

## **Development Policy and Migration in Sri Lanka**

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Migration and economic growth are closely interrelated. History of migration provides numerous instances which demonstrate this interdependence. The industrial revolution and the development of modern industry led to a drastic change in the economic structure of what is now recognised as the developed world. The changes in the economic structure were accompanied by changes in technology and the spatial distribution of economic activity. Growth of modern industry was much more concentrated spatially than agriculture or the pre-industrial revolution manufacturing activities. Large-scale urbanisation characterised this period of industrial development which also saw an unprecedented development of tertiary economic activities which were also concentrated in the urban areas. This has produced the urban-industrial societies which characterise the developed countries and provide the empirical evidence for much of the conceptual framework on which the study of internal migration, especially rural-urban migration, is based.

Another relocation of population has taken place as a result of uneven rates of development and population growth. Population growth had slowed down in most of the industrially developed countries by the 1950s although continued expansion of economic activity required additional labour. The rapid economic growth which characterised several of these countries in the 1960s produced a situation of labour shortage which was met by migration from less developed countries where population growth exceeded the opportunity for employment generated by the slow growth of the economy. A similar situation has arisen with regard to the oil rich countries of the Middle-East since the increase in the price of oil. The new wealth generated by the increase in the price of oil has permitted a rapid growth in economic activity for which the relatively small population in most of those countries has not been able to provide the necessary labour. This shortage has been met by migration from less developed as well as more developed countries. In both these instances the migration is generally of a temporary nature with the duration of stay ranging from

less than a year to a few years. There are also qualitative aspects in this migration as the migrants are selected according to the labour requirements of the host countries.

The rural-urban migration and the international migration that have been described above are the result of spatial inequalities in development, migration being dependent on development. Development itself might have been triggered off by some other variable such as technological change or wealth generated by the exploitation of resources. The process of development thus initiated created the demand for labour, and the opportunity for employment, existing or believed to exist, generated the flow of migrants from areas or countries where such opportunity was either limited or did not exist. This type of migration is different to that which is required to initiate economic growth. In such a situation the lack of people as entrepreneurs, labour or consumers could be recognised as the factor that had prevented the exploitation of other available resources. The economic growth in the Americas, Australia and Asiatic Russia, for instance, was preceded by migration into those areas from Europe. The opening up of plantations in the southern States of U. S. A., the Carribean Islands, some of the countries of central and South America, South Africa, Sri Lanka and Malaysia depended on the labour got down from Africa or India. In these instances economic growth could be considered as dependent on migration.

It can be seen, therefore, that migration can act both as a dependent as well as an independent variable in economic development. It is, however, difficult to distinguish clearly the dependent role of migration from its role as an independent variable as migration can act in both these roles in any instance. The growth of economic activity could commence in a particular area without in-migration but would subsequently attract in-migrants. The growth of population through in-migration would, in turn, promote further economic growth. Thus migration which was originally dependent on economic growth could later become an independent variable promoting economic growth. Similarly in some other area economic growth may be initially dependent on in-migration but once economic activities develop the expansion of economic opportunities could attract further in-migrants. Thus migration which acted as an independent variable promoting economic development initially could later become dependent on the economic growth it promoted.

Just as much as migration has a close relationship with economic development in the area into which in-migration takes place, a similar relationship exists in the areas from which out-migration takes place.

Areas from which migrants move out normally offer poorer economic and social opportunities than the areas into which they move in. In predominantly agricultural areas where agriculture cannot provide adequate employment, out-migration could alleviate unemployment and under employment. Lowered dependency may even improve economic conditions and generate development. However, if out-migration takes away the more able and enterprising people, the consequences could be adverse. If the out-migration takes place from areas with insufficient labour, at least for the peak labour demand periods, agricultural production could decline unless the conditions are favourable for mechanisation. Increase in the cost of labour consequent upon the reduction of the supply would have various repercussions on the economy of the area. Decline in the population would also make it more costly to provide the economic and social infrastructure so essential for the development of less developed areas, especially rural areas. In these ways, out-migration could retard development. In-migration also could produce similar adverse effects in areas in to which migrants move. In the case of international migration it is possible to regulate movement to a great extent. Such regulation, however, is difficult or impossible in the case of internal migration. Poor economic and social conditions in rural areas in the developing countries has tended to generate an outflow from rural areas into the bigger cities where development has been more evident. The expectation of better economic and social opportunities has attracted migrants into these cities far in excess of their capacity to absorb them into employment, thus aggravating urban unemployment. Further, the influx of migrants into these cities has produced tremendous economic and social pressures which necessitate diversion of resources for urban development to overcome these problems. This raises the question of whether the resources invested in economic activities in these cities which attract in-migrants and the resources required to overcome the problems created by them could be utilised better by locating these economic activities elsewhere. Quite apart from the purely economic issue, it also raises the question of the quality of life in both the overcrowded cities and the underdeveloped rural areas. If the purpose of development is to provide a better way of living for the majority, alternative spatial allocation of resources for development should not be ignored.

The conceptual frameworks which have been built up to explain migration are based mainly on the empirical evidence relating to the rural-urban migration in the developed countries. The process of urbanisation that took place in the past, based on industrialization accompanied by mechanization in the agricultural sector, referred to an age, technology, political economy, society and culture quite different from much of the

developing world. Further, it took place in a demographic situation of slow population growth and a relative scarcity of labour. Although the incursion of the developed world into the developing world, either politically or economically has introduced some external features into their domestic economic structures, these are often superficial and operate in enclaves. The demographic situation in many cases is quite different, with population growing much more rapidly than the economy, and unemployment and underemployment being prevalent in the rural sector as well as in the urban. Thus the conceptual frameworks built up on the empirical evidence from the developed countries do not provide suitable insights to understand the realities of the developing world. The absence of the other elements of migration in these conceptual frameworks also limit their usefulness in considering the over-all relationship between development and migration. Thought has, therefore, not been given to the pattern of distribution of population and settlements which is most conducive to promoting development not only in the narrow economic sense but also in the sense of improving the quality of life of the people.

