

Proceedings of Stakeholders' Workshop on Revision of State Biotechnology Policy held on 29th & 30th October, 2013 at Hotel Holiday Home, Shimla

With the creation of the Department of Biotechnology by the State Government in 2000 the first State BT Policy was notified by the Government in April 2001. The State Biotechnology Task Force has been constituted in 2001. The main objective of the State BT Policy was to attract entrepreneurs for setting up biotechnology based industry in the State for employment and income generation utilizing its rich bioresources and human resources. In its efforts to implement BT Policy, the Department initiated several efforts to encourage investments in BT based ventures in the State.

Keeping in view the changing scenario in Biotechnology sector worldwide since 2001, such as emergence of Nanotechnology, reforms in Bioenergy, Specific molecule based nutraceuticals and Biopreservation in Food sector, specific gene therapy, sustained release of drugs using biochips, use of biosimilars, etc. and in view of the Biotechnology being included in the list of thrust industries enterprises vide Notification No. Ind. A(F)6-3/2008) dated 7.2.2009 by the State Government the present workshop has been organized to revise the State BT Policy making it highly effective for all the stakeholders.

The Inaugural Session of the Workshop was chaired by Sh. Tarun Shridhar, Principal Secretary (Forests) to the Government of Himachal Pradesh. In his Inaugural Address he made observations on the present draft BT Policy and wanted the Revised State BT Policy to have components ranging from the ITKs of farmers to Biosimilars and genetic improvements of crop species rather than genetic modification, involvement of Industries in BT Policy revision, role of line departments, State BT policy vis a vis National BT Policy. He wanted Government to assist in execution of BT activities and not to execute by self. He also emphasized on the requirement of Institutional Regulation in BT sector. It was also introspected by the Chair in the session that there should be a clearcut Education Policy in BT sector and how best DEST can help in improving the syllabi in BT, it's a huge challenge and at the end he hoped that we come up with a holistic Biotechnology Policy in the State.

In his Address the Director, Environment Science & Technology gave a brief account on the development of Biotechnology sector in the State since 2001, wherein he highlighted the components of existing BT Policy of the State and its needs to revise in the light of latest development in the Biotechnology sector worldwide in terms of Scientific and Policy areas so that Biotechnology sector becomes a core development sector in the State generating wide employment opportunities through Biotechnology sector in the State.

Dr. PS Ahuja, was the keynote speaker in the Workshop, who delivered his presentation on Biotechnology-A potential scientific intervention for sustainable development of hills, mostly emphasized advantages of Himachal Pradesh to make an ideal destination producing quality planting materials of various Agricultural, Horticultural and Plantation crops. He gave insight of biological patent we got on Potentilla SOD Enzyme isolated from a plant found in Kunzum Pass in Lahaul and Spiti District. Another interesting feature was manufacture of Kurkure type food from Apple pomace.

Beside this, about nine Theme speakers presented their Scientific and Developmental works pertaining to the revision of State Biotechnology Policy on various issues.

The two days workshop was attended by about 105 participants with a representation from the line departments, NGOs, educational institutions and students of the State besides the press and media personnel. The issues that were discussed in the workshop was:

1. Biodiversity – A rich bio resource for BT Industries in HP.
2. Role of public funding in Institutional strengthening for R&D Infrastructure and HRD.
3. Agriculture Biotechnology- Perspectives in HP.
4. Perspectives of Industrial Biotechnology in HP.
5. Bioengineering and Nano-Biotechnology.
6. Perspective of Mushroom Biotechnology as an Industry in HP.
7. Potential Areas of Green Biotechnology in HP.
8. Bio resources of HP and its Value Addition through Biotechnology.

After the detailed deliberations and thorough discussions on the Revision of State Biotechnology Policy the following recommendations were emerged to be incorporated in the Revised Policy.

1. The State Policy should be in consonance with the National Policy so that the National agenda is also carried along with the State agenda on Biotechnology. At the same time the policy should not be stand alone kind of policy and it needs to integrate the policies of line departments.
2. The State Land Policy and State Industrial Policy should be meticulously incorporated in the Revised BT Policy. The involvement of Industries is very important because the Policy is basically targeted for Industrial investment in Biotechnology sector in the State.
3. Biosimilars and Bioservices should also be included as core entrepreneurial areas in BT.
4. The role of Government should be limited to facilitation and assistance in execution of schemes related to Biotechnology with a strong Institutional regulation.
5. Instead of Genetic Modification emphasis should be give more on Genetic Improvement. Biosafety issues should also be addressed in the Biotechnology Policy.
6. While consulting the State Education Policy the Syllabi of Biotechnology should be improved as a part of Biotechnology Policy.
7. The concerns of all the Stakeholders in Biotechnology sector in the State should be addressed.
8. To encourage the Human Resource in Biotechnology Sector there should be some Awards/Fellowship etc. for PG students undertaking Biotechnology as career in the State.
9. The Scientists/Research Workers engaged in Biotechnology Research and Development in the State should be encouraged by the State Government as part of BT Policy by instituting some state level Awards.
10. Sufficient provision of fund should be earmarked in BT R&D Sector so that the R&D Ad-Hoc Projects are funded by the State Government for utilising the available Bioresources of the State.
11. There should be a provision of Corpus Fund in Biotechnology in the State in line with that of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh to encourage Biotechnology promotion in the State in terms of investment and skill development.

12. There should be Government support in terms of finance to the Scientists for presentation of their Research Work in National and International Forums from the State in Biotechnology sector.

The Closing ceremony was chaired by the Director, Environment, Science & Technology and in the concluding remarks he assured the Stakeholders that the Revision of the State Biotechnology Policy shall be focussed in all areas of Biotechnology in the State including HRD, R&D, Industries and Regulations. He also envisaged organising such workshops in Baddi for active participation of Industries and in Universities for participation of the Academia in Biotechnology Sector so that we are able to come out with a holistic State Biotechnology Policy after incorporating the views and suggestions of all the Stakeholders in Biotechnology Sector in the State.