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Characteristics of the individual inventors in Sri Lanka: A case study of inventors' data maintained by the National Science Foundation of Sri Lanka

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Inventions are of great economic importance to a nation because they often result in new or improved products, more efficient manufacturing processes, or entirely new industries. Inventions are developed by the institutions, firms or individuals. In the present study, an attempt was made to use the information of inventors available in the inventors' database maintained by National Science Foundation of Sri Lanka to identify the significant characteristics and dynamics of individual inventors of the country. The available information of 83 inventors in the database from year 2000 onwards, excluding school students was used for the study and data were analyzed separately for the year in which the invention was developed.

The study indicated that during the period 2000 to 2003, almost all the inventors had been males. Also, over 50 % of the inventors were above 40 years of age, except for year 2002. The majority of the inventors was from the Western Province which represented nearly 50 % of the total number of inventors during all the years in the considered period followed by the Southern Province and the Central Province respectively. The highest educational qualifications of majority of the inventors were below G.C.E. Advanced Level plus a Diploma or below, while the proportion of inventors with a basic degree and above were not very prominent. A high variation in invention types was evident in the considered period. However, industrial equipment and processes were the predominant invention type in the considered years. The study revealed that the majority of the inventions was patented. There was a significant association between age group and patent status ($p=0.028$) and most inventions that did not have the patents were developed by the age category below 20 yrs. As per the inventors' personal views, government intervention is necessary to provide financial and technical assistance to commercialize their inventions.

The study revealed that contribution from women and those who are below 40 years of age was very low in developing inventions. The role of graduates in inventions also seems unsatisfactory. The higher variations in invention types observed over the considered years highlights a policy insight that inventors should be given financial and technical support by relevant authorities to encourage the inventions that are more focused on immediate national priorities (i.e. agriculture), but not on their individual interests.

Keywords: Science & Technology, inventors, patents