Development challenges and potentials in the periphery of a rapidly developing core region of Sri Lanka: A case study from the *Pathigoda Grama Niladhari* Division (GND) of Gampaha District

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Abstract

The purpose of a country's national development is to take necessary measures to reduce regional development disparities within the core-periphery structure, even in districts located within rapidly developing core regions, such as the Western Province of Sri Lanka. The present study investigated whether there is a development gap between the core and the peripheral areas of the Western Province. Accordingly, the main objective of the study was to discover the development gap between the core and periphery of the relatively developed Western Province and to find out what are the development challenges in the rural periphery of a rapidly developing district. For this, the Pathigoda Grama Niladhari Division (GND) of the Divulapitiya Divisional Secretary's Division (DSD) located at the periphery of Gampaha District, which is one of the three districts of the Western Province of Sri Lanka was selected. Under the deductive approach and mixed method, a random sampling method was applied to collect primary data. The samples were collected from 30 households in Pathigoda GND. Spatial data was analyzed and maps were developed by ArcGIS software. Descriptive and narrative methods were applied to analyze the qualitative data where descriptive analysis included percentage and mean score measures, simple regression, and correlation coefficients using SPSS software. This research verified that there are drastic differences between the center and peripheral areas of the Western core area of Sri Lanka in terms of key development related parameters and environmental issues by taking the Pathigoda GND as an example. The peripheral areas of the Gampaha district, a highly developed district and the most populous district of Sri Lanka are highly backward, and communities are marginalized due to the exclusion of the development process in the core. Lower education levels, drug addiction people, and early adolescent marriages, chronic and absolute poverty, are common issues among people in the periphery Engaging in micro-level work and obtaining micro-finance loans can be identified as the economic challenges. The entire development process of the periphery has been drastically politicized. The major environmental issues are deforestation, lack of safe drinking water, and illegal environmental activities. Lack of infrastructure and historical background in the periphery has resulted this outcome. Accordingly, the peripheral development processes should be linked with the core's development process and the forward and backward linkages of the industries should be strengthened with the periphery. Moreover, human resource development in the studied peripheral region is needed.

Keywords: Backwardness, Development disparity, Western province development

Introduction

Both cities and villages are unique and play an important role in a country's development. Therefore, development outcomes should be provided not only to the people in urban areas but also to the people in rural areas. In regional development, a separation between the rural and urban areas can be seen very often. Therefore, it is very important is to focus on this issue as a development challenge in rural and urban areas. Especially in developing countries such as Sri Lanka, these inequalities in rural and urban areas are common. The rural sector plays a unique role in developing counties especially in the agriculture sector and as human resources for other sectors (Podimanike and Vitharana, 2016). Consequently, the core-periphery developmental distance is strong in Sri Lanka and Sri Lanka has areas that lack social economic development.

In the 21st century, there is an increasing development disparity in developing countries compared to the developed countries. The reasons behind these include mainly the economic crisis, social unrest, and civil wars (Namsuk Kim and Pedro Conceição, 2010). The Sinhalese slogan "Kolabata Kiri, Gamata Kakiri" used to by the Radical Young Movement in 1980 in Sri Lanka provides an example for this situation(Hasbullah and Morrison, 2004; Karnik, 2002; Yeung and Lin, 2003). Although various development strategies have been implemented, the physical, social, and economic aspects have been unevenly distributed among the regions in during the development process. In terms of geographical space, the most developed region of Sri Lanka is located in the Western Province. The Western Province owns most of the economic activities such as industry, commerce, and services. Colombo city has the most of the country's economic activities than the other regional centers of Sri Lanka. Consequently, development disparities exist between Colombo and other regions due to various factors (UNDP, 1998; Karunanayaka, 2001; Dangalla 2005). Sri Lanka has a core area in which development outcomes have accumulated and co-periphery areas with backward characteristics (Magazine of Bauma Samiksha, 2004).

