

PANEL DISCUSSION

International Collaboration for Enhancing Social Science Research and Innovation for National Social Development

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In the recent decades Sri Lankans have grappled with a range of social issues and problems. Increasing levels of urban, estate, and rural sector poverty and vulnerability, adverse effects of climate change including displacement and relocation of thousands due to floods and landslides, reduction of habitable spaces, widening gap between the rich and the poor, hidden single parent families, the institutionalization, commercial exploitation, and online violence against children, drug addiction and alcoholism, the onset of biological hazards such as COVID-19 and Dengue, and open dumping of municipal solid waste and collapsing of open dumping sites, are few such issues and problems. Only when the difficult task of mitigating the negative impacts of these problems and issues are tackled, can development be truly sustainable. It is the duty of applied social researchers to engage in scientific research to identify root causes of such issues and problems and recommend people-centered, evidence-based policies to tackle them. Furthermore, they are responsible for designing and implementing relevant intervention programs in the short-and-long-run to minimize or eradicate such problems and issues. Social Scientists are also responsible for exploring whether Sri Lanka is on track to achieve the targets set under Sustainable Development Goals and SENDAI Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction by 2030. Collaborations have always been a natural part of academic life, but within the context of an increasingly globalized research environment, the ability to link into and build international collaborations becomes important. Strengthening research collaboration is important to meet national and the larger global challenges confronting sciences, such as climate change, as well as attracting and retaining links with the best scientific talent. The outcomes of nationally important research projects can assist the process of securing livelihoods of the poor and the vulnerable and aid the social development of the people. It is against this background that this presentation will showcase current levels of International Collaborations (ICs), the benefits of such collaborations, barriers to ICs, and government and institutional support for ICs. To this end, the researcher has used data collected under the Advancing Skill Creation to Enhance Transformation (ASCENT) research project partially funded by EU Erasmus+. Findings reveal that there are only a few initiatives within Sri Lankan Higher Education Institutes to create international research collaborations in the social sciences. Findings also suggest that the aim of international collaborations of academics is to improve research and innovation, and not just individual or personal benefits. The study also found financial issues, bureaucratic issues, lack of resources, and lack of institutional support for ICs as barriers to collaborative international research projects related to social sciences.

About the Panelist



Nishara Fernando is a Professor in Sociology attached to the Department of Sociology at the University of Colombo, Sri Lanka. He has been an academic for 24 years since 1999. Professor Fernando is a former Head of Department of Sociology (2016-2019) and served as the Director of the Social Policy Analysis and Research Center (SPARC) at the Faculty of Arts, University of Colombo, from 2015 to 2021. He earned his Bachelor's degree in Sociology and a Master of Philosophy Degree in Sociology from the University of Colombo, and a Postgraduate Diploma in Sociology from the University of La Trobe, Australia. He obtained his PhD from the University of

Bonn, Germany. His expertise encompasses a profound engagement with urban studies, particularly focusing on urban vulnerable groups and the intricacies of disaster-and-development-induced forced relocation.

Professor Fernando was honored with the President's Award for Scientific Research in 2018. Throughout his 25 years of service, Professor Fernando has made significant contributions as a principal investigator and country lead for numerous international sociological and multi-disciplinary research projects. These projects were funded by organizations such as ERASMUS+, the Swiss National Science Foundation, UKGCRF, GIZ, IOM, ILO, The World Bank, Save the Children, the Bill Gates Foundation, and SOS Children's Village, among others. He currently holds the position of Senior Research Fellow at the National Centre for Advanced Studies (NCAS) in Sri Lanka.

Political Apathy of the Citizen Impact on the Decline of the Voting Behavior of the Voters

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Term politics is attractive in everyday human social life. On the other hand, Politics is one of the kinds of Art in human society. For a sound political environment, active political participation of the citizens is a compulsory condition. Active political participation will demonstrate by the electoral process of the given political society. Sri Lankan political context is Fairly good for the active citizen Participation in the electoral process in the last three decades. Yet, recent trends have emphasized in that electoral process, a considerable amount of the citizens of this country have not demonstrated their political loyalty and encouragement for utilizing their voting rights at the main electoral process why? The main purpose of this investigation is to find out the core reasons behind the people's political apathy towards the inactivity of their political activities in the electoral process. This research mainly depends on both qualitative and quantitative approaches, and both research methods will be applied to gather data and information. Due to many reasons people's loyalty and motivation for politics have declined. There are many reasons such as existing spoiled political culture and the practices of the politicians and their political statements directly impact people's political behavior. The lack of political accountability and Popular actions of the politicians hurt the citizens' political behavior. Gradually, people have been rejecting politicians and their political parties from their traditional political thinking. Therefore, nowadays politicians and their thinking patterns cannot adjust according to people's thinking and expectations. People have been suffering apathy in politics and have replying to this strong response in the electoral process without utilizing their voting rights for the politics.

