

Partnerships help us find innovative solutions to societal needs: Dr Renu Swarup

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Representatives from Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC), Department of Biotechnology (DBT) and United States Agency for International Development (USAID) came together for a workshop titled 'Multi Sectorial Interventions in the context of Maternal and Child Health: All Children Thriving'.

Launched in 2013, Grand Challenges India (GCI) is a collaborative effort by DBT, Ministry of Science and Technology, Government of India; BIRAC - a Government of India enterprise; and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Following the launch of two successful initiatives in 2013: 'Achieving Healthy Growth through Agriculture and Nutrition' and 'Reinvent the Toilet Challenge', Grand Challenges India has now launched a third, 'All Children Thriving'.

Undertaken in partnership with the USAID, the program aims to ensure that all children not only survive but are also on a trajectory to live healthy and productive lives.

"We are excited to build on our partnership with the Department of Biotechnology and continue to harness the power of Indian innovation in service of the country's most vulnerable communities. At the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation we believe that all lives have equal value and we hope that this Grand Challenge will help ensure that all India's children, no matter where they are born, have the opportunity to survive, thrive and fulfil their potential," said Dr Steven Buchsbaum, deputy director, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Dr M K Bhan, former secretary, DBT, Government of India, announced this next phase of Grand Challenges India.

'All Children Thriving' funds for seed grants are USD \$500,000 for up to two years and full grants are USD \$2.5 million for up to four years and focus on innovative tools and approaches that will drastically alter the public health landscape.

"GCI's announcement indicates that we can make a difference when we work together, and our partnership with BMGF will help us find innovative solutions to address societal needs. DBT and BIRAC are proud to take forward the vision and initiatives of global thrust in developing innovative technologies to achieve sustainable gains to solve human health, food and nutritional inequities said Dr Renu Swarup, senior adviser, DBT, Government of India, and MD, BIRAC.

Globally, over 6 million children under the age of five die each year, and approximately 165 million (26 percent) of the world's children have stunted growth jeopardizing subsequent physical as well as cognitive development.

India has among the highest prevalence of stunting in the world, and represents 38% of the global burden of chronic undernutrition.

Much remains unknown about the root causes of unhealthy birth, growth, and development.

Current evidence suggests that the causes - whether based on malnutrition, infectious disease, social or other factors - are interwoven, and that addressing them one at a time can solve only a small fraction of the problem.

"This Grand Challenges India Initiative seeks to develop multi sectoral integrated intervention packages to reduce the burden of foetal growth impairment & preterm birth in India and other developing countries." said Dr Sunita Singh, program director, BIRAC.