The growth of population in Sri Lanka in the post-independence period has far outstripped the economic development that has taken place during the same period. The annual rate of population growth which fluctuated between 0.9 and 1.7 per cent up to 1946 jumped to an all time high of 2.8 per cent for the period 1946-53. The rate of growth was 2.7 per cent in the following decade and declined subsequently, first slowly in the late 1960s and then more rapidly in the 1970s until it reached 1.6 percent. Between 1946-77 the total population had increased from about 6 million to just over 14 million. The rate of economic development during this period was around 4.0 per cent annually during the 1950s and 1960s but declined to 3.0 per cent in the 1970s. A considerable proportion of the economic development resulted from increases in productivity, especially in the plantation and paddy sectors, which did not generate a proportionate expansion in employment. While the population aged 15-59 years in 1953 was 4,445,697 and the gainfully employed was 2,993,349, by 1971 the numbers had increased to 6,893,237 and 3,621,987 respectively, i.e. while gainfully employed formed 67.3 per cent of the population aged 15-59 years in 1953 it formed only 52.5 per cent in 1971. Unemployment was considered insignificant in 1953 but the next quarter of a century saw a steady increase. It was 260,982 in 1963 and 796,000 in 1971, - 8 per cent and 18 per cent of the total labour force in the respective years. By 1975 it had risen to

968,000 (20 per cent)<sup>1</sup>. In the 1977 Budget Speech the Minister of Finance stated that unemployment had reached 1.2 million or nearly 24 per cent of the labour force. The Labour Force Survey conducted by the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs in 1968 revealed that 79 per cent of the unemployed were in the rural sector (including the estate sector)<sup>2</sup>. The Land and Labour Utilization Survey of 1975 conducted by the Central Bank placed this figure at 82 per cent.<sup>3</sup> These two surveys also reveal that 67 per cent of all the unemployed were male while in the rural sector (excluding the estate sector) 43 per cent of the unemployed were female. There have been no significant changes in the intervening period to make any noteworthy changes in the distribution of unemployed persons. Therefore, on the assumption that the 1.2 million unemployed in 1977 were distributed in the proportions revealed by these surveys, the unemployed could be considered to have been distributed as shown in Table I.

TABLE I

## Distribution of Unemployed in 1977

	Male	Female	Total
Rural ..	570,000	380,000	950,000
Urban ..	200,000	50,000	250,000
Total ..	770,000	430,000	1,200,000

Although these figures may not be very accurate they are accurate enough to indicate the nature and magnitude of the unemployment situation in Sri Lanka. Nearly 80 per cent of these unemployed were young people aged 15-29 years of whom 46 per cent were aged 20-24 years. Among the unemployed aged 15-29 years, 56 per cent were male. Thus it can be seen that the unemployed persons are mainly young persons. Further almost 45 per cent of them have received formal education up to the secondary school level. It is clear from these figures that the unemployed persons in Sri Lanka are mainly educated youth living in rural areas.

1. H. N. S. Karunatilake, (1977) "Demographic Aspects of Unemployment in Sri Lanka" in *Population Problem of Sri Lanka*, Demographic Training & Research Unit, University of Sri Lanka, Colombo.
2. R. K. Srivastava, (1974) "The Unemployment Problem" in *Youth, Land and Employment*, Marga, Colombo.
3. H. N. S. Karunatilake, *op.cit.*

The sharp increase in unemployment is only partly due to the rapid increase of population in the 1950s and 1960s and the slow growth of the economy. It is also due to changes in economic and social conditions and attitudes which have persuaded more people, especially among women, to seek employment and to variations in the definition of "unemployed" in the various enumerations and surveys.

When considering the creation of employment it is necessary to know particulars about the aspirations of these unemployed youth and where they are. It would be unrealistic to expect them to accept employment opportunities which are unattractive to them. There is insufficient information about the regional distribution of unemployment but a little information is now available on the employment aspirations of the unemployed. Fernando<sup>4</sup> states that according to the Survey of Rural Credit undertaken by the Central Bank of Sri Lanka in 1969/70, which covered a sample of 26,113 households, the unemployed persons revealed the following job preferences.

TABLE II

## Distribution of Unemployed by Type of Employment Sought

Type of Employment	Per Cent of Sample
Unskilled - Agricultural .. ..	0.6
Unskilled - Industrial .. ..	6.1
Unskilled - Any sort .. ..	30.6
Skilled .. ..	13.9
Clerical .. ..	30.9
Technical .. ..	2.9
Teaching .. ..	7.8
Professional .. ..	3.7
Executive .. ..	0.2
Others .. ..	3.3
	100.0

Marga Institute has conducted a survey more recently in 1973/74 which covered a sample of 4,393 educated unemployed youth.<sup>5</sup> Table III shows the type of employment sought by them.

4. M.A. Fernando, "Employment and Unemployment in the Rural Sector", Unpublished paper.
5. G. Gunatilleke, (1977) *Pattern of Job Expectations and Employment Among Rural Youth*, Paper presented to the Asian Regional Seminar on Rural Employment Promotion (ILO-Marga), Colombo.

TABLE III

## Type of Employment Sought by Educated, Unemployed Youth

Type of employment	Per Cent
Professional, Technical .. ..	18.42
Administrative, Executive, Managerial .. ..	0.55
Clerical .. ..	15.21
Salesworkers, Salesmen, Shop Assistants .. ..	4.46
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, Hunting .. ..	6.92
Mining .. ..	0.18
Transport & Communications .. ..	4.67
Craftsmen, Production process workers, labourers .. ..	30.25
Services, Sports, Recreation, other .. ..	10.31
Unspecified .. ..	9.03
	100.00

These figures indicate that only a very small proportion of the unemployed have a preference for agriculture. Although unemployment is a serious problem in many parts of the country, lack of labour often affects agricultural production in several areas. This may change, however, if the earning capacity and working conditions in the agricultural sector improve. Nearly a third of the educated unemployed youth had expressed a preference for employment in industry. A considerable proportion of the unemployed who expressed a preference for unskilled work of any sort in 1969/70 (Table II) would most probably prefer employment in industry. Quite a large proportion of the unemployed are searching for white collar jobs in tertiary occupations.

