

# Saving innovations

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THE issue of a knowledge-based approach to economic development of monetarily deprived people was not on the radar of policy makers in India or abroad. It appeared obvious that the only resource in which poor people were rich was their knowledge (apart from institutions and values).

If this resource was also taken away or exchanged in an unfair manner, nothing much would be left. It became clear that even before the protection of Intellectual

with investments, mentors, design and R&D institutions. GIAN centers and cells have in several parts of India. A GIAN cell functions at Sri Siddhartha Institute of Technology (SSIT), Tumkur.

A large number of innovators wish to share their knowledge, innovations, and practices with the wider society without restriction. The irony is that knowledge holders who share their creativity generously, remain poor because their ethics are superior. The challenge is to uphold their ethics and yet not let them be robbed of their due credit. The concept of Prior



Many grassroots innovators have made good use of IPRs to protect their inventions



Property Rights (IPR) can take place the anonymity of the knowledge providers must be overcome.

In Karnataka, Dr T N Prakash coordinated the Honey Bee network and brought out *Hitalagida* which gave voice and visibility to thousands of unsung heroes and heroines of our society. Initially, SRISTI (Society for Research and Initiatives for Sustainable Technologies and Institutions) provided the institutional support and honoured the innovators and traditional knowledge holders from all over the country.

After establishing the National Innovation Foundation (NIF) in March 2000, this responsibility has partly shifted to the Foundation. GIAN (Grassroots Innovation Augmentation Network) was set up in March 1997 to convert innovations into enterprises and link them

Informed Consent (PIC) has been developed under which an agreement is signed with the innovators so that their knowledge is commercialised or diffused non-commercially as per the conditions imposed by them.

It is natural that a PIC would provide only a general framework of fairness in exchange of knowledge. The legal framework will have to change to incorporate the new ethics in the market place. The incentives for innovations can be in the material or non-material form and can be targeted at individuals or communities.

So far, SRISTI, GIAN and NIF have enabled filing of more than 77 patents, of which six are in US and rest are in India. Three patents have been granted in USA and two have been accepted in India. It is unfortunate that IPO is slower than the

developed countries and also does not have a fast track for grassroots innovators. The Indian Patent Act also suffers from inadequacies when it comes to protecting the rights of the grassroots innovators. The Indian Plant Variety and Farmers Rights Acts (IPVFRA) suffers from ambiguity with regard to the responsibilities of the authority in protecting the rights of farmer breeders.

Having proved that grassroots innovators can carve a niche for themselves in the global market through protection of their IPRs abroad, a lesson has been learnt that Indian creativity has tremendous potential. If the state governments are not cognisant of this potential, it only shows their myopic vision and lack of confidence in the genius of their own people. The Government of India needs to modify its IPR and R&D policies to

- Provide fast track, low transaction cost protection to grassroots innovators and TK holders,
- Recognise the rights of TK holders who have shared thousands of herbal practices in good faith,
- Acknowledge the rights of local communities for sharing their knowledge with other communities without considering it a public domain knowledge
- Bear the cost of developing technical data for protection of farmer bred varieties of crops
- Provide support through public R&D institutions, agricultural universities, ICAR institutes to add value, at their costs, to the innovators as already done by CSIR and being attempted by ICMR
- Subsidise the cost of filing patents in India and abroad.

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