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â??We look forward to collaborate with government initiatives to promote degree programmes in biomedical innovationâ?•

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Blockchain For Impact (BFI), established during the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in India, is continuing its trailblazing journey after announcing a monumental allocation of $15 million through its BFI-BIOME Virtual Network Program, aimed at propelling biomedical research forward in India. In the past three months, BFI has already allocated a substantial amount through strategic MoUâ??s with elite research institutes and incubators, setting in motion its plans to revolutionise biomedical research and innovation in the country. BioSpectrum India spoke to Sandeep Nailwal, Founder of BFI, in detail about his vision for driving transformative change in the healthcare landscape.



Please highlight the recent collaborations signed by BFI for advancing biomedical research in India.

Blockchain For Impact (BFI) has been actively collaborating with eminent research institutions in India to vitalise progression in the field of biomedical research. Partnerships with institutions like the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) Bengaluru, Birla Institute of Technology and Science (BITS) Pilani, and Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bombay, Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB), Foundation for Neglected Disease Research (FNDR), and TCG Crest, will prove to be instrumental in fostering innovation, advancing scientific proficiency and building a biomedical network in the nation.

Additionally, through the BFI-BIOME Program, alliances with leading incubators such as Venture Center, Centre for Cellular and Molecular Platforms (C-CAMP), Startup Incubation and Innovation Centre - IIT Kanpur, Atal Incubation Centre (AIC)-CCMB, and IKP Knowledge Park have further solidified BFI's commitment to making a positive impact in the healthcare sector.

BFI has committed a significant sum of $15 million to its BFI-BIOME Virtual Network Program, aimed at driving forward biomedical research in India. Overall, this initiative by BFI represents a major step forward for the field of biomedical research in India, and it is sure to have a lasting impact on the healthcare landscape of the country. Another $200 million is committed towards this initiative which includes setting up a state-of-the-art biomedical research institute in India that will engage in developing cutting edge research activities related to biomedical and healthcare directly contributing to the ecosystem.

What are the key objectives that are to be achieved through these different partnerships in India?

BFI has two primary domains, Biomedical Research and Innovation (BRI) and District Full Stack (DFS). Under BRI we are partnering with various prominent institutes, incubators and medical institutes of national importance (INIs) with an aim to support biomedical research and innovation across the nation. DFS works to identify the problem at the grass root level and provides tailormade solutions.

Developing a virtual network of researchers, innovators and industry experts. The aim is to construct multi sectoral collaborations to expedite biomedical innovation across the nation to tackle the present issues and anticipated gaps in the healthcare sector.

Stimulating concentrated efforts towards upstream research, primarily Translational Research to convert upcoming inventive research into actual products and services that can be applied to public welfare.

The DFS program through its partnership with local NGOs, State and District administration, UN agencies like the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and other health system players have adopted a health systems approach to tackle India's health challenges, aligning with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being. In this context The India Health and Climate Resilience Fellowship was launched in partnership with Partnering Hope Into Action Foundation (PHIA), UNICEF, and other NGO mentors (the Centre for North East Studies and Policy Research (CNES), JSS, Vivekananda Girijana Kalyana Kendra (VGKK), MediCiti Hospital and Mediciti Institute of Medical Sciences (MIMS). It operates in 6 states across 18 districts with 24 Fellows on the ground.

Additionally, the programme along with state health departments supports the development of novel, climate-resilient healthcare delivery systems that enhance access for remote and vulnerable populations. In this context, BFI is supporting the construction and deployment of a Hospital Ship which will provide essential maternal and child healthcare services to communities in the flood-prone regions of lower Assam. This hospital ship will be operated in partnership with CNES and the Government of Assam. It will be a pioneer in India, featuring a fully functional Outpatient Department (OPD), operation theatre, comprehensive medical and paramedical departments, and 24/7 living quarters for doctors, nurses, medical officers, and crew members.

Are you planning to execute more partnerships and collaborations this year, and beyond?

Yes, we have just closed the call for funding biomedical innovations with Medical

INIs. BFI announced $250,000, with $50,000 each going to 5 Institutes of National Importance for Biomedical Research in Public Health Preparedness. In the future, BFI-BIOME program along with its network of partners is expected to grow and enrich the network with more collaborations.

What are the major challenges currently facing the biomedical research sector in India? Does it require more collaboration between the industry & academia? How is BFI addressing those challenges?

For the longest time, the scaleup of biomedical products and research outputs has proven to be one of the major challenges to the biomedical sector in India. The idea is to provide a means to open the doors of the laboratories and allow the novel research outputs to reach upscaling opportunities for the generation of inventive healthcare products and services.

Thus, collaboration between the industry and academia is vital and should surely be encouraged to propel the actualisation of translational research outputs.

BFI utilising collaborative partnering with prominent institutions actively working in the domain of translational research is steadily constructing an elaborate network, where the researchers can connect with the innovators, other researchers, grantors, industrial experts, and entrepreneurial initiatives, to contribute to the foundation of biomedical innovation.

What initiatives do you have for startups, so that their innovation reaches the market faster?

Yes, here are some of the key ways we support initiatives:

- BFI-BIOME Fellowships: Through our partners the designed fellowships provide funding, mentorship, and resources to promising researchers and entrepreneurs in the biotech and biomedical fields, through which the fellows can develop their ideas and bring them to market. Venture Centre has announced Rs 60,000 per month as the fellowship offered under this initiative, and like such C-CAMP has offered an amount of Rs 50,000 per month and AIC-CCMB an amount of Rs 50,000 per month.

- BFI-BIOME Kickstarter Initiatives: Our partners have launched initiatives to identify and support promising healthcare technologies that will benefit the public. For instance, AIC-CCMB has announced an amount of upto Rs 10 lakh for the Kickstarter initiative, C-CAMP an amount of up to Rs 11 lakh, and Venture centre an amount of Rs 10 lakh.

- BFI-BIOME Events: The partner organisations are conducting a variety of events such as workshops, awareness sessions, mentoring clinics, and thematic campaign events. BFI will organise convening events as a support. These events are designed to provide the knowledge, networks, and skills needed to navigate the complex path to product

formulation.

- Strategic Partnerships: Our partnerships, like the one with Venture Center, C-CAMP, IITs, etc. leverage combined expertise to create impactful programmes that support healthcare initiatives in developing and scaling their innovations.
- Funding and Investment: BFI has allocated substantial funding with the aim of supporting more than 100 projects across India running at the partner institutes under Biome programme.

Any major expectation from the government to promote biomedical research in the country?

We as an organisation particularly look forward to collaborating with government initiatives that promote biomedical research in India.

- Promotion of more programmes/degree programmes that encourage younger generation to take an interest in biomedical innovation and translational research; programmes that incorporate industrial training/internship;
- Opportunities to connect over multidisciplinary discussions on promoting biomedical research in the nation.
- Promoting Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) collaborations between academia, industry, and healthcare providers to foster innovation in biomedical research.

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