Agriculture has been and still continues to be the mainstay of the economy. In the past most of the new employment generated has been in the agricultural sector. In the early phase of agricultural development, commencing about the middle of the 19th century, development of the plantation sector required a large force of labour. Due to difficulties of obtaining this labour from the country itself, labour was obtained from South India which has led to an important feature in the composition of

population in this country. Nearly 9.5 per cent of the population in 1971 were of that origin and most of them are in the wet zone plantation districts, especially in the tea growing areas in the hill country. With the gradual exhaustion of land suitable and available for the expansion of plantations, the dry zone became the new agricultural frontier. Restoration of ancient irrigation works commenced on a small scale in latter part of the 19th century and gathered momentum after the 1930s. Movement of people into these newly developed areas was voluntary. Owing to the poorly developed infrastructure and the prevalence of malaria, migration into these areas was very limited. Further, until about the 1930s, the pressure of population on village lands in the wet zone had not become so acute as to persuade people to move into the unfamiliar and difficult environment of the dry zone. Only about 150,000 acres were under irrigation at the beginning of this century. By the middle of the century it had increased to 570,000 acres and is now about 900,000 acres. The development of this large area under irrigation and the opening up of the dry zone had a big impact on population distribution. In 1946 the proportion of total population that lived in these dry zone districts was only 12 per cent. There were even less people before that; "Nuwarakalawiya had a population density of only about 21 per square mile in its 2,800 square miles of territory, according to the 1871 census, although the figure may be too low owing to difficulties of enumeration. Even this figure was higher than for any other large dry zone region. . . . The density had only risen to 29 persons per square mile by 1931. In the period 1931-46 population density in Nuwarakalawiya increased, on the other hand from 29 to 42 per square mile; colonization policy and other ameliorating influences were bearing fruit."<sup>6</sup> By 1971 the proportion had increased to 19 per cent. The increase in population in the dry zone has been due mainly to internal migration from the wet zone. The differential rate of increase in population between 1946 and 1971 shows that the rate of increase in population in most of the dry zone districts exceeded that of the country as a whole (Table IV). On the other hand rate of increase in most of the wet zone districts was lower than that for the country as a whole.

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6. B. H. Farmer (1957): *Pioneer Peasant Colonization in Ceylon*, Oxford University Press.

TABLE IV  
Population Increase 1946-71 by Districts

District	Rate of Increase (per annum)	Difference Between National & District Rates of Increase	Per Cent of 1971 Population Born Outside the District
Kalutara ..	1.90	- 0.73	14
Galle ..	1.90	- 0.73	09
Kegalle ..	2.01	- 0.62	15
Jaffna ..	2.03	- 0.60	04
Matara ..	2.09	- 0.54	10
Kandy ..	2.13	- 0.50	13
Nuwara Eliya ..	2.15	- 0.48	17
Colombo ..	2.61	- 0.02	17
Ratnapura ..	2.68	+ 0.05	14
Matale ..	2.95	+ 0.32	21
Puttalam ..	3.01	+ 0.38	20
Kurunegala ..	3.13	+ 0.50	14
Badulla & Moneragala ..	3.17	+ 0.54	14
Hambantota ..	3.38	+ 0.68	15
Mannar ..	3.63	+ 1.00	21
Trincomalee ..	3.70	+ 1.07	29
Batticaloa ..	3.93	+ 1.30	14
Anuradhapura - Polonnaruwa ..	5.56	+ 2.93	36
Vavuniya ..	5.90	+ 3.27	56

Note: National rate of increase was 2.63 per cent per annum.

Nine districts have recorded a rate of increase lower than the national rate of increase. With the exception of Jaffna which has developed agriculture based on ground water resources, these are in the wet zone. The remaining eleven districts which have recorded a rate of increase higher than the national rate are either wholly or partly in the dry and intermediate zones. A substantial part of this increase has been due to migration. The proportion of migrants in the population has been highest in dry zone districts such as Vavuniya, Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa and Trincomalee. All the districts have a fair proportion of people born outside the district, the lowest proportion (5 per cent) being in Jaffna. Most of the migrants into wet zone districts except to Colombo, probably date back to the period preceding the recent development of irrigation based agriculture in the dry zone. Most of the migration into the dry zone district took place in more recent times. Farmer states that 62,000 families were settled in dry zone colonization schemes between 1947-1964.<sup>7</sup> "Given the small size of the country, colonization has played a much bigger part in Ceylon than

7. B. H. Farmer, (1969) *Agricultural Colonization in South and South East Asia*, University of Hull.

in most other South and South East Asian countries, and the programme has in recent years been accelerated: thus it was announced in 1967 that about 13,000 peasant families would be settled on 27,000 acres of paddy land in that year."<sup>8</sup>

Sri Lankan population has been fairly mobile. This mobility might have been influenced by the nature of expected opportunities, conditions of work and living, and the distance from the place of origin. Wilson estimates that total lifetime migration amounted to nearly 1.9 million in 1971.<sup>9</sup> This indicated that 15 per cent of the population had migrated from their place of birth. Repopulation of the dry zone has been the most significant feature of this migration. Most of these migrants came from among the rural poor of the wet zone areas closer to the areas developed and from the densely populated Jaffna peninsula. They also represented the less educated unemplyed and underemployed. The more educated have not opted for this type of work and have tended to migrate to Colombo and other wet zone districts in search of employment in the manufacturing and service sectors. As these opportunities have been limited, most of them have continued to remain unemplyed in their home areas.

