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Status of research projects and sponsorships for research in Sri Lanka: A preliminary study

Seetha I Wickremasinghe, M U M Anis, and Lasantha Weerasooriya

S & T Policy Research Division, National Science Foundation, 47/5, Colombo 07

Research and development grants to scientists in Sri Lanka are available through various sources belonging to government, non-government, industrial as well as the private sector. The objectives of this study were, a) to identify the strengths and limitations of research conducted by R&D scientists, and, b) to recognize the limitations of the research grant systems in the country. This study focused on research projects funded by both local and international funding agencies other than the National Science Foundation (NSF). The study was conducted from December, 2010 to November, 2011. Data were collected through a mail survey from a random sample of scientists registered with the national database of Science and Technology Management Information Systems (STMIS) maintained by the Science and Technology Policy Research Division of the National Science Foundation (NSF). The response rate was 31.17% (out of 170 research projects).

Agricultural sciences and biological sciences account for more than 50% of all research projects. 87% of the respondents have applied for research grants from multiple funding sources. 90% of the researchers are above 41 years. About 1/3 of researchers who had applied for grants indicated that grant amounts are inadequate. Limitations in total funds available and the large number of applicants is a reason for the inadequacy of funds given by the universities. Inadequacy of funds experienced during the period when the research was conducted has reduced the quality of the research and the enthusiasm of the researcher as well. Only seventeen research projects were extended while thirty six projects have been stopped without any further consideration. When considering research outputs, only research papers were published but none of the fifty three research projects had qualified to obtain patents for their research outputs. Out of the total number of projects, 85% of the research projects resulted in national or international publications while 13% of the projects did not have any type of publication. The finding of this research can be used to improve the local research grant schemes to be more effective ensuring good outputs and outcomes of local research studies.