

## Enhancing Professionalism in Social Sciences for National Development

*transcribed plenary speech of*

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This presentation is going to discuss three areas in Social Sciences. The first one is the critical importance of Social Sciences in national development. Second point is the condition of right kind of professionalism is a prerequisite for mobilizing national development. Not all professionalism is good and there is a down side of professionalism which will be discussed during this session later. Thirdly how to establish the right kind of professionalism in Social Science for training, career development, research funding, and public recognition of Social Sciences. When we take Sri Lanka is in post disaster situation where social science needs to understand what it can do to take the society to the right track. Social Science has a big role to understanding and shaping up respondents to several emerging issues like economic and social development, social harmony, social justice and poverty reduction, post-war reconciliation and good governance. Secondly Social Sciences also has a big role to play in understanding and shaping responses to general issues like epidemic of non-communicable diseases largely attributed to behaviour of people what we eat, what we do and what we don't do. Therefore Social Sciences has a great responsibility to respond to these matters. Our prisons are filled with prisoners convicted of alcohol and drug related offences. Also we experience a crime wave and there is a huge environmental issue, deforestation, elephant-human conflicts are required policies which address these issues in effective and efficient manner.

Inputs from Social Sciences are basically social scientists should do objective assessments, factual interpretations and analysis which underline social causes on various social issues. Also we will need detached definitions because sometimes we are unable to understand in the implementation of the social reality in full complexity. Therefore you need to go back and try to understand from a little distance. We need to have a critical approach and applied orientation in Social Science to address, solve and remedy the problems in society.

Social Scientists can be researchers, consultants, activists, and teachers and so on. Social Science has a fairly critical perspective on profession and professionalism. It teaches to understand the limitations

related to professionalism. This explains three characteristics in profession as specialised training in a particular field, public recognition of certain autonomy on the part of practitioners to have their own standards, commitment to provide service to the public which goes beyond the economic benefit of the practitioners. Professionalization relates to the definition of a process which trains or occupation transforms itself into two professions of highest integrity and competence. Therefore it talks about qualifications. There are good side of professionalism and down side of professionalism. Well known figures in Social Sciences Durkaym, Tony, Marshall and Talcott Parsel have highlighted the fact that there is a moral foundation to a profession. Service orientation as the key aspect of professionalism in other words, something goes beyond rules, commitment and service orientation. Professionalism is bad when it creates closure like some professionals try to monopolize something. And professional jargons create a barrier between practitioners and the public. In our country, Social Science often becomes an appendage of technical fields like medicine without realising their full potential. Characteristics of a professional include ethics, integrity, honesty and respectability. When it comes to right kind of professionalism, there are two sets as the first one gives the professional competencies and skills meanwhile the second list gives the values and orientation that a profession should have. Therefore in the first list objectivity, value based, evidence judgement, application of knowledge are explained.

Our main task is how to inculcate proper values in professionalism such as ability to stand for parallelism, High degree of commitment for national development, Altruism orientation, concern for the underprivileged, avoid extremities accountable to the institution as well as public. Finally what needs to be done in professionalism as previously mentioned, training, professional guidance and research funding. Training is very important when it comes to community service. We need actual professional bodies that are not only concern about profits to the organization but also deliver the services expected. Enhancing professionalism means to have a right approach with debate and dialogue to

become public intellectual. We need historically grounded approaches balance between theory and practice, right mix of quantitative and qualitative research skills and interdisciplinary approaches. Ultimately for professionalizing Social Sciences, need

local research funding which influence research priorities in a way which benefits the society.