Strasser et al., (2016) has explained several development challenges in rural economies such as weak market access and infrastructure connectivity, limited access to finance, lack of adequate healthcare, and poor-quality education. The authors have also reported that two-thirds of the 600 million people who are in extreme poverty around the world live in rural areas (Strasser et al., 2016). The percentage of the population living in rural areas is especially high in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Oceania. Francis and David (2012) have mentioned the challenges of agriculture and rural development in Nigeria. They discuss the problems and challenges posed by these issues on people and the government responses to develop the rural infrastructure needs to the people living in rural areas. They recommend that the government should focus on developing agricultural policies, implement strategically targeted investments in agriculture, and upgrade rural infrastructure to boost the agricultural productivity, and increase the competitiveness of the farm output while fighting corruption (Francis & David, 2012). Anderson (2003) has explained the risks and challenges for managers and policymakers involve in rural development. Most people presently reside in rural areas in the world are poor and exposed to several risks. The authorities often lack instruments to manage them adequately, and therefore, they are highly vulnerable both socially and economically (Anderson, 2003). Scoones (2009) has provided a historical review of key moments in debates about rural livelihoods, identifying the

tensions, ambiguities, and challenges of such approaches. Several core challenges are identified, centered on the need to inject a more thorough political analysis into the center of livelihoods perspectives (Scoones, 2009). The digital economy challenge faced by the peripheral rural areas can be identified as another challenge. Despite the considerable effort being made by the European Union to heighten awareness of the need for peripherally located rural S... M... E... (SMEs) to become more involved in exploiting the economic potential of the digital economy of a country, among the major barriers preventing such involvement by rural SMEs is the difficulty of obtaining affordable high-speed internet access in remote locations in this era of liberalized telecommunications markets (Grimes, 2003).

Sri Lanka has a rural population of 77.4% and an urban population of 18.2% (Census and Statistics Department, 2012). Significant progress has been made in the provision of social and physical infrastructure in the peripheral region where a high rural population lives and in raising the standard of living of the rural population, and the persistence of regional imbalances and growing regional disparities have affected the regional development of Sri Lanka (Moore 1984; O'Hare and Barrett 1996; Gooneratne 2001; Wanasinghe 2001; Karunanayake and Abhayaratna 2002). In terms of development, there are clear disparities between districts within Sri Lanka. This research focuses on the fast-developing district Gampaha which belong to the Western Province of Sri Lanka. The other districts in the Western Province include Colombo and Kalutara. The Gampaha district, serves as an industrial hub where the Katunayaka International Airport, Katunayaka Export and Investment Promotion Trade Zone (BOI), and the Biyagama Export and Investment Promotion Trade Zone are located. Moreover, several places related to tourism can be found within Gampaha district which also includes infrastructure related to railways, highways, electricity, and telecommunication. Disparities in regional development can be seen in Gampaha district. The main challenge faced by the Government of Sri Lanka as well as any other country is to increase the country's production, income, and employment opportunities and to distribute the benefits of them equally to all in the society.

The total population of Gampaha district as of 2016 is 2,372,000. The urban population is 370,718 and the rural population is 2,000,053 (Department of Census and Statics, 2016). Accordingly, backward characteristics can be identified in the Gampaha district, which shows a clear demarcation between an urban core with only 15.6% of the population live and a rural periphery with 84.3% of the population live. Examining the interaction of physical and human processes in the identified areas of Sri Lanka, it is clear that the benefits have not been extended to the entire region when examining the spatial pattern of development in specific areas. Roads, water facilities etc. in the city of Colombo in the Western Province are not available to see in the isolated towns like Divulapitiya, Madhyagampitiya, Mabodala in rural areas in the Gampaha district. This research focuses on identifying the development challenges in the rural periphery of the rapidly developing Gampaha district, and this is the main research question addressed in this study. Therefore, the main objective of this study is to identify these specific development challenges in the rural periphery the Gampaha district. The sub-objectives of this study include determining the factors influencing the challenges in the rural periphery and proposing appropriate solutions to overcome the identified development challenges.

Different theoretical models can be used to study regional economic growth. In 1984, Mick Moore has reported about the development and rural-urban division in Sri Lanka. In his study, he

focused on four main areas in Sri Lanka including the core areas in the Western, Galle, and Matara districts, internal/inner periphery areas in Kegalle, Nuwara Eliya, and Kandy districts, outer peripheral areas in Puttalam, Kurunegala, Matale, Badulla, Monaragala, and Rathnapura districts, and periphery areas in Hambantota, Ampara, Batticaloa, Mulativ, Vavuniya, and Kilinochchi districts. In his study he used … model to study the rural/urban distinctions. For this study, Immanuel Wallerstein's World system theory model, freedman's co-periphery model, and Chrystaller's Central Place Theories were used.

Methodology

The interpretive research paradigm and the deductive approach were used in this research and quantitative and qualitative data was used to determine the development challenges in the rural periphery of the Gampaha district. In addition, primary data and secondary data was used to identify the development challenges in the rural periphery area. As primary data, field observations and interviews and questionaries were used to collect data.

