

---

## EDITORIAL

### Public trust in science and scientists

Evidence based decision making on most matters of public interest concerned with the welfare of the public require the application of scientific knowledge. It is reasonable to suppose that the extent to which policy makers base their decisions on scientific evidence, will be influenced by the apparent extent of public trust in science. In the absence of such trust, policy makers are more likely to be influenced by personal bias and by other factors of a socio-political nature.

Research carried out suggests that in most countries there is considerable public trust in science. However, this is often not explicitly expressed nor are there easy pathways to make policy makers aware of this. It should be noted that trust in science is the not the same as trust in scientists. Scientists, particularly those who take up

advocacy positions on contentious local issues will be trusted on whether they are perceived to be acting in the interest of the public or in their own interest. In the current context of ease of disinformation through the internet and social media, individual scientists are vulnerable to unfair judgement. Thus, collective advocacy by professional and academic associations are much more likely to be trusted by the public.

In this connection, it is noteworthy that the National Academy of Sciences Sri Lanka has recently launched an ambitious, multifaceted programme in collaboration with the Sri Lanka Association for the Advancement of Science on “Rebuilding Trust in Science”. The fact that the programme is supported by the private sector is a particularly encouraging development for Sri Lanka.

**Ajit Abeysekera**