

37.

ROLE OF THE NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION (NSF) IN SOIL BIODIVERSITY RESEARCH IN SRI LANKA

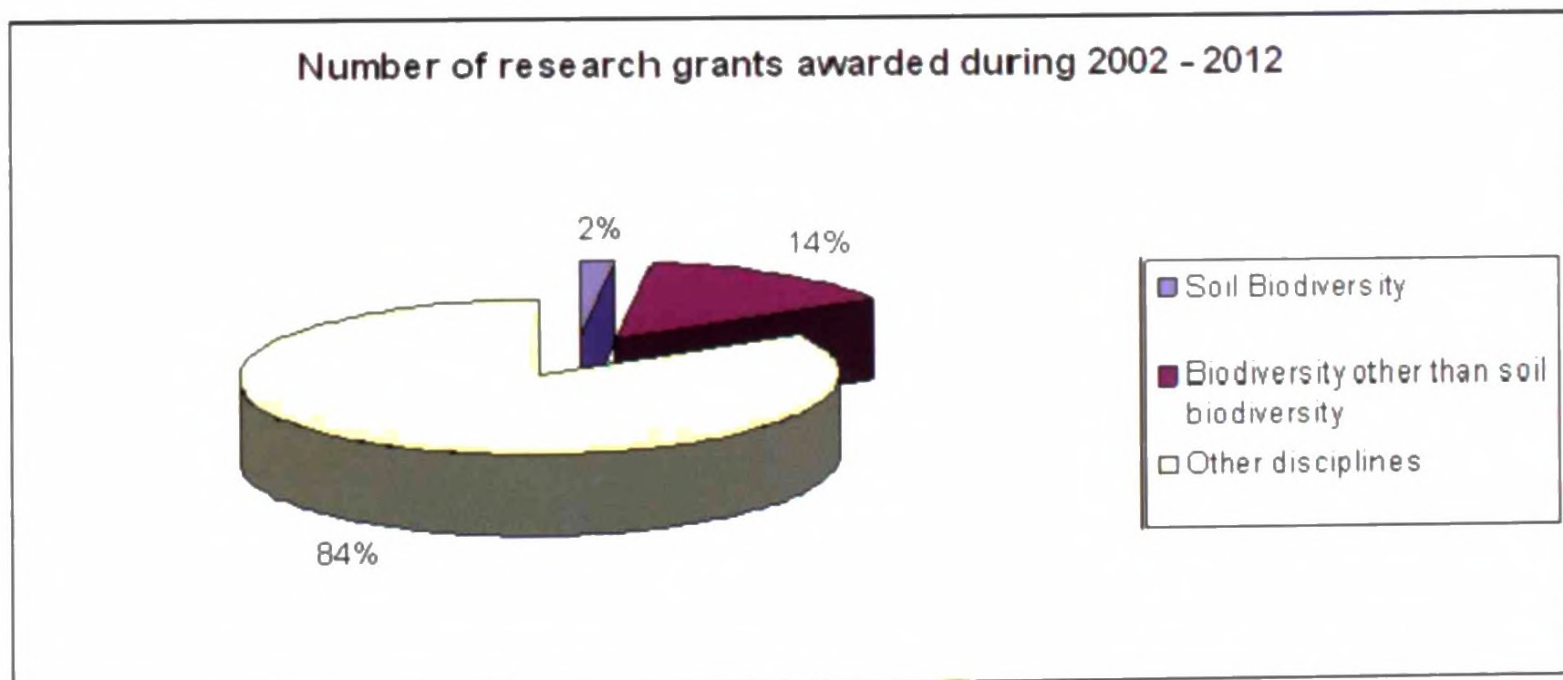
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Soil encompasses enormous numbers of diverse living organisms from microorganisms to small mammals. These organisms form an important fraction of terrestrial biodiversity. Furthermore, soil biota play fundamental roles in providing essential ecosystem goods and services such as food production, water filtration, nutrient cycling, and soil structure maintenance *etc.* These services are critical to the sustainability of all ecosystems and the well-being of human societies.

The National Science Foundation (NSF), successor to the National Science Council and the Natural Resources, Energy and Science Authority, has been the premier research funding organization in Sri Lanka for the past 45 years. Since inception, 1987 research grants have been awarded to researchers and academics in universities and research institutes to carry out research in all fields of Science and Technology in Sri Lanka. Out of these research grants, only 27 have been awarded for research relating to soil biodiversity.