When selecting the study location, the population distribution in Gampaha district was taken into consideration (Table 1). Due to, rural periphery area is most suitable. The total population size in Gampaha district is 2,372,000 (Department of Sensus and Statistics, 2016). The highest urban population was living at Negombo Division and the lowest urban population rate was living at Divulapitiya, Mirigama, Aththanagalla, Dompe, Mahara and Biyagama divisions. For this research, the Pathigoda GND which is situated in the periphery of the Divulapitiya secretarial division was selected (Figure 1).

Table 1: Population distribution of Gampaha district (division level) – 2016

Secretarial division	Population				Land area (Km²)	Population density (for 1Km²)	Grama Niladari Divisions (GND)
	Urban	Rural	State	Total			
Negombo	146,278	0	0	146,278	31	4,749	39
Katana	63,012	179,136	0	242,148	108	2,250	79
Divulapitiya	0	148,532	185	148,717	202	735	123
Mirigama	0	168,485	891	169,376	187	908	149
Minuwangoda	7,742	175,774	11	183,528	131	1,406	121
Wattala	28,848	151,792	0	180,640	55	3,308	46
Ja ela	32,142	175,252	0	207,394	64	3,241	57
Gampaha	64,152	139,276	0	203,427	96	2,126	101
Attanagalla	0	184,657	141	184,798	154	1,200	151
Dompe	0	158,493	0	158,493	178	889	133
Mahara	0	213,837	0	213,837	99	2,164	92
Kelaniya	28,544	112,797	0	141,341	22	6,454	37
Biyagama	0	192,022	0	192,022	62	3,117	49
Total	370,718	2,000,053	1,229	2,372,000	1,387	1,711	1,177

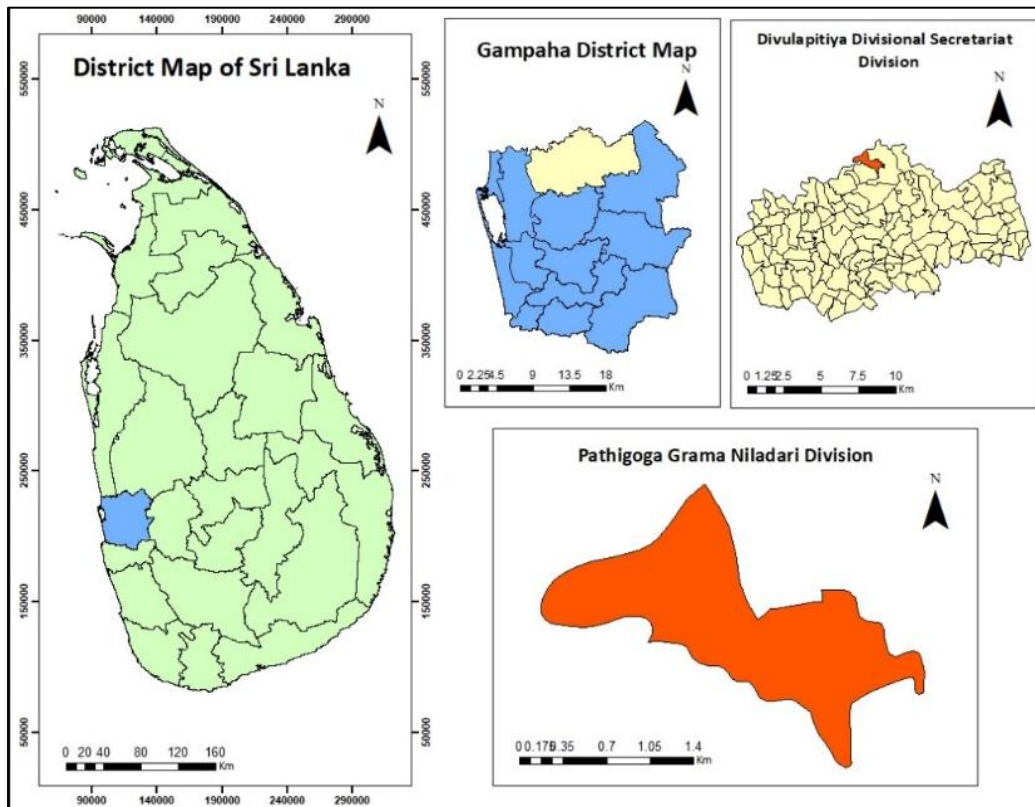Source: The Department of Census and Statistics, 2016

Figure 1. Location of the study area: Pathigoda Grama Niladari Division (GND) in Sri Lanka

Under the deductive approach and mixed method, the random sampling method was applied to collect primary data (i.e., ...). The samples were obtained randomly from 30 household units in Pathigoda GND. Spatial data including ... has been analyzed and maps were developed by ArcGIS Ver. The descriptive and narrative methods were applied to analyze the qualitative data. Descriptive statistical methods including percentages and mean score measures, simple regression, and correlation coefficient using SPSS software. Secondary data for the study (i.e., ...) was gathered from ...

