

NGOs, experts to hold national consultation on generic drug production and challenges

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A number of public interest groups and health activists will hold a two-day national consultation here from December 6 on 'Generic drug production and access to medicines: Current challenges' and prepare a roadmap to ensure affordability and accessibility of drugs in the country.

Centre for Trade and Development (Centad), along with Delhi Science Forum (DSF), Third World Network (TWN), and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF-Access Campaign India) and with the financial support of UNDP, India office, is organizing the consultation, to be attended by prominent activists, industry leaders and government officials.

India is the 3rd largest producer of medicines in the world. The continued production of generic medicines in India is crucial in addressing the needs of a very large number of people, not just in India, but across the world. Patients, especially poor patients in a majority of developing countries, depend on medicines produced in India, according to a release by the organisers.

The generic industry in India faces multiple challenges, many of which have their genesis in changes in the global Intellectual Property regime and trade related treaties. The signing of the Agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights in 1994 was a major challenge to Indian generic companies, who were denied the favourable domestic environment provided by the 1970 Indian Patent Act. India was forced to sign the TRIPS Agreement as a condition of its membership in the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Fortunately, India was one of the few countries that made use of the full 10 year transition period offered by the TRIPs Agreement. Substantive changes in the Indian Patent Act, thus came into effect only in 2005, it said.

“The momentum provided by the protection available to Indian companies, in the 1970 Patents Act, was able to support generic medicines production well beyond 2005. However we are now starting to witness several developments that have the potential to jeopardize generic drug production in India. Prominent among recent trends is the spate of acquisitions of Indian companies by Multinational Corporations (MNCs). Several top Indian companies have been acquired by MNCs, and several others are understood to be in the process of being taken over. These are, by no means isolated developments, but constitute a response to structural changes that are now starting to take place in the pharmaceutical sector,” the release said.