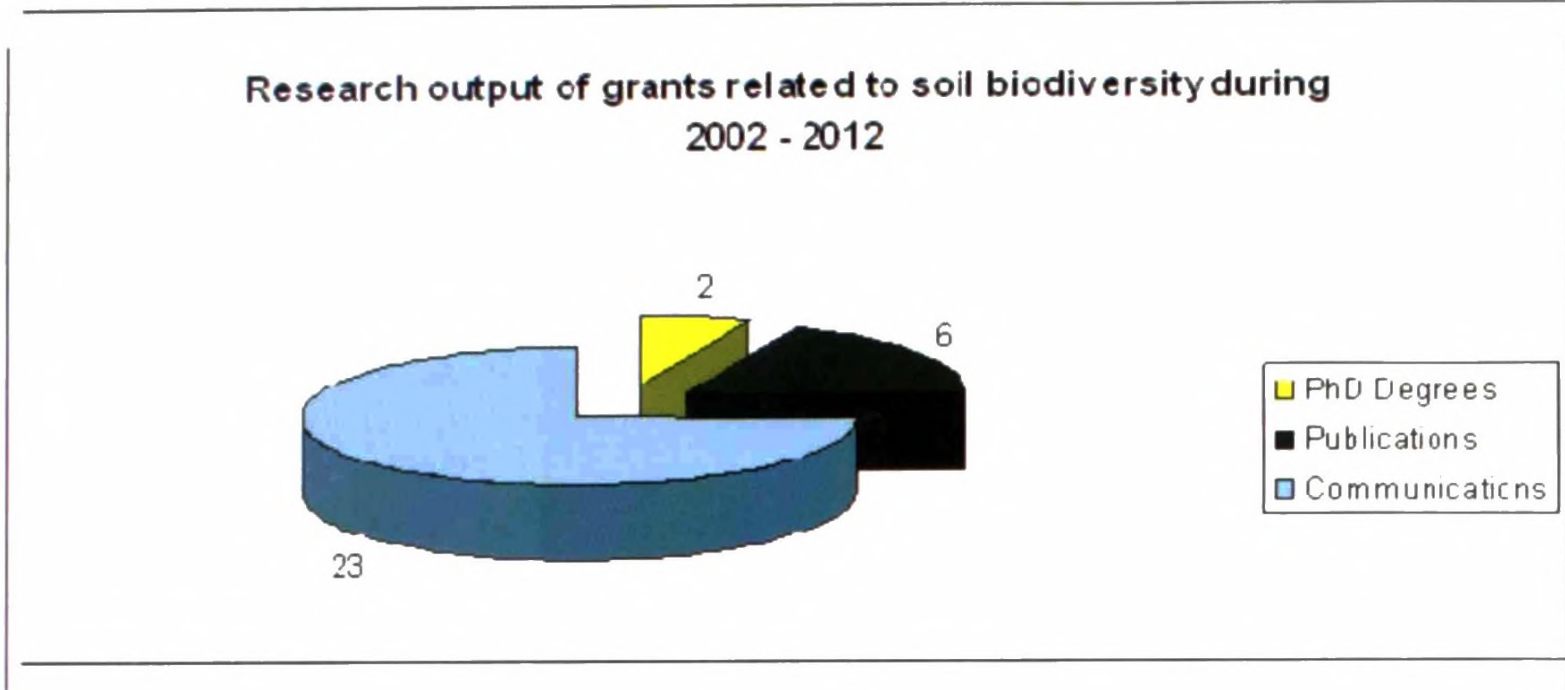
These grants have led to career advancement of these researchers, and capacity building and human resource development through the award of postgraduate research degrees to young scientists. Further, new knowledge generated through the research activities has been disseminated through publications in local and international journals and presentations at various fora.

During the period 2002-2012, the NSF has awarded 412 grants out of which 67 (16%) grants have been for research related to biodiversity. However, as seen from the following graph, only eight grants (2%) have been awarded for research on soil biodiversity during this period.



Of these eight grants relating to soil biodiversity, six grants have been completed and have led to the award of two PhD degrees and publication of five research papers in international journals and 23 communications in local and international fora. Further, an annotated checklist has also been published.

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In conclusion it can be recommended that considering the importance of soil biodiversity to the sustainable function of all ecosystems, Sri Lankan researchers and academics pay more attention to research and developmental activities in this area of research.