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# DBT & Gates foundation pledge $25 million for Grand Challenges India

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The Grand Challenges initiative, launched in 2003 by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation seeks to encourage research and development to develop innovative solutions to tackle the myriad health and development challenges afflicting the lives of millions of poor across the globe.

Recently the Annual Grand Challenges meeting was held from October 18-21 in Beijing, China. The meeting witnessed the convening of over 800 researchers, scientists, as well as high-level representatives from governments and organizations from across the globe to share proven practices, encourage partnerships and seek solutions to address the health challenges in the world.

Grand Challenges India was jointly launched by the Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC), Department of Biotechnology (DBT) and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in 2013 to promote scientific and technological advances in health through research and innovation, exclusively for Indian researchers.

Under the initiative, the DBT and the Gates Foundation have pledged an investment up to $25 million each, over the period of 5 years. Grand Challenges India seeks to promote and nurture innovations in vaccines, drugs, agricultural products, and interventions related to improving maternal and child health.

"We must recognize the need of innovation in developing societies. Encouraging innovation is of principal importance to tackle the problems of open defecation, child morbidity and mortality and malnutrition among mothers and children. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Department of Biotechnology, Government of India, have come together to tap the vast potential available in India and drive health innovation in the country." said Mr Trevor Mundel, President of the Global Health Division, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

The first two grants under Grand Challenges India focused on, 'Achieving Healthy Growth through Agriculture and Nutrition' and 'Reinvent the Toilet Challenge'. The latest grants under the initiative 'All Children Thriving' were awarded in 2015.

Collectively there are 17 researchers and social entrepreneurs from across the country being funded under the partnership. The aim is promote innovation aligned with achieving the SDGs 2, 3 and 6, i.e., end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture; ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages; and ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

Dr K Vijayraghavan, secretary, Department of Biotechnology, Ministry of Science & Technology, Government of India and Chairman, BIRAC stated that "In the past two decades, we have witnessed major advances in science and technology which have transformed the lives of millions in the country. We need to continue to drive innovation and research to meet existing challenges in health care. There is a need to create an enabling environment for research and innovation; where creative confidence and inventiveness is praised and encouraged in order to harness the immense potential available in India. Through partnerships such as the Grand Challenges initiative, we can utilize our vast pool of knowledge and scientific talent to address the health challenges plaguing the country."

In India, an estimated 1.27 million children die every year before completing 5 years. 81 percent of under-five child mortality takes place within one year of birth which accounts for nearly 1 million infant deaths and 57 percent of under-five deaths take place within the first one month of life accounting for 730,000 neo-natal deaths every year in the country. Globally, India continues to be the country with the highest number of people (597 million people) practicing open defecation.

Dr Renu Swarup, managing director, Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council and senior advisor, Department of Biotechnology, Government of India said, "Developing an innovative multi-sectoral approach is imperative to deal with the health challenges that we face today. Fostering innovation is the way to realizing the world's ambition of a better, healthier world and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation-DBT-BIRAC partnership aims to fulfil this vision through the Grand Challenges India initiative and encourage Indian researchers from across the country to work towards developing solutions with far-reaching social impact."