**Lecture Three: The Disciplines of Social Sciences**

Social science looks at a wide range of things/issues that affect or are affected by people and society. Some examples of things/issues that social science might study are:

• How economic change affects people differently. For example, a company might want to build a new factory. Some people might sell their land to the company to become rich. Other people would have to work at the factory instead of being farmers.

• How decisions about development affect the environment and people. For example, a plan to build a new factory in a town might bring jobs but it might also pollute the local river. The pollution will damage the livelihoods of local fishing communities.

• How religion or culture affects politics. For example, some people might not allow people from other religions or cultures to be involved in politics or become political leaders in the community.

Social science encompasses a wide array of [academic disciplines](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Academic_discipline). Some of the main ones include sociology, economics, psychology, geography, political science, development, environmental studies, public health…

1. [**Sociology**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sociology)**:** the systematic study of society, individuals' relationship to their societies, the consequences of difference, and other aspects of human [social action](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_action). Sociologists assume that behaviour is influenced by people’s social, political, occupational, and intellectual groupings and by the particular settings in which they find themselves at one time or another.

**2. Economics:** the study of the production, distribution, buying and selling of goods and services. It is also defined as "the study of how people seek to satisfy needs and wants" and "the study of the financial aspects of human behaviour". Economics has two broad branches: [microeconomics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Microeconomics), where the unit of analysis is the individual agent, such as a household or firm, and [macroeconomics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Macroeconomics), where the unit of analysis is an economy as a whole.

**3. Psychology:** the study of the human mind. Psychology also refers to the application of such knowledge to various spheres of human activity, including problems of individuals' [daily lives](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Everyday_life) and the treatment of [mental illness](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mental_illness). Psychology is a social science because humans are social creatures. It focuses on the individual and physical processes, such as: biological structure, development and maturation. Out of the various branches of psychology, the most relevant to social science is social psychology, which studies individual’s behaviour as it influences and is influenced by the behaviour of others. Some specific topics that interest psychologists and social psychologists are socialization, environment and heredity, and adjustment and maladjustment. Psychology deals with natural phenomena such as emotion, memory, perception, and intelligence.

**4. Geography:** the study of the natural environment and how it influences social and cultural development. Some of the concerns of geography are ecology, climate, resources, accessibility and demography. It can be split broadly into two main sub fields: [human geography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_geography) and [physical geography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Physical_geography). The former focuses largely on the built environment and how space is created, viewed and managed by humans as well as the influence humans have on the space they occupy. This may involve [cultural geography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_geography), [transportation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transportation_geography), [health](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Health_geography), [military operations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_geography), and [cities](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urban_geography). The latter examines the natural environment and how the climate, vegetation and life, soil, [oceans](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oceanography), water and [landforms](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Landforms) are produced and interact.  As a result of the two subfields using different approaches a third field has emerged, which is [environmental geography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Environmental_geography). Environmental geography combines physical and human geography and looks at the interactions between the environment and humans.

**5. Political Science:** Political science is the study of the systems that societies use to organise themselves, and which people or groups in society have power and why. More specifically, [Political science](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_science) is an academic and research discipline that deals with the theory and practice of politics and the description and analysis of [political systems](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_system) and political behaviour. Students learn about the rise of political institutions, the law-making process, and the interactions between political powers. Some political scientists specialize in political theory, whereas others study international relations, comparative politics, American politics, etc.).

**6. Development:** looks at economic and social change and the social and environmental impacts that come from those changes .The study of development is divided into economic development and social and community development. The former aims to improve people's lives through growing the economy of a country. Economic growth can create more jobs and raise the amount that people earn (income). This helps them to pay for needs, like food and housing. As people earn more, they can then afford more of the goods that they want, like computers or cars. The latter focuses more on education, health and people's well-being. Social development often encourages people to be more involved in economic and political decisions that affect them and their communities.

Nowadays, social science is vast that no one student can master it all. The previously given list of social sciences is too narrow because there are other disciplines which are not mentioned such as history and archaeology and others which are emerging such as cognitive science and socio-biology which incorporate new findings and new ways of looking at reality.

Because all knowledge is interrelated, there are inevitable problems in defining and categorizing social sciences. Often, it is difficult to state exactly where one science ends and where the other starts; social sciences interrelate with each other, on the one hand, and relate with natural sciences and humanities, on the other hand. For instance, to understand social development, it is helpful to understand geography; to understand economics, it is necessary to understand psychology. Similarly, parts of history and geography belong to *Humanities,* and parts of psychology belong to natural sciences.

In sum, to be a good social scientist, one must know the components of social science and how they interrelate with each other.

**Practice**

**Exercise:** What are the social sciences referred to in the actions below.

**1.** You interview people about what makes them feel more comfortable in new situations and how they think about those situations.

**2.** You study the constitutions of different countries around the world.

**3.** You study how the amount of fresh vegetables available affects their prices in local markets.

**4.** You work on a project to **assess** the effects of new roads on the lives of small farming communities.