

DST: We're India's largest life science player

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India's Department of Science and Technology (DST), which was established in May 1971 with the objective of promoting new areas of science, has emerged as a nodal department for organizing, coordinating and promoting science-related activities in the country. Dr T Ramasami, secretary, Department of Science & Technology (DST), Ministry of Science and Technology, Government of India, in an interview with *BioSpectrum* speaks about the role of DST and the future of Indian science, among other things.

What is the role of DST in promoting life sciences research in India?

DST is mandated to promote scientific inquiry in India without making choices and selection. DST doesn't need to specifically focus on certain sectors like pharmaceuticals and biotechnology, as there are separate departments to take care of them. We are the largest players in life sciences research, with the number of projects totaling 200, 29 percent of which belong to the domain of biotechnology. It is worth mentioning that the Technology Development Board under the guidance of DST has funded ground breaking projects like Bharat Biotech's project on Revac B, by providing around \$58, 181 (Rs32 lakh) worth of loan. The result was the delivery of a product at an unbelievable price of one-dollar-per-dose.

Is there a need to increase funding in India?

Overall, there is 20 percent increase in funding every four-to-five years. We also have to keep in mind the absorption capacity of the industry and academia. One thing to remember is that, it is not the funding that requires to be celebrated but we must see that the right ideas don't suffer due to lack of support. We have to ensure that funds reach the most deserving projects. Having said that, I am certain that Indian science won't suffer due to lack of funding.

What is more important, research publications or products?

A plant nursery keeper doesn't know which seed sprouts. Hence, we don't talk about fruits to him. Neither do we talk about

the research publications nor do we bother much about the product outcomes. We select ideas and our organization is the foundation that looks at ideas with value.

What is the future of Indian science?

Indian science has come a long way. Since policy is a marginal instrument to bring about societal change, deep policy revaluations need to be done from time-to-time. Public-private partnerships have to go hand-in-hand and this model is highly relevant for the R&D. Today the word innovation is driven by competition. However, the real benefit is received when the fruit is not only enjoyed by the intellectual property rights (IPR) holder but also the masses at large.