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Commercial exploitation of university inventions: A Sri Lankan perspective

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With the global transformation of national economies towards innovation driven economy, the role of knowledge generating centres has become pivotal with regard to production of new knowledge, products and processes. In response to this phenomenon, universities have moved from its traditional missions of education and research to a higher mission of commercializing research outputs emanating from university Research and Development. A number of patents granted to universities could be considered as a measurable output indicator that determines the extent of university contribution to research and technological development. The study shows that the degree of success of commercial exploitation and transfer of technologies depend on factors and actors that hinder/promote industrial utilization of academic inventions.

A lesser number of patent share of 4.2% by Sri Lankan universities for the period from 2001-2009 implies the necessity of taking a paradigm shift in the university system to transfer the new knowledge/technology generated to industry by exploiting intellectual property. Dominance of patents emanated from Natural Science disciplines (Chemistry, Zoology, Botany) is observed (51.7%) compared to applied science disciplines and 60% of these were related to chemistry. Inventions related to agriculture related disciplines account for 17.2 % of the total patents granted to universities. The distribution pattern of inventions among universities reveals that University of Kelaniya contributes to a higher number of patents, which accounts for 27.5% of total patents granted. Further studies show that those inventions were at different stages of development; prototype development, scaling up, commercial production, market introduction or successful products/services in the market. There were inventions with no further development also. The inventions that entered into the market or market introduction stage were the results of collaborative work with the industry.

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