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Katherine A. Kendall Institute for
International Social Work Education

International Social Work Leader Review

Dr. Daniel S. Sanders (1928–1989)

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Dr. Daniel Selvarajah Sanders was the first President and one of the founders of the Inter-University Consortium for International Social Development, now known as the International Consortium for Social Development (ICSD). He held this position for around 10 years until his passing in 1989. Dr. Sanders was a well-known educator globally recognized for his leadership in promoting world peace, human rights, and social justice.

Dr. Sanders was born on September 18, 1928, in Sri Lanka to his parents David S. and Harriet C. (Handy) Sanders. Dr. Sanders earned his B.A. in Social Science from the University of Ceylon in 1953, a diploma in Social Welfare from the University of Wales as a British Council Scholar in 1958, and an MSW (1967) and PhD (1971) from the University of Minnesota. From 1971–1973, he served as an associate professor in the School of Social Work at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, becoming a professor from 1973–1975. Later, he was appointed as the Dean and Director of International Programs from 1975–1986. From 1986–1989, he held the positions of dean, professor, and director of the Center for the Study of International Social Welfare Policies and Services at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Dr. Sanders was affiliated with various organizations, including the Academy of Certified Social Workers, the Council of Social Work Education, the National Association of Social Workers, the International Council on Social Welfare, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science. He also served as the President of the United Nations Association of Hawai‘i and received the Messenger of Peace Award from the United Nations. While at the University of Hawai‘i-Mānoa, he served as the President of Lutheran Campus Ministry, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, from 1978–1979 and 1985–1986.

Under his dynamic leadership, the ICSD expanded its membership beyond the United States, initiated international biennial symposiums, and played a crucial role in establishing the European branch of the ICSD. To honor his contributions to the ICSD, the Dan Sanders Peace and Social Justice Lecture is presented at the biennial conferences of the ICSD.

Dr. Sanders authored and edited several books, contributing significantly to the field of social work. His writings have touched upon distinct themes such as social work among refugees,



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developmental work, emphasizing an interdisciplinary approach. He advocated for collaboration among various disciplines, including medical, educational, and social work, emphasizing the need for both prompt crisis response and a well-coordinated long-term plan.

In the area of refugee work, using an interdisciplinary perspective, he advocated for the development of effective crisis-oriented interdisciplinary efforts to address conflicts that emerge between immediate and long-term concerns among diverse professionals. His work in the area of refugees underscored the significance of voluntary agencies and broader community involvement for successful refugee resettlement, emphasizing the role of media, citizen groups, and refugees themselves in fostering understanding and acceptance within society. His approach recognized the significance of sensitizing institutions to refugee cultures, fostering understanding, and incorporating religious structures.

He was a doyen of the multiculturalism movement, envisioning its role in social work's future and advocating for an inclusive approach where no culture is deemed superior, recognizing them as valid variations on the human experience. In his writings, he addressed challenges like cultural irrationality and urged for the abandonment of assumptions of cultural superiority.

Dr. Sanders was one of the major proponents of the social development perspective within social work. In advocating for the social development perspective, he underscored the need for prioritizing human survival and committing to constructive peace efforts amid global threats, especially nuclear technology. He also highlighted the need for public education on global issues, developmental concerns, and the need for vital nonviolent changes.

His approach toward policy change challenges emphasized factors such as local and state-level initiation, leveraging political parties, understanding opposition forces, and media influence. He systematically explored innovative policies for improving the lives of vulnerable groups such as refugees using a developmental approach. His social developmental approach toward policy development considered aspects and strategies traditionally recognized as clinical while emphasizing social construction involving institutional changes. Strategies included recognizing family bonds, leveraging cultural strengths, integrating religious concepts, and highlighting the importance of relocating families together for support during cross-cultural adjustment.

He contributed to an understanding of the importance of leveraging political parties, opposition forces, and using independent organizations. He recognized how social workers can influence legislators through personal contacts, written communications, and organized petitions. He stressed the need for strategic selection, open alternatives, and timely action. He identified the importance of forming alliances among interest groups as an important factor and acknowledged that compromises may be necessary. Additionally, he called for making policy systems more responsive to the needs of marginalized individuals and emphasized the necessity for new structures promoting broad-based participation in policy decisions.



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