The main flow of migrants in Sri Lanka during the past century has been rural to rural areas, whether one thinks of nationally born population moving from over-crowded wet zone areas to newly developed dry zone areas or foreign born population moving from over-crowded rural areas in South India to the plantations. Both these migration streams have been influenced by development policy. The former migration stream was influenced by the Government policy to increase food production following food shortages during first and second World Wars. Although the government decided to restore irrigation facilities in the dry zone and encourage resettlement in these areas following the first World War, progress in this direction was slow. "The period from the outbreak of war in 1914 to the initiation of the Donoughmore Constitution in 1931 forms a very suitable unit in the study of the history of colonization policy in Ceylon. For the war ushered in an interesting period in which land policy and colonization were the subjects of active discussion, experimentation, and reform. By 1931 the need for colonization to relieve pressure in congested areas was accepted . . . During the period 1914-31 there were a number of factors which at various times drew attention to the social and economic problems of Ceylon and of its peasantry, and led to suggestions concerning land

8. B. H. Farmer, *op. cit.*

9. P. Wilson, (1975) *Patterns of Internal Migration in Sri Lanka*, paper presented to the Seminar on Population Problems of Sri Lanka, Demographic Training & Research Unit, University of Sri Lanka, Colombo.

policy in general and colonization in particular. The first of these, chronologically, was the war-time need for increased food production; and, although, the immediate danger receded after 1918, the decreased overseas purchasing power of the country which resulted from the depression in the estate industries in 1920s kept the need for food production temporarily to the fore . . . . Sporadically during the food production crisis, and increasingly as the crisis passed and the nature of Ceylon's basic economic difficulties became apparent, the problem of rapidly increasing population came to the forefront . . . . There was also, in the period 1914-31, a developing concern for the peasantry as a social institution . . . . Clearly, then, the period 1914-31 was, for the progress of Dry Zone Settlement, one of experiment and discussion rather than of actual accomplishment. The dry zone in 1931 was still under a cloud; malaria and remoteness combined to give it an evil reputation and to discourage voluntary immigration."<sup>10</sup> This situation changed rapidly in the 1930s and 1940s, especially after it became possible to control malaria with DDT. The government policy to redevelop the dry zone and attract migrants from other areas was followed with greater vigour. Major investment was undertaken to restore ancient irrigation works, construct new ones, build economic and social infrastructure and provide generous assistance to new settlers. The fact that most of the land vested in the government under the Crown Lands Encroachment Ordinance of 1840 was still under government control in the dry zone enabled the government to undertake land development and settlement successfully. Although, economically, the redevelopment of the dry zone has not produced a benefit commensurate with the magnitude of investment, the situation may be different in the future. The introduction of the high yielding varieties of paddy which perform very much better under irrigation in the dry zone than in the wet zone if cultivated properly could make the economic return much greater. Also the diversification of the dry zone farming system with the introduction of subsidiary food crops, industrial crops and livestock would make dry zone agriculture more productive.

The latter migration stream into the plantation areas preceded the migration into the dry zone. This was influenced by the encouragement given by the government to open up plantations. Land vested in the government was made available for this on very easy terms and the initial development of infrastructure, such as the construction of road and railways, the port of Colombo and other services, were directed at serving the plantation sector. This development which started around the middle of the 18th century continued into the first two decades of this century. During this period the government also permitted labour to work on the

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10. B. H. Farmer, *op.cit.*

plantations to be recruited in South India and to be settled on the plantations. Others also moved into these areas to engage in construction work or provide services; they came mainly from the south western coastal areas of the wet zone.

By comparison to the rural to rural migration which took place as a result of the development of the plantations in the wet zone and irrigation in the dry zone, the rural to urban migration has not been significant. Between 1871 and 1971 the urban population increased from 260,000 to 2,800,000. This represented an increase from 10.9 per cent to 22.4 per cent of the population. This increase was due partly to the expansion of the urban areas and partly to the proliferation of urban centres which increased from 19 to 134 during this period (Fig. 1). What is classified as "urban" in Sri Lanka comprise municipal, urban and town council areas. The smallest of these have less than 2,000 people and are little or no different from service centres of a similar size classified as "rural". In fact, some large villages perform functions which are more urban in character than the smallest urban centres. The largest urban centre, Colombo, has not grown as rapidly as comparable Asian or African cities. Its population increased from 110,500 in 1881 to only 562,000 in 1971 during which time its area increased by about 50 per cent from 9.45 to 14.4 square miles. This population represented 4.6 and 4.4 per cent of the total population and 39.3 and 19.8 per cent of the urban population in the respective years. The rate of growth of population in the city since independence in 1947 has been lower than in the country as a whole despite a small increase in the area of the city. The slow growth of industry is one of the reasons for this. The number employed in manufacturing increased from little under 300,000 in 1946 to about 350,000 in 1971. Further, almost 75 per cent of those employed in manufacturing in 1971 were in the rural sector. Only about 113,000 were employed in the organised or formal industrial sector in 1976. Thus the urban oriented industrial employment formed only a small proportion of those employed in manufacturing. Many of them are distributed in urban areas around Colombo than in the city itself. Even among those who are employed within the city, many have preferred to commute to work from outside the city. According to the Colombo Metropolitan Region Structure Plan, there are an estimated 319,161 job opportunities in the city but only 178,594 employed persons reside within the city. As some of these employed persons work outside the city, at least 45 per cent of those who work in the city can be assumed to commute regularly. They commute from places as far away as 30-40 miles from the city. This has been made possible by rail and bus services, which link the city with its commuting hinterland. These services,

which are heavily subsidised, have made it more economic for people to live in their home areas or towns at some distance away from the city and commute to work than to migrate to the city where the shortage of housing makes it both difficult and costly to obtain accommodation. If most of those who now commute to work decide to migrate into the city, together with their families, the city population would almost double itself placing the already overstrained city amenities under very great pressure which could even lead to their breakdown. The recent increases in the cost of travel has increased the cost of commuting. Fig. 2 shows the increases in the cost gradient which would generate a movement of people to the city and its immediate environs. Fig. 3 shows the time gradient, i. e. the cost in time of living away from the city of Colombo and commuting to work in the city. Adjustment of these cost and time gradients in favour of areas further away from Colombo and its immediate surroundings would reduce the pressure on the city and its suburban fringe. The cost to the country of providing such efficient transport services at a reasonable cost to the commuters should be weighed against a run-away growth of population in the city and its surrounding area with all its concomitant problems.