Results

Gampaha district can be identified as a fast-developing area in Sri Lanka with a first-level service center with a core region. However, a regional development backwardness can be observed in the region due to several development challenges faced by the people living in the rural periphery of the district. According to the analysis of primary and secondary data, the major development challenges in the area could be studied under four main development challenges: (1)... (2)... (3)... and (4).... The solutions to address these challenges could be analyzed.

It is very important to study the socio-cultural development challenges in rural communities. The socio-cultural situations can be affected by different social activities. Therefore, the educational levels of the rural people, health conditions, cultural beliefs, and household conditions should be studied. Consequently, socio-cultural development challenges can be identified on the social condition.

Education is a process of developing knowledge, skills, and attitudes in an individual. Education has greatly influenced human development in any country. The development of intelligence, personality, skills, and awareness contribute to a good society. The development should not be regional, but it must be obtained by everyone. In the study area, the education can be identified as an important component of the development process. When having a high-level education, a high intellectual contribution can be made to development.

The development process becomes an important factor in higher education depending on the level of education. Intellectual contribution to development will be of great help. When focusing on the study area, low-level education has been identified. Societies with educated people can make a high-level contribution to the labor force. But low-level education has created a low-level society. Consequently, such societies experience nonregular activities which impact the whole society.

According to the results, 34% of the study population has obtained primary education. A secondary education was obtained by only 3% of the study population and a tertiary education was obtained by only 2% of the study population. Collectively, it can be concluded that the villagers have a lower access to education. The lower level of education has resulted the study population to have lack of social knowledge, lack of intelligence level, low level of understanding, and awareness.
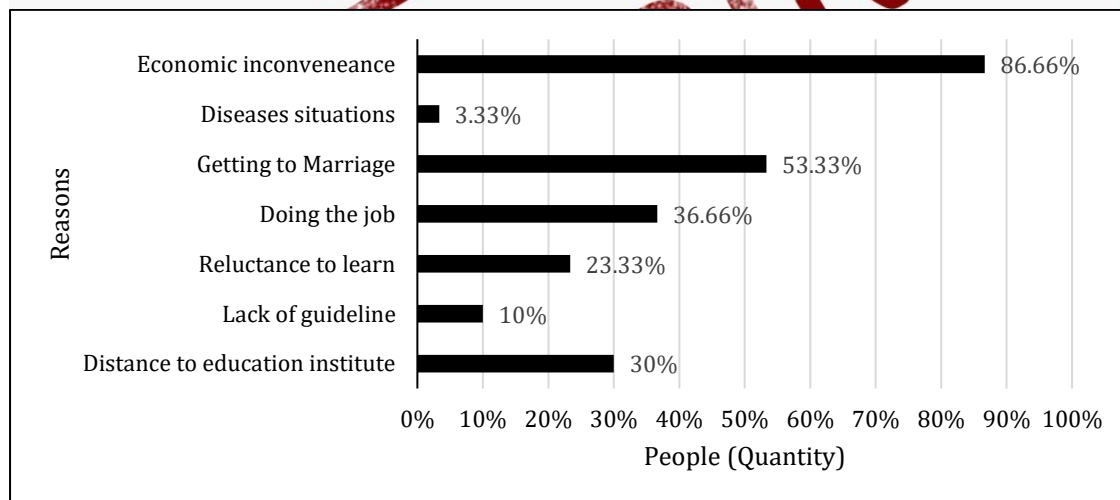

Figure 2. Reasons of the study population for not following higher education

Figure 2 summarizes the reasons of people not accessing higher education. Most villagers have stopped their education after primary or secondary education. It can be identified that the primary reason behind this is economic inconvenience. Moreover, wide spreading drug is a main socio-cultural challenge in the rural periphery area.

