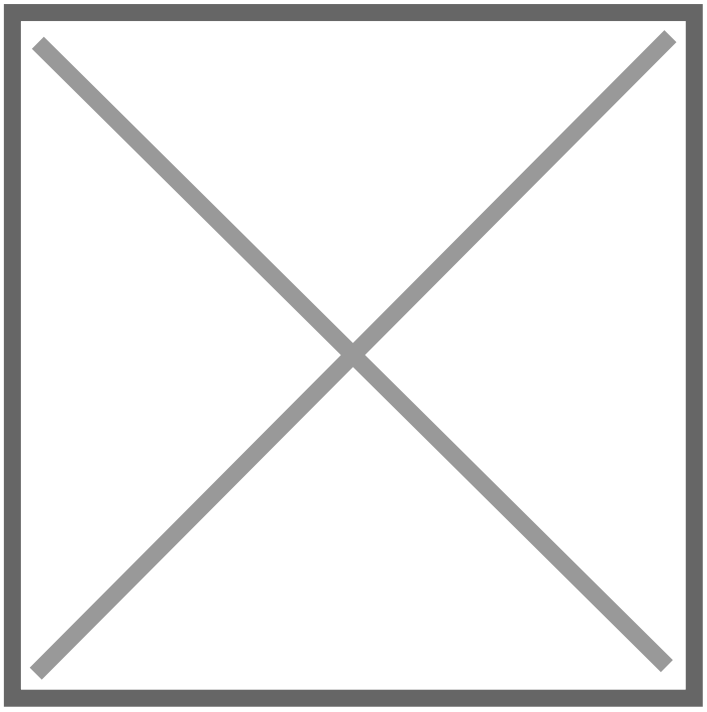
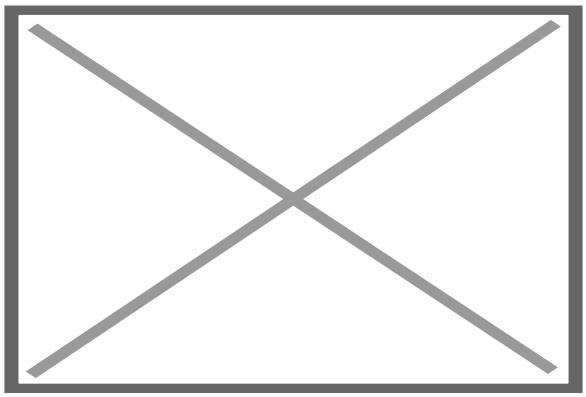
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Indian biotech looking for the right support

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Says

Dr Satya Dash
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As the Indian economy grows, the demand for food, fuel and affordable healthcare will increase. On one hand this expansion in economy will continue to increase the size of the domestic market, and on the other hand, it will also allow the increase of many challenges that India and the world are currently facing, be it in affordable healthcare and medicine, food and fuel security or in keeping the environment clean and sustainable. Biotechnology will offer solutions to myriad challenges that India, as a transition economy, will face in the near future.

The Indian biotechnology industry is at a point where given the right support it can become one of the leaders in bio-economy. The energy level of this industry in India is high, especially shown by innovative entrepreneurs and industry leaders. Immense opportunities lie in biosimilars, devices and diagnostics, stem cells, natural product-derived drugs, m-health, systems biology, industrial biotechnology including green chemicals and synthetic biology, as well as in agri-biotech especially integration of new technologies and methodologies in agricultural practices and expansion and deepening of contract research and manufacturing services.

It is important to have stretch goals for this sector and this industry, which has been growing at an average of 20 percent over the last decade, has the potential to grow at 30 percent in the next decade if the right support

is provided and it can reach a target (for biotech and healthcare) of $100 billion in revenues by 2025. This could become a reality given the talent India has in entrepreneurial dynamism.

Challenges remain, no doubt. The present Ã¢â?¬Å?regulatory regimeÃ¢â?¬? in India remains a huge hurdle especially due to the timelines taken for decisions and multiple windows that need to be navigated. This has a downward effect on investor confidence and risk behaviour. These regulatory hurdles have to be addressed immediately. A raft of regulations in emerging areas of stem cell, synthetic biology, medical diagnostics, genomic data including personalised genomic data need to be put in place at the earliest.

Challenges also remain in the access to cutting-edge technologies, technology transfer, basic infrastructure for research, academia-industry linkages as well as infrastructural issues involving sourcing, distribution and logistics for biotech products. Many of these gaps have been ably bridged by the Government, especially the Department of Biotechnology (DBT) as well as Biotechnology Industry Research and Development Assistance Council (BIRAC).

The Government through BIRAC and DBT has brought in significant schemes such as Biotechnology Industry Partnership Program (BIPP), Small Business Innovation Research Initiative (SBIRI) and Ignition Grant that have helped in de-risking early and middle stage steps in the bio-innovation process and these schemes have the potential to jump-start bio-entrepreneurship leading to the catalysis of India's bio-economy.

The report generated by ABLE titled, Ã¢â?¬Å?The Indian Biotechnology, The Road Map to Next Decade and Beyond,Ã¢â?¬? with the support from DBT and BIRAC, captures the trends in the biotechnology sector globally and touches upon the dynamism shown by the Indian biotechnology and healthcare entrepreneurs and leaders in providing innovative solutions. The process, initiated in 2011, involved a consultative engagement with an array of senior industry leaders and as well as entrepreneurs through the nodal industry body Association of Biotechnology Led Enterprises (ABLE) and its partnering organizations. The report provides several recommendations for India to be a global leader as a bio-economy, taking India to the leading front of innovation and capture the immense opportunities that are there to be seized. This requires partnership efforts among the stakeholders namely government, industry and academia.

About the author

Dr Satya Dash *is currently the senior strategy consultant to IIM-B and IISc. Previously, he was the chief operating officer of the nodal biotechnology industry organisation of India, ABLE.*