Another important feature of urbanization in Sri Lanka is the growing dominance of intermediate size towns.<sup>11</sup>

TABLE V  
Distribution of Towns by Size Class

Size Class	1953		1971	
	No.	Per Cent	No.	Per Cent
Below 2,000 ..	3	7	6	5
2,000 — 5,000 ..	8	19	34	25
5,001 — 10,000 ..	5	12	28	21
10,001 — 20,000 ..	14	32	32	24
21,001 — 50,000 ..	6	14	26	19
50,001 — 100,000 ..	6	14	5	4
Over 100,000	1	2	3	2
	43	100	134	100

There has also been a conspicuous increase in the number of small urban centres and their average size has decreased from 2,900 to 2,100 between 1953 and 1971. Most of the recent increase in the urban population

11. P. Puvanarajan, "Patterns and Processes of Urbanization in Sri Lanka" in *Population Problems of Sri Lanka*, Op.cit.

has been due more to natural increase than to migration. "Between 1963 and 1971 the urban population increased by 41.1 per cent compared to an increase of 20.1 per cent in the total population of the country. However, when only the areas which are classified as urban in the census of 1963 as well as in 1971 are considered, the population increase of these areas is only 16.1 per cent. Thus the growth rate of population within the areas specified as urban in 1963 was lower than that of the country as a whole."<sup>12</sup>

This shows that, inspite of the rapid increase in unemployment in the rural areas, there has not been a serious exodus to urban areas in search of jobs. It is difficult to explain this without detailed studies but one could offer some probable explanations. The nature of economic development that took place did not create strong pulls towards the urban areas and especially not towards the big towns. Combined with this, the policies of social development which were adopted and followed by various governments since independence have tended to reduce the rural-urban gap and increase the capacity of the rural areas to contain a bulk of the unemployed as dependants. The income differential between the urban and rural sector for those earning an income of less than Rs- 400/- per month in 1969/70, which constituted a major part of the population, was not very great; it was Rs. 235/- per month in the urban sector compared to Rs. 196/- per month in the rural sector.<sup>13</sup> In other respects too the rural-urban gap had narrowed considerably as a result of governmental policy, discussed below, especially in the post-independence period. Although these policies were not aimed specifically at upgrading rural areas, the income redistribution that took place as a consequence of them benefitted the rural areas.

The introduction and spread of free education and free medical services have been two important aspects of this upgrading. The number of schools increased steadily from 5,915 in 1947 to 9,417 in 1972.<sup>14</sup> Following the acceptance by government of its commitment to provide free compulsory education up to the age of 14 years, primary schools were started in most rural areas to provide education to the children in those areas. Today, with regard to the availability of primary schools there is little difference between rural and urban areas. There are, however, qualitative differences. Rural children have to travel, often walk, further to attend school than

12. Department of Census & Statistics, — *The Population of Sri Lanka, C.I.C.R.E.D. Services*, 1974.

13. G. Gunatillake, — (1973) "The Rural-Urban Balance and Development: The Experience in Sri Lanka" in *Marga Quarterly Journal*, 2(1).

14. Administration Report of the Director of Education for 1947, Ceylon Government Press, 1949, and *Statistical Profile of Children and Youth, Sri Lanka*, (1975) Department of Census and Statistics.

their urban counterparts. The school facilities, buildings as well as teachers, are better in the urban areas although even in urban areas the primary schools which serve low-income areas are less well provided for than others. The important distinction comes with regard to secondary schools. Most of these are in urban centres, some in small urban centres which serve rural areas. However, the quality of secondary education is very much better in the larger urban centres which also have better facilities for the teaching of science. Although this distinction does exist, it affects only the population that studies beyond the primary level. Education is, therefore, not a major consideration in the decision to migrate to the urban areas except for a small proportion of the population.

There is a similar spread of facilities with regard to health services although not to the same extent. The health service consists of several types of government hospitals and dispensaries in addition to which there are private doctors who practise the western system of medicine or the indigenous system of medicine (ayurveda), and nursing homes and dispensaries. In 1947 there were only 223 hospitals and 221 central dispensaries; in addition there were 174 branch dispensaries and 492 visiting dispensaries.<sup>15</sup> By 1974 these facilities had been upgraded and their distribution had become more widespread. 916 units in the government run medical service offer the western system of medicine. The spatial distribution of facilities for the government ayurveda sector comprising 7 hospitals and 211 dispensaries is not available nor is such information available for the doctors practising the western system of medicine, 530 dispensaries and surgeries, 230 pharmacies and 9,833 ayurvedic doctors in the private sector, and a large number of registered medical practitioners. The private sector being more responsive to demand conditions, the facilities in this sector are more weighted towards where the population resides. Health care facilities dealing mainly with public health and preventive medicine had also spread widely during this period. However, while facilities for the western system of medicine are generally more concentrated in urban settlements, the ayurvedic doctors and registered medical practitioners reside in rural areas also. Unfortunately there are no data available for medical facilities in terms of the urban and rural sectors. Observation, however, shows that hospitals and other facilities for the western system of medicine tend to be located in urban areas. Access to these are not difficult for people in rural areas where transport facilities are available, which means that, except in the remoter areas of the dry zone, the rural population has fairly good access to such

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15. *Administration Report of the Director of Medical and Sanitary Services for 1947*. Ceylon Government Press, 1948.

facilities. This is indirectly borne out by the mortality rates which are not significantly higher in mainly rural districts than in mainly urban districts. While there is fairly good access to basic medical facilities at the rural level, better medical facilities are concentrated mainly in the larger towns. At one stage, the facilities available at hospitals in Colombo city were far superior to those available elsewhere. This was especially true of specialist services, but the government has pursued a policy of upgrading the facilities at Provincial and Base hospitals, and even at District hospitals. This has reduced the "pull" of Colombo.

The differential development of health facilities does not exert as great an influence on one's decision to migrate as the differential development of educational facilities. Most illnesses do not require the services of highly trained personnel or elaborate equipment which are available in the hospitals in urban areas. Such facilities are required for more serious illnesses which are less common and periodic. Thus, although there is a significant rural-urban gap in medical facilities it is not significant with regard to rural-urban migration.