Drug addiction is impacting seriously not only rural development but also the personal and family development. Lack of education may be one of the reasons behind people getting addicted to drugs. Most young people have addicted to drugs (Figure 3). Most of the school-age children in the study area are addicted to drugs. According to the survey, Moonshine has highest number of drug addicted people within the study area.
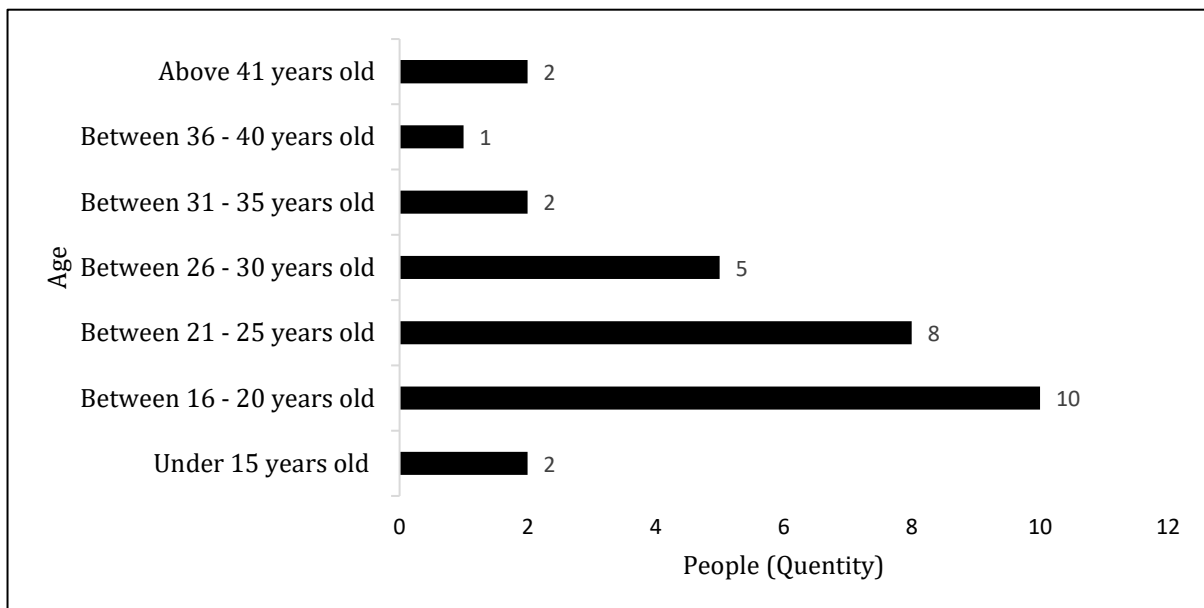
Figure 3. Age categories of the people who are drug addicted

According to the study, a lot of younger people in the study area are addicted to drugs. The highest number of drug-addicted people (33%) reported between ages 16–20 years. 27% of the drug addicted people were between ages 21–25 years old. 17% of the drug addicted people were between ages 26–30 years. Therefore, most children who are age of schooling and younger are addicted to drugs. Children's generation activities are impacted by well-being in their area development. Using the drug, in this case, impacts society, culture, and the economy. Reasons behind using illegal drugs, included health conditions, family issues, lack of education, and lack of economy. Other than drugs, some people in the study area use for alcohol, cigarettes, marijuana, and heroin.

Education is an empirical foundation for creating a better person with qualities. In this education's purpose on develop his or her attitudes, knowledge, and skills. But the sad situation is a lack of education. Consequently, child marriage is one of the social-cultural challenges. Child marriage is a social-cultural challenge in the rural periphery areas. On the other hand, it is a social problem. Child marriage is due to a bad situation their children have faced a lot of issues. especially awareness, lack of social knowledge, lack of responsibility, and understanding about children are identified as qualities. In addition, her role awareness, lack of guidelines for education, lack of knowledge of financial management, and lack of family plan and plan are identified in child marriage women.

