

An analysis of the report on scientific publications by the presidential advisor on science: Lessons for Sri Lankan Universities

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The Office of the Presidential Advisor on Science has formally tracked the output of seminal publications from Sri Lankan institutions during the past 10 years. We report here an analysis of the report and its implications to and lessons for Sri Lankan science.

Our study shows that Sri Lankan publications have not grown in number or significance despite the government's advocacy of research through the Presidential Reforms, except at the Institute of Fundamental Studies. The universities have broadly failed to increase research output despite new point schemes for professorial appointments and the enunciation of university reforms policy, both around 1997 emphasizing publications. Further analysis shows that foreign collaboration plays an important role in many of the few publications reported from Sri Lankan universities. A perusal of editorial boards of local journals and the membership of the National Academy of Sciences shows few of the strong Sri Lankan researchers as have won a place in the Science Advisor's report being recognized through office or honours. A parallel analysis of the National Science Foundation's reports on their funded research shows that few of the seminal publications in the Science Advisor's report have come out of NSF-funded projects.

Comparing university experience with the IFS's, we suggest that risky employment at higher salaries works with enlightened scientists who do not fear arbitrariness from their management and, together with their management, are committed to their work. The IFS experiment shows that Sri Lankan scientists are capable of producing if the right system and atmosphere are there. (In a companion paper we describe the right infrastructure for being productive in research). The data in the report argues for a system of tenure through strict evaluation based on indices that cannot be manipulated so that no employee need fear arbitrariness. Towards this end, we advocate using the Science Advisor's report as an ongoing basis for promotions, research awards and increments.

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