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BIRAC Regional Bio-Innovation Center- New plans in store

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There are some changes planned to the programmes focused on founders

BRBC
A BIRAC - Venture Center Initiative

After four years of contributing to the ecosystem and enriching it, it is time now for the BIRAC Regional Bio-Innovation Center (BRBC), one of the four regional centers set up by Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC), to think of the next stage and scale its operations.

The BRBC, a joint initiative of BIRAC and the Pune-based tech incubator Venture Center, is one of the four regional centers established by BIRAC to foster entrepreneurship across the country. The others are – BRIC (BIRAC Regional Innovation Centre at IKP-Knowledge Park, Hyderabad); BREC (BIRAC Regional Entrepreneurship Centre set up in partnership with C-CAMP); and, BRTC (BIRAC Techno-Entrepreneurship Centre East and North East) based in Bhubaneswar.

As Dr V. Premnath, Director, Venture Center, points out, the four regional centers are regional in the sense that they are anchored in a region but work throughout the country with a focus on certain themes. It is an interesting collaborative model where BIRAC, a Government agency, is scaling its outreach and impact through a hub-and-spoke model, where the spokes are independent entities and are partners in the project.

One of the tasks of the regional centers, says Dr Premnath, is to work in specific areas, identify gaps in those areas and come up with solutions that can be scaled up. The BRBC that was anchored by Venture Center focused on mentoring, regulation and supporting other incubators. “The importance of it is primarily that it is helping activities in specific gap areas to create lot more activities in that specific domain and build it up. While we are doing that, we also identify the gaps in the larger ecosystem,” he adds.

A quick recap of what the BRBC has achieved in four years:

- Initiatives reached 19 States
- Seven innovative platform programmes to support biotech/biomed startups
- More than 2,800 participants
- Over 150 unique mentors and trainees
- Nearly 155 events to support entrepreneurs in their journey
- Above 700 mentees/startups impacted
- Over 4,400 mentoring hours contributed by the mentoring initiative
- Collaborations with more than 20 new organizations
- More than 75 incubators trained and supported at Venture Center

Anirban Palit, Co-founder and Managing Director, Pragmatech Healthcare Solutions Pvt Ltd, a Vadodara-based medical devices startup, was one of the beneficiaries of BRBC. The company is developing products to make cervical cancer screening easier and simpler. Palit is all praise for the BRBC, especially since it helped the company navigate the crucial regulatory waters for its product and also helped in its ISO13485 certification process.

“That is one of the biggest advantages for a startup, because we are into medical devices. We are focusing on pre-screening and there are two products we are working on. One is a sampling solution and the other is a testing solution. When we talk about a medical device, for a startup to manufacture batches that have been approved by regulatory authorities, you need a facility that has a proper certification. Until and unless one has access to that, it is close to impossible to get a test licence or a manufacturing license from any authority,” says Palit.

Ashish Gawade, Co-founder/Director, Jeevtronics Pvt. Ltd., a Pune-based medical device company, that has developed and launched the world’s first dual-powered (hand cranked and electricity) defibrillator that works even in areas without reliable power supply, says “We benefitted immensely from the advice that we got from the Regulatory Information & Facilitation Center (RIFC) that was part of the BRBC. Thanks to that, we successfully completed ISO13485. We got a CDSCO manufacturing license and we were able to launch our defibrillators.”

Then take the case of Dr Arpit Shukla, Incubation Manager, BioNEST, Venture Studio, Ahmedabad University. He was part of BRBC’s Immersion Programme for incubator managers. The programme, he says, gave an overview of all the different aspects of running an incubator.

According to Suman Gupta, Chief Operations Officer, BSC BioNEST Bio-Incubator, Regional Centre for Biotechnology, who participated in BRBC’s programme for incubator managers, one of the important take-aways for her from the programme was to keep the policies startup friendly and to make them transparent so that everything is available at the click of a key. “I was in that stage where I had to initiate the incubator and design some policies around it. I had to look at how the incubator is going to sustain and draw up plans for the incubator. I got a good insight when I attended the Immersion Programme. A lot of queries that I had, because this was a new assignment for me, got resolved when I was in that programme. A few other incubator managers were also there and it helped us network. We had a good connect with Venture Center as well. If anything happened anywhere or if we got stuck, we approached them,” says Suman.

What next for the BRBC? Dr Premnath agrees that after four years, they are entering a new phase. While what is being done will be scaled up, there are some new initiatives planned. As far as scaling is concerned, in the regulatory aspect, the first phase focused a lot on medical devices and diagnosis.

There are some changes planned to the programmes focused on founders. In the Venture Base Camps, the format was to conduct them over three days and do a concentrated dose. However, founders being extremely busy juggling various roles, the idea is now to have an extended version of the Venture Base Camps spread over three months, hand-holding the founders for a longer period with the help of partners who have been brought in so that the ventures are helped over the hill during this period.

According to him, there have also been requests for specific training for incubators. For example, how to run a seed fund, how to run a faculty entrepreneurship programme and how to run a student entrepreneurship club. These will be launched in due course. One of the themes that the BRBC will try out has to do with internationalization, he says. “What are the mechanisms by which we can take some of the startups international.”

Another aspect they are looking at is how to enhance the interaction between large industry and startups. A few activities have been designed, for which they hope to get approval. Other countries have well-designed international assistance programmes, where they fund their startups to set up overseas offices. Countries such as Israel, Sweden and Singapore have international programmes, says Dr. Premnath and adds that India does not have much for startups. “That is one of the ideas we want to do,” he adds.

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