

'Purpose of BioSpin is to enter into new, emerging markets'

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“Purpose of BioSpin is to enter into new, emerging markets”

—Harald Wolf, project manager of BioSpin for India

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The Biotechnology Sustainable Partnering India (BioSpin) was initiated in 2008 to create business relationships between German and Indian biotechnology as well as pharmaceutical companies, and to foster cooperations between research and business in India and Central Germany. This is one of the projects under the ‘India and Germany - Strategic Partners for Innovation’ initiative. With this initiative, the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) supports Indo-German cooperations.

For the last one year, the German delegation has been screening the market in India and till date, has touched base with around 450 business and research delegates from India. On a recent trip to India, Harald Wolf, project manager of BioSpin for India, spoke exclusively to BioSpectrum. He shares more information about the BioSpin initiative, its goals and plans to accelerate the synergy between India and Germany.

What are the key focus areas of BioSpin project?

BioSpin was started in 2008. We decided to approach the Federal Ministry for Education and Research, because there were companies and research institutes in Germany that wanted to make business out of research projects in India. Partners in India mainly include Indian pharma and biotech companies. In Central Germany, there are three federal biostates - Saxony-Anhalt, Thuringia and Saxony - which alone encompass around 230 biotech companies, and 50 research institutes including university research institutes.

It was then when we came on a delegation trip to India and we screened the potential Indian partners from the sector. After this, we began to contact companies in the domain of the life sciences industry because we had a strong focus on fine chemical specialties for the pharma industry and also on industrial biotech companies. The specialty of this initiative is that it is focused on biotechnology. This initiative is very important as far as Germany's India initiative is concerned. Other initiatives which are funded by the federal government are more wider and comprehensive in their India focus.

How is the biotech scenario in Germany, and how supportive is the federal government to companies and institutes?

The year 1996 was a landmark year for biotech in Germany. We have young start-ups, bioclusters and concentration facilities. In Germany, there are around 450-500 biotech companies doing research in the avenues of enzymes production research, medical device and drug discovery services. We also have a lot of biotech concentrations and clusters all around the region. The federal government is extremely supportive to boost the biotech industry in Germany and as a result has introduced several initiatives.

For example, you have the research project funding, education research funding, SME funding and funding for technology. The biotech initiatives undertaken also depends on the region. Germany is divided into 16 states and every state has its own funding system for biotechnology. There are different levels of funding, federal level, EU level and state level. For instance, for one state alone, there has been a funding of up to 150 million euros (about Rs 1,028 crore). This goes into infrastructure, incubators and biotech equipments for small and medium size companies.

With respect to BioSpin, what prospects does India have to offer?

India has the potential to offer two things for the BioSpin initiative. India gives us the opportunity to collaborate with the innumerable start-up companies and research institutes that have come up in the recent years. Start-up companies and established Indian companies are more open to collaborations because they know the prospects that the EU has to offer. The purpose of this project is to venture into new markets across the globe and to extend cooperation for research. Most importantly, we have observed that the academia here have the same spirit as in Germany. For instance, India has well-educated and learned academicians in biotechnology, research and pharma.

What are the collaboration models you are planning to initiate with the Indian partners?

It all depends on the company, their needs and their product. For instance, if they are into pure biotech or enzymes, the discovery might take place in Germany, after taking it to a certain phase, the production may be done in India. We did strike partnerships with Indian companies because for funding it becomes necessary to have an Indian partner. Apart from research, we also looked at marketing opportunities. We first tapped the fine chemicals sector and made our presence in India.

What kind of funding is available for this initiative?

This is a small initiative and focus on very niche market, so funding amount is very small. As of now, our funding is about 100,000 euros (about Rs 68.55 lakh).

What are the joint activities you are taking with the Indian government?

At the moment, there are direct talks with the German and Indian governments. This is in the event of a particular research institute under this initiative, along with undertaking business, research and production projects between two German and two Indian partners. So, when you have four partners you will get a 50 percent funding from Germany for the German companies, and the other funding comes from the ministry of technology for the Indian companies.

You are planning to extend this initiative to Asia. Which are the countries you will be going to?

Yes, we will be going to other Asian regions with India being the most important region. For example, we will be targeting

China and Indonesia.

Any similar delegation or initiatives in other countries beyond Asia?

We went to Canada in 2005 and Great Britain in 2008. The US is not so important because we go there through the BIO international forums where we get all our possible partners, and you do not need a delegation.

What are the future plans to take this initiative forward in India?

In this initiative, we will also include bioinformatic companies. Our next step is to bring a delegation to India to bring about a nexus between bioinformatic companies and collaborate with research companies in India. So every time we make a delegation trip to India, we look into different sectors and segments in biotech and pharma. For example, this time it was industrial biotech and fine chemicals. The delegation trip for bioinformatics will be somewhere around February or March 2010.

Nayantara Som in Mumbai