About the Panelist



Professor Shantha Gamlath is a highly accomplished academic with extensive expertise in Political Science and International Relations. With a research focus spanning Public Policy, Public Administration, Public Management, Democracy, International Relations, Religion and Politics, Local Governance, and Political Sociology. He earned a Bachelor's degree in Political Science with Second Class Upper Division honors from the University of Colombo, where his foundational understanding of political systems was shaped. Building on this, he completed a Master's degree in International Relations at the same institution in 2004, further enhancing his grasp of global political dynamics. In 2017, he completed doctoral studies at Huazhong University of Science & Technology (HUST) in Wuhan, China, specializing in Public Administration with a focus on Administrative Management. Currently serving as a Professor of Political Science, he is known for a dynamic approach to teaching and research, blending theoretical insights with practical applications. His work addresses key issues in democracy, governance, and international relations, contributing to both academic discourse and policy development.

Role of Humanities and Social Sciences in improving the wellbeing

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Advancing socio-economic research for national development is paramount important in fostering societal progress and addressing contemporary challenges in the economy. To that end, it is imperative to integrate insights from history, sociology, psychology, political science, and other social science disciplines to enhance national policies and programs. The humanities and social sciences offer a deeper understanding of cultural dynamics, social behaviors, and ethical considerations, enabling policymakers to create informed, inclusive strategies. Research in these areas can illuminate the complexities of human interaction, inform educational reforms, and promote social justice, thereby contributing to a more equitable society. In particular, advancing research in socio-economic fields can help tackle pressing issues such as public debt, corruptions, poverty, inequality, and economic crises. By employing qualitative and quantitative methods, researchers can analyze the root causes of these challenges, assess the effectiveness of existing interventions, and propose innovative solutions. Collaborative efforts between academia, government, and civil society can amplify the impact of research findings, ensuring that they translate into actionable policies. Investing in socio-economic research not only enriches national development but also fosters critical thinking among citizens which has become pre-requisite to carry out much needed reforms in the economy. It cultivates a more informed public that is better equipped to engage with democratic processes and contribute to community resilience. Nevertheless, the existing practice has been far below the expectations. Humanities and social science research agenda has limited address the research needs of both private and public sector in Sri Lanka. It is time for researchers and academia working in the fields of humanities and social sciences in the university system to work closely with both private and public sector in identifying research needs and align the humanities and social sciences research agenda with the national development.

About the Panelist



Dr. Priyanga Dunusinghe is a Professor in Economics in the Department of Economics, and Head – Department of Information Technology, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka. He has teaching, research, training, and consultancy experience for about 20 years. His areas of teaching are Econometrics, Statistics, Quantitative Techniques, Financial Institutions, Development Economics, and International Trade & Finance. His areas of research interest are macroeconomic policies; growth and development including agriculture, financial markets, poverty, labour, public

debt, education and international trade & investment. Dr. Dunusinghe has also worked as a Consultant to the United Nations (UN) Food and Agriculture Organization, World Bank, European Union, Asian Development Bank, International Labour Organization, UN Conference on Trade and Development and to the Government of Sri Lanka's Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Industries, Ministry of Labour, and Ministry of Agriculture. He has published several research articles in various prestigious journals and won a number of research awards. He is also a regular contributor to both printed and electronic media. *Advancing Humanities and Social Sciences Research for National Development*.

Role of Humanities and Social Sciences research in addressing population issues and sustainable development in Sri Lanka

