

Manufacturing indigenously: Biosuppliers chase their dream!

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The 'Make in India' slogan by the prime minister, Narendra Modi may not sound new to the biosupplier industry that has been looking at this option for few years now. However, the idea of introducing low cost India made research products' competing with multi-national firms was not promoted at a large sale due to many complications including quality, affordability and convincing of clients.

The major factors that have led to the non- initiation of the manufacturing are believed to be within the circles of the policymaking also. The industry has been demanding special attention for establishing plants including fair tax regime and land at lesser price. However, the policymakers seem to have so far ignored the requirements of this tiny sector due to apparent lack of understanding of its importance.

Confident of doing it?

There are many erstwhile distributors of multi-national firms who want to set their feet in the manufacturing but are doing it rather slowly or cautiously. The maximum opportunities lie in consumables including reagents, 80 percent of whom are imported. Mr Arun Prakash, CEO, Genetix Biotech Asia which also has dabbled in the manufacturing its own range of products, says, "The key strategy initiatives of our company includes focus on our own brand building by introducing world class quality products at most affordable price."

Echoing similar views, Mr DK Dubey, managing director, 3D BlackBio says, "Our strategy is to produce world class molecular reagents for lifescience R&D in Indian manufacturing facility. We want to provide top class products at affordable prices in time as substitution to imports."

"We expect the government to give us support. We are dependent completely on companies in China and Germany for technology. It is not easy to manufacture reagents here because we require highly skilled people as we can't afford even any

pipetting errors. For that it is foremost importance that Indian scientists shed their casual attitude. If India has to play a key role in biotech in future, it has to develop disciplined skills. The spending has to be right and with accountability. We have to promote ethical work culture with a sense of giving back to our motherland. "Dr Ushakar Nag, director, DSS Takara Bio India and business manager, DSS ImageTech.

But the major issue has also been to maintain the quality and yet remain affordable. This is the area where perhaps the companies are struggling in. Also, there is lack of venture funding or seed funding for biotech manufacturing for research reagents. There is absence of culture that connects research labs with commercial companies," says Mr Rupinder Singh, CEO, BioHouse Solutions, while adding further "Government talks about innovation but forgets to address self-dependency of our country for regular research items. There is absence of subsidized programmes to boost such manufacturing. Also, lots of dollars go into importing these products and if manufactured locally, we can do two to three times more research with the same amount."

Given the right kind of support, there is hardly any doubt on the capabilities of Indian biosuppliers to do it. However, they will have to rise to the occasion and join hands to push it further. The manufacturing of research products in India is as important as research itself as it will hasten the process and the delivery of end product.

Meeting expectations a challenge

The one important thing that can make or break the idea is the approval of clients who too have grown smart and want value for the money. Obviously, a researcher running low on funds has to be doubly sure about the product he uses to get quality results in a project with deadlines. For the multi-national companies, this is always a priority and infact, this is the reason why scientists prefer such products even if expensive. In words of Mr Paul A Smaltz, executive vice president, Pharma, Avantor Performance Materials, "Many of the Indian pharma facilities are doing contract manufacturing, or doing runs for clinical trials. It makes difficult to forecast their demands for raw materials. They may require it quickly and thus keeping in view, we are producing key agents and excipients in India to serve their needs."

Says Dr Siva Kumar Pasupathi, LDA Country Head, Agilent Technologies, India, "There aren't many Indian players in instruments and the market continues to be dominated by the global MNC players. These companies form our competition in India as well. We have often seen that competition emphasizes its prices and discounts, whereas at Agilent, our focus is always on the quality of the product. In the short-term, this may affect us adversely from time to time, but we believe that customers will always prefer a better product to a cheaper one. Our dependence on dealers and the rupee depreciation have both hit us hard, and sometimes we have been non-competitive on prices, but despite that we have done well."

Let us hope that this doesn't just remain merely a talking point and the biosupplier industry takes up the challenge and build confidence not only among themselves but in the minds of scientists too. It is not only the question of just producing but also remaining updated and introducing the new improved techniques. Research and development in order to compete is not new but it is just that the quality will have to be at par with the established brands. For Indian biosupplier turned manufacturers, the innovation in processes shall be important to stay in the business.