

THE IMPACT OF POPULATION GROWTH ON DEGRADATION OF MANGROVES, WATER AND CORAL REEFS IN THE SOUTHERN PART OF SRI LANKA

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Abstract: *Since independence, coastal settlements have grown in size and increased in its economic importance, particularly in the wet zone in Sri Lanka. By 1981, 5.04 million people of the total population, and in today more than half of a population of 21 million people live in coastal districts in Sri Lanka. The objectives of this paper are to examine the impact of population growth, density and human activities on coastal environmental degradation in the Southern coastal areas in two districts in Sri Lanka (Galle and Matara), and to discuss some policy implications. The study was based on both primary and secondary data. The primary data were gathered through, a household survey conducted in the coastal areas in seven Divisional Secretariat Divisions (DSDs). A sample of 2,154 households was selected randomly from the electoral list obtained from the DSD offices in Galle and Matara districts. Furthermore, an interviewer administered questionnaire, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Spot Observations were used to understand the characteristics of the population, and human activities that affect coastal resources. Findings indicate that there is a considerable environmental impact on the density of population more than the growth of population on the degradation of coastal resources in the coastal area of both Galle and Matara Districts. Findings reveal that mangrove, water sources and coral reef in the study area have conspicuously degraded due to population growth, density and human activities. These results suggest that proper monitoring programme should be initiated for the identification of water pollutant sources, which discharge pollutants into the marine waters directly or indirectly and actions should be taken to prevent further damage to the marine environment.*

Keywords: Population growth and density, Human activities, Coastal resources, Degradation of mangroves.

Introduction

One of the major causes of coastal erosion and degradation of coastal resources in Sri Lanka is attributed to rapid growth of population, population density and human activities in the coastal areas. The three main demographic factors of births, deaths and migration make changes in population size, growth, composition and distribution and these changes raise a number of important issues related to resource utilization. Thus, degradation of coastal resources is considerably associated with these demographic factors. Sri Lanka is an island with an attractive coastline which covers 1,585km, 24 per cent of the land area and 32 per cent of the population. It has experienced an unprecedented population growth and high density along the coastal than the non-coastal areas (Savundranayagam et al., 1993; Nayanananda, 2007; Athulathmudali et al., 2011). Different development and economic activities and,

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