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Today, we live in a globalized world with 8.2 billion people and many societies experience multiple issues and challenges which cannot be resolved within the natural sciences alone, but understanding the root causes and addressing them in sustainable manner will require input from scholars in the humanities and social sciences. Social scientists and humanity scholars study people and their diverse behaviours including social, psychological, economic, political, historical, cultural and many more dimensions and attributes that shape these population issues and challenges in different contexts. Sri Lanka being a small island with about 22 million population and multicultural society, it is highly challenging to achieving the United Nations 2030 development agenda-17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) in its three dimensions: economic, social and environmental. In 2021, Sri Lanka ranked 87th of 165 countries in the SDG index. From a demographic perspective, population processes, for instance, fertility, mortality and net migration, affect changes in population size, growth, structure and distribution, and all of them have important implications for sustainable development. Humanities and Social Sciences research could play a significant role in enriching our understanding of population issues. Evidence-based research is needed in facilitating people-centric policies and that are key to mitigating population dynamics related issues, inequalities and vulnerabilities, while achieving macroeconomic stability, promoting human wellbeing, utilizing humans' full potential, and raising living standards. In this discussion, cross-sectional data from national censuses, surveys and literature reviews, are used to examine demographic transition-related development challenges. In addition, the past, present and future, demographic scenarios, are shown to highlight the importance of humanities and social sciences research in addressing national and subnational level population issues. It is argued that research insights driven development measures are vital to discover issues and challenges faced by diverse population groups namely, children, youth, working adults and older adults in Sri Lanka. In conclusion, advancing multidisciplinary collaborative research and developing linkages between researchers and policy makers are needed for developing mitigation and adaptation measures in response to demographic change in different stages of transition that are vital in addressing population and sustainable development challenges to ensure no one is left out at all levels.

About the Panelist



Dr. E. L. Sunethra J. Perera is the Professor (Chair) of Demography at the Department of Demography, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka. Her research focuses on population ageing, international migration, internal migration and urbanization, population health, gender and fertility dynamics in Sri Lanka. Her collaborative research work with the Asian region has been published in international volumes as book chapters, journal articles, and reports. She received the Senate Award for research excellence in 2017 from the University of Colombo. Her contribution on population census data analysis to the Department of Census and Statistics (DCS) and UNFPA on thematic areas such as ‘internal and international migration’ and ‘ageing population of Sri Lanka’ is noteworthy. She serves as the President of the Population Association of Sri Lanka (PASL). She obtained her PhD in Demography from Mahidol University, Thailand, and her Masters and Bachelor from the University of Colombo, Sri Lanka.

World Bank’s Country Partnership Framework for Sri Lanka

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The World Bank Group’s Board of Executive Directors have discussed the new Country Partnership Framework for Sri Lanka which aims to help restore economic and financial sector stability and build a strong foundation for a green, resilient, and inclusive recovery. This CPF comes at a time when the country is navigating a severe economic crisis that is having devastating impacts on people’s lives and livelihoods and which demands deep reforms to stabilize the economy and protect the poor and vulnerable. Sri Lanka’s poverty rate is estimated to have doubled from 13.1 to 25 percent between 2021 and 2022—an addition of 2.5 million poor people—and is projected to increase by another 2.4 percentage points in 2023.

Of the critical points, the Environmental and Social Framework (ESF) was approved by the Board of Executive Directors on August 4, 2016. It consists of a Vision for Sustainable Development; ten Environmental and Social Standards (ESSs), which set out the requirements that apply to Borrowers; an Environmental and Social Policy for Investment Project Financing (IPF), which sets out the requirements that apply to the Bank; and an Environmental and Social Directive/Procedure for Investment Project Financing (IPF) and a Directive on Addressing Risks and Impacts on Disadvantaged or Vulnerable Individuals or Groups. It applies to all IPF projects initiated on or after October 1, 2018.

Further, it approved the Social Sustainability and Inclusion that reflects the World Bank’s commitment to addressing long standing barriers to development, strengthening the focus on people who have been excluded from economic and social opportunities, and increasing investment in inclusive growth. We support our client countries to build socially sustainable communities and societies that are able to work together to overcome challenges, deliver public goods, and allocate scarce resources in a manner perceived as legitimate and fair by all, so that all people may thrive over time. These includes **how technology can support current operations financed by the World Bank.**

About the Panelist



Shanek Fernando has nearly 20 years of experience working on major development projects in Sri Lanka and the Maldives with organizations such as the World Bank, UNICEF, and UNDP, as well as various diplomatic missions and international development agencies, including the European Union, Government of Norway, Australian Aid, Canadian International Development Agency, World Vision-USA, Christian Children's Fund of Canada, Tearfund-UK, and Geneva Global-USA. Shanek's technical expertise includes project design &

management, social development, social risk assessment, implementation of complex resettlement interventions and recovery projects in emergency contexts such as tsunamis, post-war, COVID-19, and economic crises. He has multi-sectoral experience in agriculture, water and sanitation, dam rehabilitation, education, urban development, health and social protection. He holds an M.Phil. in Development Studies from the University of Cambridge, UK, and a B.Sc. in Computer Science from Norwich University, USA.