BioSpectrum the business of Bio & Health Sciences

# India is lacking many academic entrepreneurs

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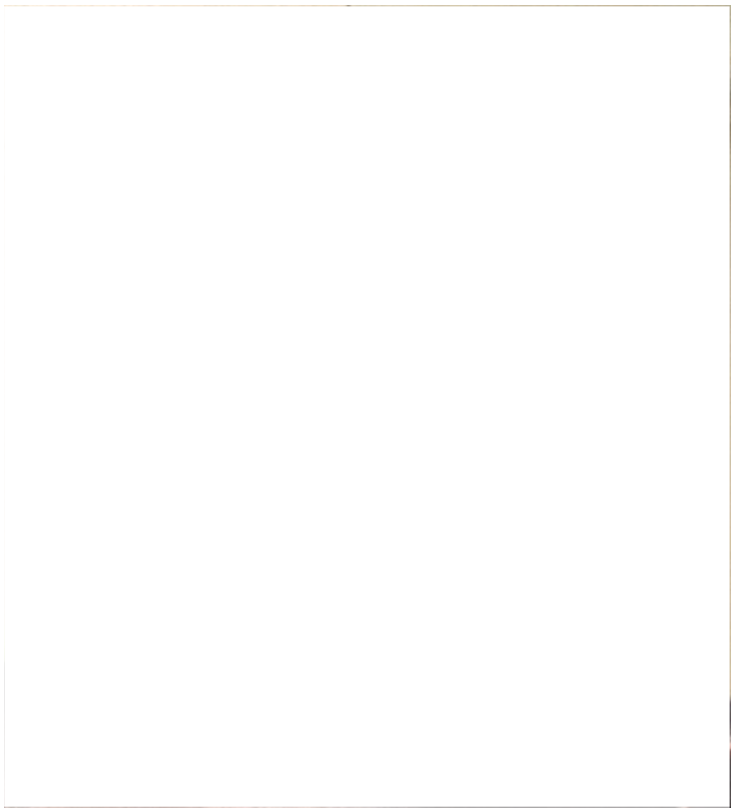
**Entrepreneurs want to catch the attention of the people who matter. There are exciting signs of a nascent, but promising, rise in Indian life sciences research and innovation. These ventures are primarily in need of funders for proper support and backing.**



*Recently, Centre for Cellular and Molecular Platforms (C-CAMP) organized a Bio Entrepreneurship Competition with the task of promoting deep-science-based startups in India. BioSpectrum interacted with Dr Taslimarif Saiyed, CEO and Director, C-CAMP, to learn more about driving in innovation in India.*

**Congratulations on the successful completion of the National Bio Entrepreneurship Competition. What is the main agenda for selecting and funding the early stage startups?**

We encourage the exciting biotech innovations being developed in our country, which are technology driven. Through our programme, we try to help these technologies get further support towards their journey to the market. Our basic criteria for selection includes three important factors- novelty, business feasibility and societal impact. We want to hear new bold ideas, thus novelty is the key factor.

**What all efforts go behind organizing such platforms to fund early stage startups?**

For such a competition, we organize two sets of jury- technical and non-technical. The non-technical experts focus primarily on the business potential of the idea proposed by the applicant. On the other hand, the technical jury provides its expert opinion on the quality of the idea and how it can be enhanced further. During the selection procedure, we started with 1600 applications/registrations that were filtered further into 160 and then eventually into 40. These 40 applicants were then invited to our residential boot camp in Bengaluru, for further nurturing of these ideas. The participants spent 2-3 days with our experts in order to establish a better pitch for their ideas and innovations. These ideas were presented to boot-camp jury panel, which had a wide variety of experts including industry leaders, healthcare experts, doctors and business managers. Post the boot camp session, we were able to select 9 participants for the final round of our competition. The grand jury for our National Bio Entrepreneurship Competition involved the participation of Kiran Mazumdar Shaw and Gaurav Gupta, for bringing in broader perspectives.

**Are there any regulatory procedures also involved when few startups come up with risky ideas?**

A lot of discussion regarding the market penetration of the ideas takes place at the boot camp. We make sure that all doubts and confusions are discussed at that stage. If the entrepreneurs feel challenged by a certain idea or situation, our experts try to provide best suggestions accordingly. C-CAMP has a very detailed programme chalked out for such mentoring purposes. We also conduct separate regulatory workshops which involves presence of FDA officers etc.

**What role does C-CAMP play in assuring the success of their funded startups?**

C-CAMP provides detailed mentorship and conduct follow-up meetings every 4-6 months. We offer constant monitoring for the funded startups. Through our Mentorship Program, the mentors and mentees interact with each other in an environment of trust where the mentee discusses issues related to her/ his venture and the mentor shares her/his expertise, experience, knowledge; sets goals and provides a direction to attain these goals; provides introduction to other experts in his or her personal network and generally guides the mentee to make good business decisions. The mentoring and guidance is crucial to increase the chances of the start-up's success.

**How does C-CAMP work out different funding arrangements for the startups?**

C-CAMP has funds in partnership with the government's Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC), the scheme — Sustainable Entrepreneurship and Enterprise Development (SEED) — supported 8-10 life sciences startups for its first batch with funding ranging between Rs 5 lakh and Rs 30 lakh. Then there is the Biotechnology Ignition Grant (BIG) Scheme, in partnership with BIRAC. C-CAMP is one of the six BIG Partner organizations, apart from IKP Knowledge Park, Hyderabad; Foundation for Innovation and Technology Transfer (FITT), New Delhi; Venture Centre, Pune; SIDBI Innovation & Incubation Centre (SIIC), Kanpur and KIIT Bio-incubator, Bhubaneswar. Over the last few years, we have been able to support nearly 90 start-ups through the BIG scheme, and close to 100 start-ups through other activities including bio-incubation, mentorship and other facilitation. Apart from this, we have also partnered with the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) under the Support for Entrepreneurial and Managerial Development of SME's through Incubators scheme. The funding provided through this scheme ranges between Rs 8 lakh and Rs 10 lakh. Also, the bio-incubator at C-CAMP is the only life science life-science incubator selected by NITI Aayog for scale-up support.

**Although India is doing excellent research, do you think the entire process of translating innovative ideas is challenging**?

We all are hearing how disruptive ideas and technologies are taking research to the next level. Innovative research ideas are flowing in but there aren't many academic entrepreneurs in our country. Innovation is definitely challenging and a conducive development process is required to efficiently transform ideas into profitable growth. We need top notch academic researchers in order to make sure that the innovative ideas do get translated into market products eventually. There is a need to attract more researchers. So yes, efforts should be made in this direction.

**Is C-CAMP looking out for more international collaborations in order to encourage the innovators here?**

The startups here need to understand the potential of the international market. It is very important to build a global perspective. For such purposes, C-CAMP has established the US-Indo Life Science Sister Innovation Hub, with California Institute for Quantitative Biosciences (QB3). Through this innovation hub, we keep working towards promoting collaborations in scientific research, encourage co-development of innovation led products and push these technologies towards commercialization. I believe that innovation- based start-ups will be nurtured and accelerated through incubation and funding opportunities by leveraging the existing entrepreneurial ecosystem in both countries. Apart from this, we also have collaborations with Cambridge, UK and European countries like Finland, Switzerland and Netherlands.