

Re-thinking of urban planning for sustainable development of communities in Sri Lanka in the context of 2030 development agenda: understanding the role of population dynamics

EL Sunethra J Perera¹

One of the goals of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by world leaders at the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit in September 2015 is to make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable communities. In this context, understanding the significance of urban population dynamics of Sri Lanka is vital to address issues related to urban dwellers. The objectives of this paper are to identify urban population dynamics related issues and fundamental pillars of sustainable urban development in relation to Sri Lanka. This paper uses secondary data mainly taken from the Department of Census and Statistics. In addition, qualitative data from field observations made in selected urban settlement communities in Colombo district are also employed. The analysis revealed that the urban population of Sri Lanka is 18.2 percent in 2012 and over the last six decades, growth of urban population has been slow mainly due to definitional issue. According to the current 'urban' definition, population living in Municipal Councils (MC) and Urban Councils (UC) are considered as urban dwellers. More than half of the urban population is concentrated in the Western Province which features uneven distribution of urban population across provinces. Out of 64 total urban locations of the country, eight locations (Colombo, Kaduwela, Dehiwala-Mt Lavinia, Moratuwa, Negombo, Kotte MC's and Kesbewa, Maharagama UC's) constitute nearly 50 percent of the urban population in Sri Lanka. This overcrowding situation has become a challenging task for urban planners. In these circumstances achieving all dimensions of sustainable urban development such as economic sustainability, social sustainability, ecological sustainability, sustainable spatial development, and cultural continuity are more challenging. Qualitative findings reveal that preparation of urban policies should be further strengthened by giving special consideration to population dynamics including migration, changes in age structures which link with youth bulges and population ageing etc. Therefore, Sri Lanka would require considerably more comprehensive and integrated urban planning and policies than today in order to strengthen sustainable urban communities.

Keywords: *Sustainable development goals, urban planning, urban population dynamics*

¹Department of Demography, University of Colombo