

ABLE releases 'Indian biotech roadmap'

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Bangalore: India's premier biotech show, Bangalore India Bio 2013, which is organised by the department of information technology, bio-technology and science and technology, Government of Karnataka, India, and the Vision Group on Biotechnology, featured a session to analyse and discuss the ABLE report titled, 'Indian biotechnology: The roadmap to the next decade and beyond'. The report was released in the inauguration function of the 13th edition of Bangalore India Bio on February 4, 2013. Following this there was a panel discussion that saw several eminent individuals share their view on the ABLE report.

The report was presented by Dr Satya Dash, strategic alliance and partnership consultant, Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC), Department of Biotechnology, Government of India. He said, "Various interactions such as the present gathering between industry, academia, internal meetings and workshops has helped in the making for such an important document. Various challenges facing our nation, mirrors the needs and requirements of the world as well as the need for a reduced dependence on fossil fuels, environmental remediation, development in agro-biotechnology are areas for which life sciences and biotechnology would provide sustainable solutions."

He further said, "India has grown from \$500 million-to-\$5 billion industry from 2003-to-2012. ABLE has recognized that our country has key components to support this industry due to our current knowledge and progress in various domains such as bio-similars, vaccines, bio- manufacturing, rise in IP registrations and stem cells among others. Some of the challenges that the industry faces are regulatory systems, lack of infrastructure for start-up and SME companies, restricted access to technology across all industries and academic sizes."

He also added, "Recommendations of the report were to train world class man power, revamp the university system in India, promote translation of academic research, promote BT entrepreneurship, develop homemade medical diagnostic devices instead of relying on Imports. The recommendations for these solutions were optimal government intervention for sustainability of industry and research, partnership and mission-oriented approaches would help in implementation, and harnessing and sustaining entrepreneurship will also make a difference."

In his talk, Prof K VijayRaghavan, secretary, Department of Biotechnology, Ministry of Science and Technology, Government of India, said that, "There are a range of issues that we have to tackle in order to make this a \$100 billion industry. Although opportunities are available but connections and communication is required for bridging the gap."

Dr Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw, chairperson, Karnataka Vision Group on Biotechnology and CMD, Biocon, said that, "The target of reaching \$100 billion is a doable task as BT cotton alone has helped rake in \$3 billion dollars and cited that BT brinjal, a GM crop that was not approved by the government would alone have fetched in a substantial revenue and said regulations such as this is what drives away investors from this sector and we need enabling policies and enabling regulations rather than being detrimental. Ad-hoc policies are not helpful and require more stringent lawmaking. Pharma and healthcare sector is a market that is capable of generating \$13 billion, developing bio fuels from sea weeds algae will help us be non dependant on fossil fuels. Clinical trials were first opposed in Karnataka but later we received the government's support. This is the type of support that we require to take this industry further along the lines of development."

Shri. I S N Prasad, principal secretary, department of information technology, biotechnology and science and technology, Government of Karnataka, said that, "We have rooted BT concepts into education. The government of India along with the government of Karnataka have joined together in setting up and integrating of bio-informatics, biotechnology and bio-computing and create hi-tech labs. BT finishing schools are being setup in Karnataka that has an intake of students from all across India. The government is continuing dialogues between activists on educating them on the benefits of GM crops. The same is being done for farmers for implementation of the same."

Mr David Wetherell, president and chief operating officer, Burrill Healthcare Venture and Private Equity Funds, US, while giving inputs on projections on the BT sector said that, "The daunting task was possible due to the man power and intellectuals in India but gaps are still found between science and markets. He cited the example of US and said that BT innovations are good due to the grants and funding of about \$30 billion that the government allocates for the sector. The number of jobs and the supplying man power are in favour of this set-up and recognized bio-informatics to be a subject that will help run all these sectors together. Bio-informatics will help drive discoveries among various sectors. Bangalore has a good set-up for providing training on bio-informatics and hence will be an useful tool in the path of surpassing the projection of making biotech a \$100 billion industry."

Dr P M Murali, president, ABLE, and MD, Evolva Biotech, said that, "Some initiatives have been taken this year to develop India's biotech sector. Some of the strategies that have been implemented, include creating a road map for the biotech sector, setting up of specific goals, setting up a office in New Delhi to deal with government approvals that are required from time to time, and incorporating a financial committee to help in attracting investors."

Dr Murali also stressed on the, "Need of focusing on regenerative medicines, addressing challenges with clinical trials, on making affordable drugs and encouraging innovations, the need to make people aware of the benefits of the technology by engaging them with the stake holders, MNC's and the government. The potentials of synthetic biotech in affordable gene sequencing, its role in the food, energy, fragrance, flavors as sectors that bring in revenues, which will contribute to reaching the \$100 billion projection."