The rural-urban gap has been bridged to some extent by the accessibility that people in rural areas have to urban facilities as a result of the development of transport. The bus services carried 1,396 million passengers in 1972 and the railways carried a further 106 million. At the time of independence the country was served by a network of main roads of about 7,000 miles that covered much of the island. Since then, several thousand miles of branch and feeder roads have been constructed to link up nearly all the settlements except the most remote. Over 17,000 miles of roads now serve the 25,000 square miles of the country; this works out to 0.68 miles per square mile and 1 mile per 824 persons. The nationalisation of the bus services in 1958 enabled the organisation and better coordination of the services available in different parts of the country. Further, the change of emphasis from making profits to providing a public service has enabled the Ceylon Transport Board to run bus services in many parts of the country, linking even the remotest rural areas to urban centres. Although bus services are not frequent in rural areas, they are available providing the rural population with access to urban amenities which would otherwise be available to them only if they migrated to urban areas.

The progressive intervention of the state in many areas of economic and social activity has enlarged the area of contact between government and the people. The consequent expansion in the administrative service has been accompanied by a progressive decentralization of administration. Many administrative activities have been transferred to district and lower

levels. This has not only enabled rural people to get much of their work attended to at that level but has also upgraded the smaller urban centres. At the same time, other tertiary activities, especially trade, became more dispersed leading to the development of several service centres of varying size. The growth of small and medium size urban settlements described earlier could be linked to this process. Gunawardena has shown this relationship: "Generally speaking more central places and a better centralization of functions seems to be called for in the Wet Zone with its high density of population and high thresholds . . . In the Dry Zone with its low population density and low thresholds attention appears to be most needed to the improvement of transport facilities, so that access to existing centres becomes more easy."<sup>16</sup>

Many development processes that have taken place have tended to reduce the rural-urban gap in Sri Lanka and develop the lower order service centres which include the smaller urban centres. These are spread throughout the country, more in the densely populated areas of the wet zone. At present no conscious effort is made to integrate these with the surrounding rural areas to build up a mutually reinforcing relationship between them. This calls for a comprehensive policy on human settlements and regional development at the national level and effective implementation of a plan to develop lower order service centres. Such a policy of planned development could further ameliorate the disadvantages which still exist in rural areas. The rural-urban gap is still very real in many respects, especially with regard to facilities such as electricity, adequate supply of clean water, recreational amenities, shopping and transport. These affect the quality of life in the rural areas vis a vis urban areas. As education makes people aware of these differences and provides them with the means to migrate to the larger urban centres where they could enjoy better amenities, the tendency to migrate would increase. To reduce this tendency, it is necessary to reduce this gap. There is however, an increasing tendency to improve urban amenities without comparable improvement in rural amenities.

One of the factors which has stemmed this tide up to now is the lack of employment in urban areas. Due to the level of education achieved by the unemployed even in the rural areas, they have not trekked to the urban centres to swell the underemployed ranks of the informal sector in the urban areas. Further, as only about 20 per cent of the educated unemployed youth are from households with incomes below Rs. 200/- per

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16. K. A. Gunawardena, (1964) *Service Centres in Southern Ceylon* — Unpublished Ph. D dissertation, University of Cambridge.

month, they are able to remain in the rural areas as dependants until they find suitable employment. The capacity of these households to look after their dependants was helped by the subsidies that they received from the government in one form or another in the past. Withdrawal of these subsidies and the increasing cost of living would change this situation and increase the pressure on these dependants to move out of their home areas to seek employment. The "push" factor in the rural areas which has existed because of unemployment and rural-urban differences has in the past been contained fairly effectively as a result of governmental policies which have

- (a) reduced rural-urban differentials,
- (b) increased the capacity of rural areas to maintain their dependants, and,
- (c) lack of suitable employment opportunities in other areas.

The increasing cost of living and decrease in subsidies have increased the "push" factor in rural areas. Some of the other measures taken recently also indirectly affect it. On the other hand the development programmes which are now envisaged would generate employment and provide a "pull" factor. It is, therefore, important to consider the migration implications of economic policies and development programmes.

The government is relying heavily on completing the Mahaweli River Diversion Scheme during the next five years. The construction phase would employ 150,000-200,000 persons concentrated in the areas of major construction work. This would generate additional employment in tertiary activities to service such large concentrations of people who would have a sizeable purchasing power. On completion of the scheme the new land that is developed would absorb nearly 1,000,000 people, including the dependants. Several thousand families would find an increase in their income as a result of the improved irrigation facilities. This additional population and income would generate secondary growth of industry, construction and tertiary activities which attract more people into this region. The impact of this scale of development, concentrated both in space and time, the like of which Sri Lanka has not seen before, would be to transfer a massive population into this area from various parts of the country and establish a pattern of settlement on a scale which is difficult to visualise. Unless careful thought and planning goes into this aspect of the development process, the problems that might arise could defy solution for several decades to come and would require the diversion of resources which could be used more productively elsewhere.

The other irrigation schemes planned are not on such a large scale and more like what has already been done in the country before. These would also involve the transfer of population and establishment of new settlements changing the present pattern of population distribution but to a lesser extent.

The establishment of the Industrial Processing Zone and the Colombo City and Greater Colombo development programmes would have a major impact on the process of urbanization in the country. If, as expected, the Industrial Processing Zone is a success, it would generate direct employment for about 200,000 in an area of about 200 square miles, i. e. an addition of nearly 1,000 per square mile to an already densely populated area. The secondary development resulting from this could make the population increase greater. Although, this increase in population may not take place in the next five years, a process of cumulative growth would be set in motion that would have long-term effects. There are large numbers of unemployed who are particularly interested in the type of jobs that this development would generate, i.e. non-agricultural employment. Given the strengthening "push" factor in the rural areas, prospect of such employment could lead to an influx of population into this area that is in excess of its needs. A similar situation could result from the Colombo City and Greater Colombo development schemes which would make Colombo and its suburban area much more attractive to live in. In the absence of countervailing development of the smaller urban centres and the rural areas, this would increase the differential between rural and urban areas as well as between smaller urban centres and Colombo. The influence of such a widening gap would be to increase the "pull" effect of Colombo and its surrounding area, thus generating an influx of population in excess of what the area could absorb. Should that happen, the effect of the major investment would not be the amelioration of the problems of the metropolitan area but an aggravation of them. This would be the result of a piecemeal approach to settlement policy in Sri Lanka, the absence of a macro-plan in this respect and unbalanced urban development. While industrial development is undoubtedly useful to help our economic development and the problems of the metropolitan area need to be solved, we must not ignore the possibility of creating greater problems than the ones which we are solving.

