

Grand challenges winners awarded certificates at BIRAC Innovators Meet 2015

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The Grand Challenges India initiative was jointly launched by the BIRAC, DBT and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) in 2013 to promote innovative health and development research within India, exclusively for Indian researchers. Till date, the two previous grants, 'Achieving Healthy Growth through Agriculture and Nutrition' and 'Reinvent the Toilet Challenge' have collectively funded ten researchers and social entrepreneurs from across the country.

The winners of the 'All Children Thriving' grants of the Grand Challenges India initiative were awarded the certificates for funding at the 4th BIRAC's Innovator's Meeting held on September 15-16, 2015 at Manesar in National Capital Region (NCR). The awards were given by Dr K Vijay Raghavan, secretary, department of biotechnology (DBT), government of India.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr Vijay Raghavan stated, "Stimulating an atmosphere of research is one of the major instruments to tackle the problems plaguing the country. The Grand Challenges initiative has grown tremendously in the past decade and partnerships have played a key role through knowledge sharing and cross pollination of ideas. Through the Grand Challenges programme, we aim to create a conducive 'innovation ecosystem' in the country to encourage creativity and inventiveness among young researchers."

"India has one of the highest child mortality rates and under-five deaths in the world. The selected proposals under the 'All Children Thriving' initiative focus on promoting interventions which aim to ensure that children live healthy and productive lives. Our target of improving lives can be made possible only by embracing innovation in the country and the DBT- BMGF- BIRAC partnership through Grand Challenges has made great strides in this regard," said Dr Renu Swarup, managing director, BIRAC.

The 'All Children Thriving' grants aim to develop multi-sectoral interventions that can reduce the burden of preterm birth, stunted postnatal growth, and impaired cognitive development. In India, an estimated 26 million children are born every year. An estimated 1.27 million children die every year before completing 5 years. 81 percent of under-five child mortality takes place within one year of birth which accounts for nearly 10.5 lakh infant deaths and 57 percent of under-five deaths take

place within the first one month of life accounting for 7.3 lakh neo-natal deaths every year in the country.

"Innovation plays a central role in developing societies. Encouraging and fostering research and development of interventions meant to improve the quality of life is crucial. Grand Challenges provides a platform for innovators to think creatively to develop cost-effective and sustainable interventions. The 'All Children Thriving' grants concentrate on a vital stage of life where effective interventions can be incredibly beneficial in changing the lives of millions of children," said Mr Trevor Mundel, president of the Global Health Division, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

The speakers at the event emphasized the need to stimulate interest in research and development in the country to address the various health issues. There was also discussion on creating economical and sustainable solutions, keeping in mind ground realities is the need of the hour.