expand and coordinate the campaign with a range of media partners. Areas of association and activities within these partnerships will include among others:

- pledging airtime/space for release of PSAs, which will be available rights-free to all
- developing original programming formats
- incorporation of HIV/AIDS storylines into existing programmes such as serials, reality shows and documentaries
- support for journalist programmes for enhanced news and editorial coverage
- employee sensitisation
- orientation workshops for creative content development

The **Societal Leaders Programme** seeks to garner the collective force of key community leaders - opinion leaders and key stakeholders from various sectors, whose influence will be leveraged in order to affect public perception and bring about policy level changes on the issue of HIV/AIDS. Currently the focus is on involving business heads and industrial groups to institute and implement workplace HIV/AIDS programmes and policies. The programme will also work with the NRI community and the entertainment industry.

#### INVOLVING THE MEDIA

In order to reach a wide segment of the Indian population with relevant HIV/AIDS messages, Heroes Project is working with a range of media organizations. With each partner, Heroes Project seeks to form an exclusive and innovative association that builds on the unique strength and reach of the media partner. Some recent examples of how this has worked include:

##### Informing a wide base of audience

Using a mass reach network such as Star provides the Heroes Project with an opportunity to reach close to 70 million people nationwide. Star India has provided the project with approximately Rs. 214 million (USD 4.65 million) worth of free airtime across its various television and radio properties annually over a three year period.

##### Inspiring opinion leaders and key influencers

NDTV's news and feature based programming provides a model platform to open discussions on issues surrounding HIV/AIDS, and give regular updates on the dimensions and status of the infection in the country. Recently, as a part of its association with Heroes Project, NDTV ran HIV/AIDS focused shows on You Decide, The "X" Factor and Dr NDTV in addition to special stories on the subject in the week leading up to World AIDS Day 2004.

##### Engaging the youth

The majority of newly infected people in India are under the age of 29 years. Messages for young people need to promote safe sex and engage them to form their own response to the epidemic. Heroes Project is partnering with MTV India to incorporate HIV/AIDS messaging in their programmes as well as air Heroes PSAs. The project will also provide informational material and hold special events together with MTV to raise HIV/AIDS awareness among Indian youth.

##### Enhancing viewer involvement

Sony Entertainment Television's distinctive formats and innovative cross promotions has audiences gripped with its programmes like Jassi Jaisse Koi Nahin and Indian Idol. Heroes Project has worked closely with the youth-based, reality music show Indian Idol. Ever since the Indian Idol contestants learnt about HIV/AIDS they have taken the nation along on their journey to understand it. Highlights have included discussions with celebrities, a visit to a positive children's care home as well as the creation of an anthem.

#### ARE YOU A MEDIA ORGANIZATION?

Heroes Project can provide campaign materials including rights free PSAs, support your programming efforts and on-ground events, and inform you about upcoming campaign activities.

##### Order Campaign Materials

Write to HEROES PROJECT for materials or visit the website to view materials on-line.

##### Create new shows, programmes or features on HIV/AIDS

Contact our staff at our office in Mumbai.

##### Goings On

Be in the know about HEROES PROJECT. Visit the website.

##### Feedback

Questions or comments? Send an email to: [info@heroesprojectindia.org](mailto:info@heroesprojectindia.org)

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