While the development programmes discussed above involve major shifts in population, the proposals to intensify agriculture on plantations and formulate electorate and district development programmes would involve minimal shifts in population. To that extent they are both economically and socially less costly and more desirable. The development that is envisaged would be on a smaller scale in any one locality but would spread

over a larger number of localities. The employment created would, therefore, be distributed over a much larger area and would provide employment to people who are unemployed or underemployed in the areas concerned. The cost of generating this employment would be less than in the case of the projects discussed earlier and provide an important alternative strategy to development. It is doubtful, however, whether such development could absorb all the unemployed or generate sufficient growth in the short-run to give our economy the dynamism it needs to get moving.

From the foregoing discussion it is clear that migration is closely related to development policy and processes although much thought had not been given to this relationship. Throughout, our development policies have been determined without taking into account the long-term implications they have on migration and settlement although ultimately all development is designed to serve the people. These policies have both direct and indirect effects on migration and settlement. In the past, most have been beneficial more through accident than by intention, but unfortunately the rate of development itself has been too slow to provide the employment that the growing population needed. At the moment, the emphasis is on creating this employment, producing the much needed goods and overcoming our balance of trade problems. The policies and programmes that have been worked out to achieve these objectives would have a major impact on our population distribution. But again not much attention has been paid to their impact on human settlement and migration. It is imperative that we give adequate consideration to the human settlement and migration implications of these policies and programmes as we would set in motion irreversible processes that could create serious problems for the future.

# SRI LANKA REFERENCE MAP



### URBAN SIZE CLASS

- Over 50,000
- ▲ 20,000 - 50,000
- Below 20,000

### URBAN STATUS

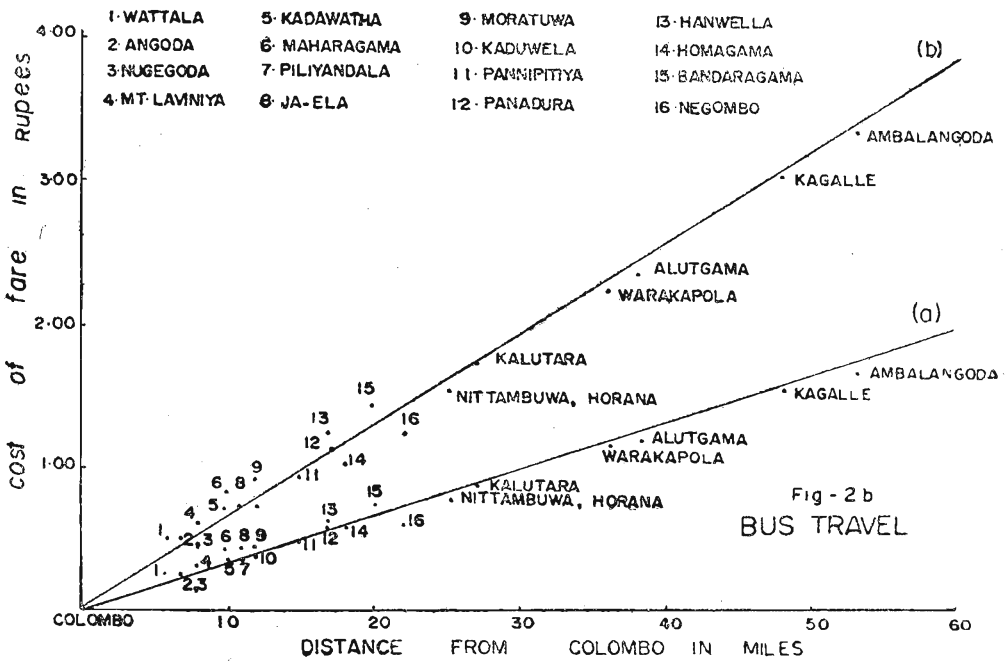
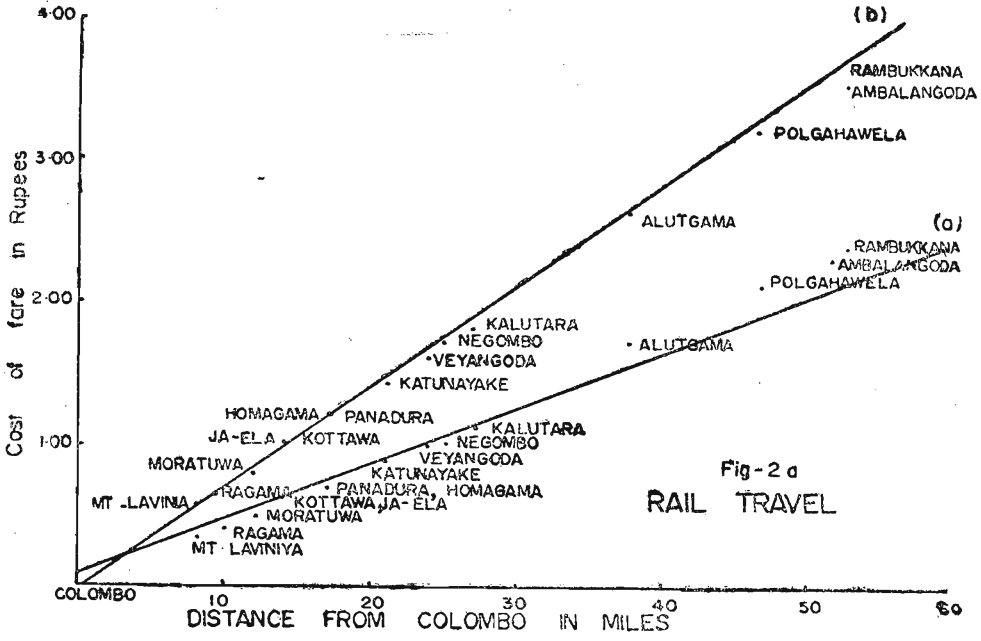
- Municipal Council - COLOMBO
- Urban Council - Kotte
- Town Council - Mutur

