

**Experts discuss ways to bridge research and society,
with an emphasis on quality of life for citizens**

If a student is interested in pursuing entrepreneurship, train him in that direction. Create courses with exposures in entrepreneurship for researchers who want to develop their innovations into products. The auditorium at the National Institute of Advanced Studies was abuzz with such recommendations, aimed to improve the business ecosystem in India. The meeting was co-chaired by Dr T Pradeep (IIT, Madras) and Dr Baldev Raj (NIAS).

“Inequalities in all forms especially in the area of water and energy causes multitude of damages, to confidence and productivity, thus denying the possibility of esteem, earnings and quality of life”, said Dr Baldev Raj, setting the stage for further discussion.

India is in a strange situation: on the one hand, we have millions of people who are facing multitudes of challenges from water pollution to unaffordable health care. On the other hand, we have our elite academic institutions developing novel, high-tech and yet economical solutions to these problems. However, innovations within academic institutions not blossoming into usable products that can be consumed by the masses. Taking cognizance of the situation, stakeholders from academia, the Government, and startup companies gathered in Bangalore to chalk out a path.

At the meeting titled “Bridging Innovations in Academic Institutions to Society,” experts came up with specific action items to improve the scenario in the country. The meeting was attended by representatives from the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), Indian Institute of Science, technology startups incubated in the IITs, Kovai Medical Center and Hospital, Coimbatore, and the Department of Science and Technology, India’s primary funding agency for research and development. The meeting which was jointly organised by the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS), Bangalore and the Thematic Unit of Excellence, IIT Madras included the participation of young and struggling but bubbling entrepreneurs in the high tech domain. The two-day meeting, held at NIAS, concluded today.

Recognising that ‘sharing’, ‘caring’, ‘facilitation’ and directions (policy) are crucial for taking innovations from laboratories to the society, the meeting came up with action points in each area. Since almost all researchers experience challenges in filing patents, the meeting pitched for a single, nation-wide repository for all intellectual property (IP) rules. This would also seek to sensitise researchers to the conflicts of interest they face when start businesses. The experts also recommended a portal for showcasing all the IPs procured in the country.

The members of the meeting were unanimous in recognising the need for a ‘caring’ ecosystem. They recommended starting mentoring programs for innovators and entrepreneurs at the institutional level. Going a step ahead, they even suggested making it mandatory for the innovator to spend a minimum number of hours a week with the entrepreneur who is developing that laboratory invention into a product.

The meeting also recommended that academic institutions should ‘facilitate’ technology entrepreneurs by allowing them share the research facilities for a cost. This is necessary because it is not viable for new companies to build their own research and manufacturing facilities.

The representatives from the medical fraternity said that there is an urgent need for cross talk between among clinicians, engineering fraternity, and the technologists. According to them, products like artificial heart valves and insulin pumps are socially relevant and financially viable due to large demand.

It is critical for young entrepreneurs to understand the social side of the problems they are going to address. Lack of understanding of social issues have even resulted in failure of good technologies, the meeting noted. It advised the entrepreneurs to make the social angle part of the product development cycle.

In late evening talks yesterday, Dr Prasad Raju formally from the Department of Science and Technology, Government of India, shared his experiences of installing water treatment plants in remote villages of Andhra Pradesh. According to him, getting into confidence the local people, especially the village leaders, is extremely important.

Dr Debapriya Dutta, the Director, Indo-French Centre for the Promotion of Advanced Research, shared his experience of working from the village level to the global level. According to him, India can take a leaf from United States’ book, for developing policies that convert innovations in academia to products.

About

A discussion meeting on “Bridging innovations in academic institutions to society” was held at the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS), Bangalore. It is being organized by NIAS and the Thematic Unit of Excellence, Indian Institute of Technology Madras; and sponsored by the Department of Science and Technology.