

Enable Make in India to become the new normal

Indian entrepreneurs recalibrated to produce vital supplies to combat Covid-19, showing their potential



The coronavirus disease (Covid-19) crisis has put the whole world on notice. It has highlighted the need for efficient responses to urgently required goods and services. Perhaps never before has there been as much urgency in ensuring the supply of equipment crucial for frontline workers, essential services providers, and the population at large, in such a short time. With the massive demand for personal protection equipment (PPE), surgical and N95 masks, ventilators and testing kits, it has been necessary to look for solutions domestically. And Indian entrepreneurs have stepped up to the plate, and fulfilled the demands through innovation, repurposing, and bolstering the production of essential goods.

This is why, going by the response from Indian companies to the pandemic, there is clear evidence that Make in India can be a driving force. Building on the catalysing effect of this concept, the next step is to provide a dependable regulatory framework, and incentivise similar synergies to allow Make in India across sectors become the new normal.

As evident from the successes in the health sector, Indian companies and entrepreneurs can recalibrate, repurpose and become world beaters.

The manner in which vitally important supplies to combat Covid-19 was made available is a testament to the potential of Make in India. India required 75,000 ventilators, of which just under 61,000 needed to be ordered. Nine domestic manufacturers were chosen to supply almost 60,000 of those, with just one importer being selected for the remaining 1,000. Of the domestic suppliers, Sanray Technologies and Bharat Electronics were chosen for 30,000 ventilators, while AMTZ and AgVa each for the supply of 13,500 and 10,000 respectively. A similar situation is being witnessed in PPEs, where for a total requirement of over 20 million PPEs, 35 domestic manufacturers have stepped up to fulfil the demand, supplying 13 million PPEs. The domestic manufacturing of PPEs has grown exponentially. For masks, of the 27.2 million required, three domestic manufacturers are providing 12.8 million. The production of domestically manufactured testing kits, both reverse transcription-polymerase chain reaction and rapid antibody testing, has been ramped up. This capability will enhance India's daily testing capability. Overall, these are huge opportunities for Indian companies to prove their mettle.

Indian companies are also at the front-line of developing a vaccine for Covid-19. Between six to eight Indian companies have reached the development phase.

Zydus Cadila is said to be working on two vaccines, while Serum Institute, Biological E, Bharat Biotech, Indian Immunologicals, and Mynvax are also in the process of developing a vaccine. Biocon, a leading Indian biopharmaceutical company, is developing two new generation repurposed drugs for treatment and an antibody diagnostic kit. It is also working on a vaccine project with Seagull Biosolutions.

Several entrepreneurs have made inroads in helping fight the pandemic.

Biodesign Innovations Labs, which makes automated versions of low-cost manual ventilators, tied up with Remidio, a manufacturer of ophthalmological devices to ramp up production from 400 ventilators per month to 15,000 over the next couple of months. AgVa Healthcare tied up with Maruti Suzuki in a collaboration arrangement to develop ventilators, and potentially make 20,000 ventilators a month, up from its earlier production of 300 per month.

Saral Designs repurposed from making sanitary napkins to manufacturing three-ply surgical masks, and in collaboration with the Mahindra Group, has raised production to 30,000 masks per day that they are sending to state governments through Mahindra's Corporate Social Responsibility programme. Qure.ai, has used Artificial Intelligence (AI) and machine learning to develop a solution through screening chest X-rays for abnormalities in seconds, through door-to-door testing, acting as the first point of reference on who needs to be tested for Covid-19.

StaQu Technologies, an AI-based contactless monitoring application, has a built-in provision for thermal cameras which can take body temperature from a distance of up to 10 metres. Asimov Robotics has introduced the "Karmi-bot", a robot intended for isolation wards in hospitals, with the ability to carry medicines and food trays and conduct video calls with caregivers, among other essential features.

And these are just a few of the innovators who are taking the fight to the pandemic.

The collaboration between India's best corporate entities and the brightest young start-up entrepreneurs during one of the world's most critical periods is arguably one of the most positive takeaways for India's future as a global powerhouse. India's focus on fostering and supporting the startup ecosystem is a vital input towards becoming a \$5 trillion economy. Collaboration, innovation, and the ability to recalibrate and repurpose bodes well for Make in India to be accelerated. If the results are so encouraging in the health sector, then with adequate support and a robust regulatory framework, this can be replicated across most sectors, helping India become self-sufficient and the nerve centre for growth and capability. There is no better time than now for this movement to take off.

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The views expressed are personal*