- 1 Hendala 2 Kelamiya
- 3 Peliyagoda 4 Dalugama

SCALE 1:2,000,000

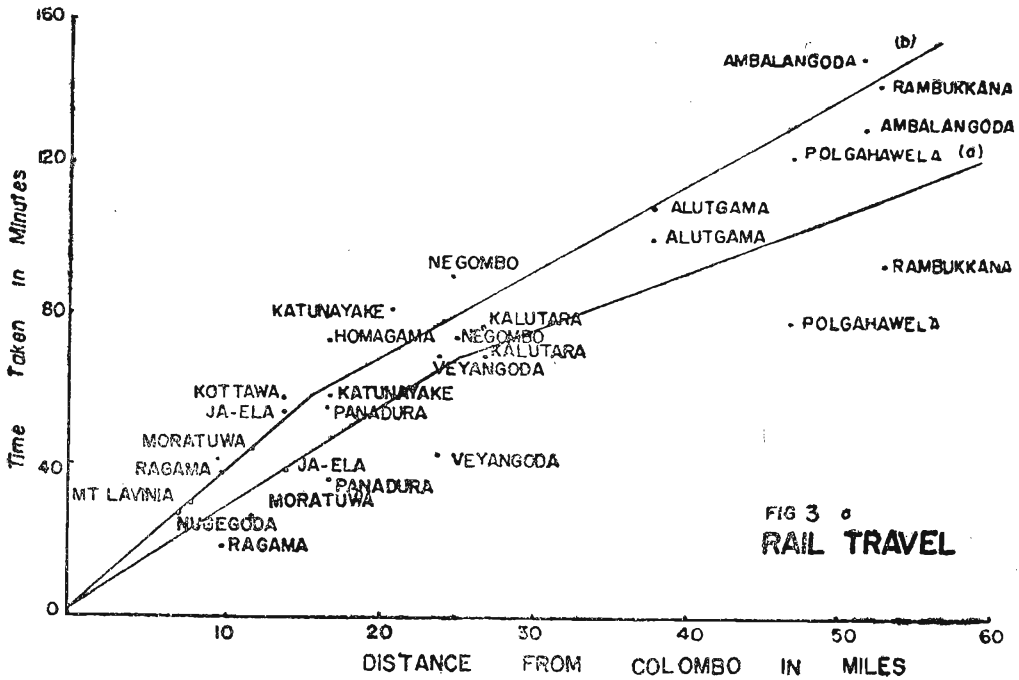
Fig. 1

FIG. 2. STEEPENING OF THE DISTANCE - COST GRADIENT RESULTING FROM INCREASE IN THE RAIL AND BUS FARES

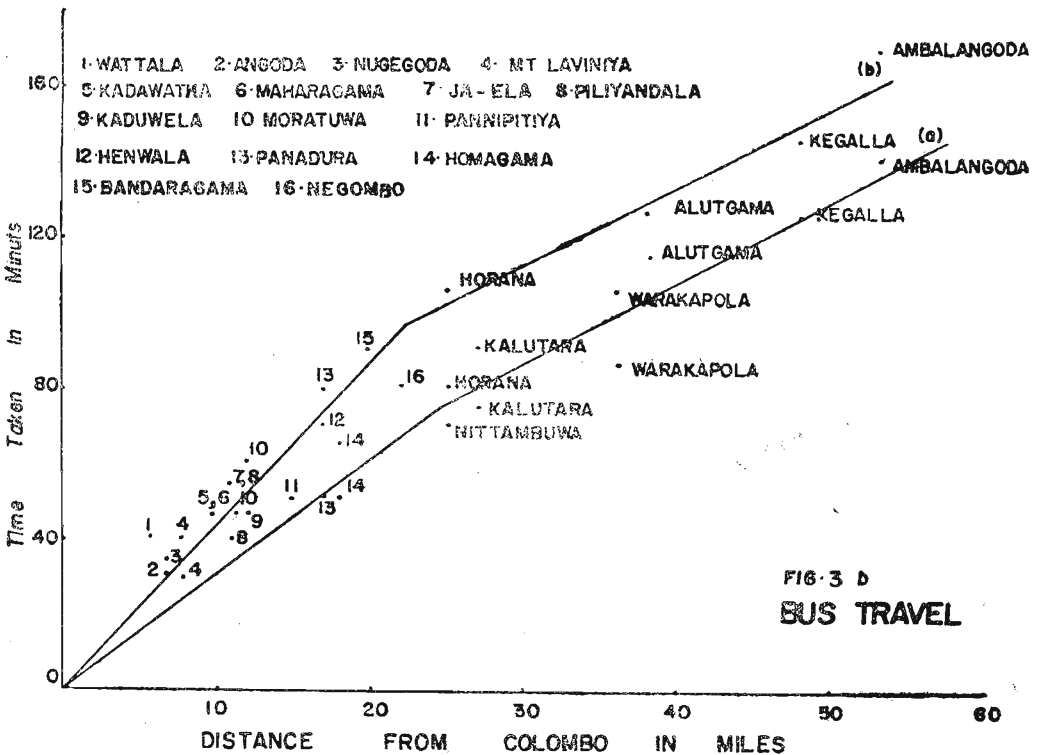


(a) GRADIENT BEFORE FARE INCREASE  
 (b) GRADIENT AFTER FARE INCREASE

**FIG-3 DISTANCE - TIME GRADIENT FROM COLOMBO**  
 (a) EXPRESS SERVICES (b) SLOW SERVICES



**FIG 3 a RAIL TRAVEL**



**FIG-3 b BUS TRAVEL**