

Goa's Biotech Dreams Washed Away

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Lack of interest by the State Government coupled with agitations by local groups have slackened the development of Goa's biotech policy.

The state of Goa had evolved an Industrial Policy in 2003 and has recently put in place an IT policy to provide the framework for accelerated growth of its knowledge based industries. Following which, talks were doing the rounds to implement a policy support to augment the growth of the biotech industry in Goa given the mammoth opportunities the state has to offer in terms of agriculture , pharmaceutical, food processing and marine biotechnology. However, there has been a huge gap between the formulation and the actual execution of policies from the state government's side, whereby now the wheels of progress for the biotechnology industry in the state has totally come to a standstill.

As envisaged by the state government before, the biotechnology policy initiated would concentrate in areas of agriculture, healthcare, industrial biotechnology, environmental biotechnology, bioresources utilization, bioinformatics, bioservices, marine biotechnology . It has also been envisaged that private-public partnership would play a key role and that accordingly, appropriate allocation will be made in the state's budget. The state would develop mechanisms to work in close collaboration with the central government. The policy would also ensure that the state government would also offer special grants to set up or upgrade research and development facilities. It also aimed to focus on areas like human resources, infrastructure, giving

incentives and financial support. The government also put forward to set up a high-powered coordination committee to ensure clearance of biotechnology projects.

However, external circumstances or rather agitations from the local groups have pushed Goa's biotech dreams in the background.

Says Dr Sangam Kurade, Vice President, Goa State Industries Association, "Goa State Industrial Association (GSIA) has time and again reminded the State Government to implement the Industrial Policy (2005) and Biotech Policy (2006) With the change in government, 14 months ago and frequent changes in the post of Director of Industries has had impact on micro, small and medium scale units setting up or expanding their base. Many of them dependent on large mother units existing in Goa. State Chief Minister having Industrial portfolio has not helped either."

Lack of any development in the biotech industrial front has led to prospective investors backing out. Comments Dr Kurade, "Goa seems to have lost the charm to the investors and ceased to be an investor's friendly estate. Besides policy matters and government apathy, single most factor seems to be opposition to any and every developmental activity by newly formed committees, forums and NGO's/fronts. It has had its most severe impact on the industrial development of the state."

The recent scrapping of SEZs by the State Government has also proven to be a major setback to biotechnology in Goa.