

EDITORIAL

Science communication

Science and technology are important and relevant in our daily lives and play a very significant role in society, by providing lasting solutions to the problems faced by society both on governance and technical issues. Decision making at all levels needs to be based on scientific methodology and information.

For these solutions to become a reality, the scientists and technologists of the country have to play leading roles. Society has to understand, appreciate and support science and scientists who work towards achieving scientific solutions for societal problems. Societal support for science will become a reality when scientists successfully communicate their research findings to people and policy makers, particularly on issues that affect the society at large. Currently, there seems to be a communication gap in this respect. This major challenge has to be overcome for our society to go forward. How can this be achieved?

The answer lies in proper science education where the skill of science communication is instilled in all school children. Today's scientists including university academics successfully communicate their findings to fellow scientists mostly as publications in reputed scientific journals. This is no doubt essential. However, it is doubtful as to whether this most important information reaches the people and policy makers. It is essential for this information to reach people as well as policy makers who can apply this scientific knowledge to solve problems the country faces.

Successful scientists have mastered many scientific skills. However, the skill of science communication is not one of them. As a result, their knowledge does not reach the people. It is the scientists' responsibility to reach the people through mass media in all languages, particularly in Sinhala and Tamil. The few scientists who endeavour to reach the people do not appear to get adequate support from both the print and electronic media. The country's media should give more importance for disseminating scientific information enabling the general public as well as school children to benefit from the efforts of our scientists.

The gap in science communication can be overcome partly by the media organisations having staff with special skills in science communication enabling them to regularly include feature programmes to disseminate science information in collaboration with scientists. In addition, the universities and scientific institutions as well as learned scientific societies can assist in this endeavour by having their own publicity units with the responsibility of conveying significant findings of their scientists to the people and policy makers.

Media appears to give high priority for disseminating news on the current political situation in the country, particularly by obtaining views directly from politicians. It is highly desirable if similar importance is given to get views from scientists on topics relevant to the society.

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