The husband's actions have impacted a lot of family problems. Because the person who depends on child marriage, is not educated and not intelligent. his drug addiction is the main reason for his unbalanced family life. In addition, pregnancies of low ages, casual relationships, unstable families, lack of child nutrition and lack of education can be identified in this study. Consequently, child marriage is a main social-cultural challenge has focused in rural periphery areas. Women's education level has an impact due to for this situation.
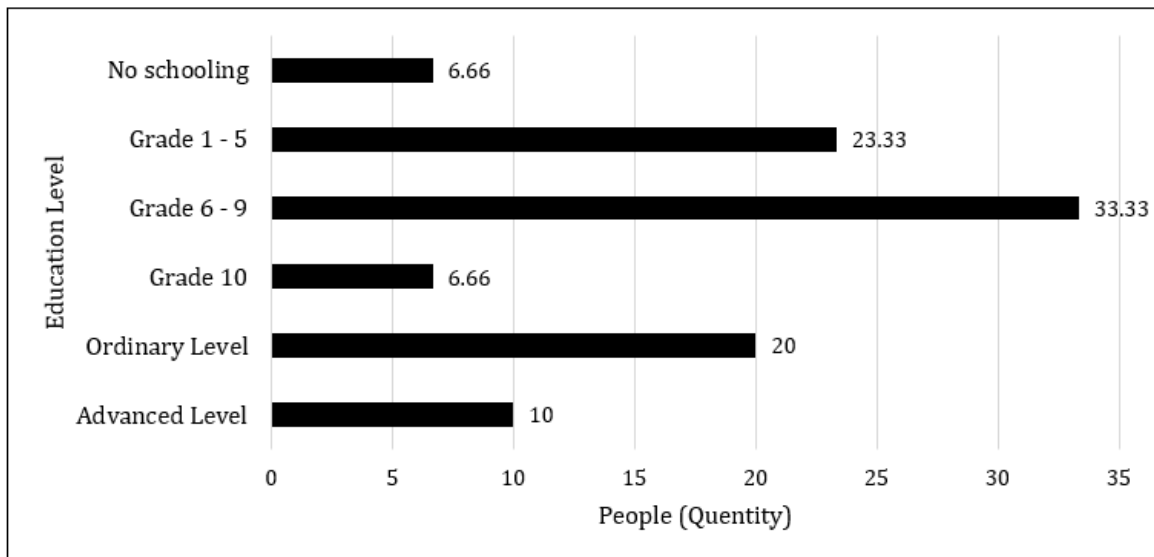
Figure 4. Educational levels of women in the study area

Economic development is an important factor in the development field. Many people, especially those in rural areas, face rural economic challenges related to poor rural development. These challenges have a direct impact on their well-being. Rural periphery people their job situation, serving, investment, and giving loans are important facts for measuring economic development. They depend on the micro-level of economic paths. The study area includes mainly coconut cultivations than where paddy cultivations. Apart from that, reserves, wastelands, swamps, and reservoirs are also located in the study area. Accordingly, there is a pull towards other commercial activities through agriculture. The main reason for this is the lack of stability of the income generated from agriculture, the increase in the price of raw materials and chemicals, and the lack of water in the area. Here, due to their lack of educational status, the majority have resorted to hired jobs rather than permanent jobs. Because of this, the people have to maintain their family's livelihoods on a low level of economies.

In the study area, it can be identified that the majority of rural people are engaged in micro-economic level jobs. Here, due to employment conditions at the micro-economic level, they have to depend on a very low level of monthly income. 73% of the study population have a monthly income of less than Rs. 6,000 rupees. Accordingly, it is a representation of the backwardness of the social system in that a large number of people live on the micro-level economic conditions of low income. Here, families living at very low-income levels are facing many challenges. 12% of the population has a monthly income in between Rs. 6,001–15,000 and 8% of the study population has a monthly income of Rs. 15,001–20,000. Only 5% of the study population earns Rs. 20,001–30,000 per month and 2% of the people have a monthly income of less than 30,000 (Sampath Pathikada Report, 2020).

During the study of the sample area, 30 family units were identified mainly under 06 job categories includinghired jobs (temporary jobs), brick/masonry/carpentry, private jobs, government jobs, foreign jobs, and self-employment. According to the results, 55% of the total employees represented those who engage in temporary jobs. 15% of the study population was engaged in brick/masonry/carpentry. The number of people employed in the private sector was 17% of the total. Two people are working in the government, which as a percentage was only 4%.

Four self-employed people represent 7% of the total. 2% of the study population was doing foreign jobs (Survey Data, 2021). Obtaining microfinance loans at high interest rates is seen in the rural sector. According to the study population earn their livelihood based on government jobs, private sector jobs, hired jobs, and brick/masonry/carpentry. Most of the people do wage labor and brick industry as the main means of living. Moreover, it is seen that a majority of people in the area are receiving benefits under social security welfare such as Samurdhi, Public Assistance, Elderly Allowance, Disability Allowance, etc. Accordingly, the majority of people living in rural areas are low-income families. In the study area, a simple regression model, and correlation coefficient values were calculated for the correlation between the income and expenditure of the family units to obtain microfinance loans. A simple regression model was constructed to identify the impact of expenditure on the income of families living in the rural periphery (Figure 5). Here monthly expenditure can be used as the dependent variable and monthly income as the independent variable.
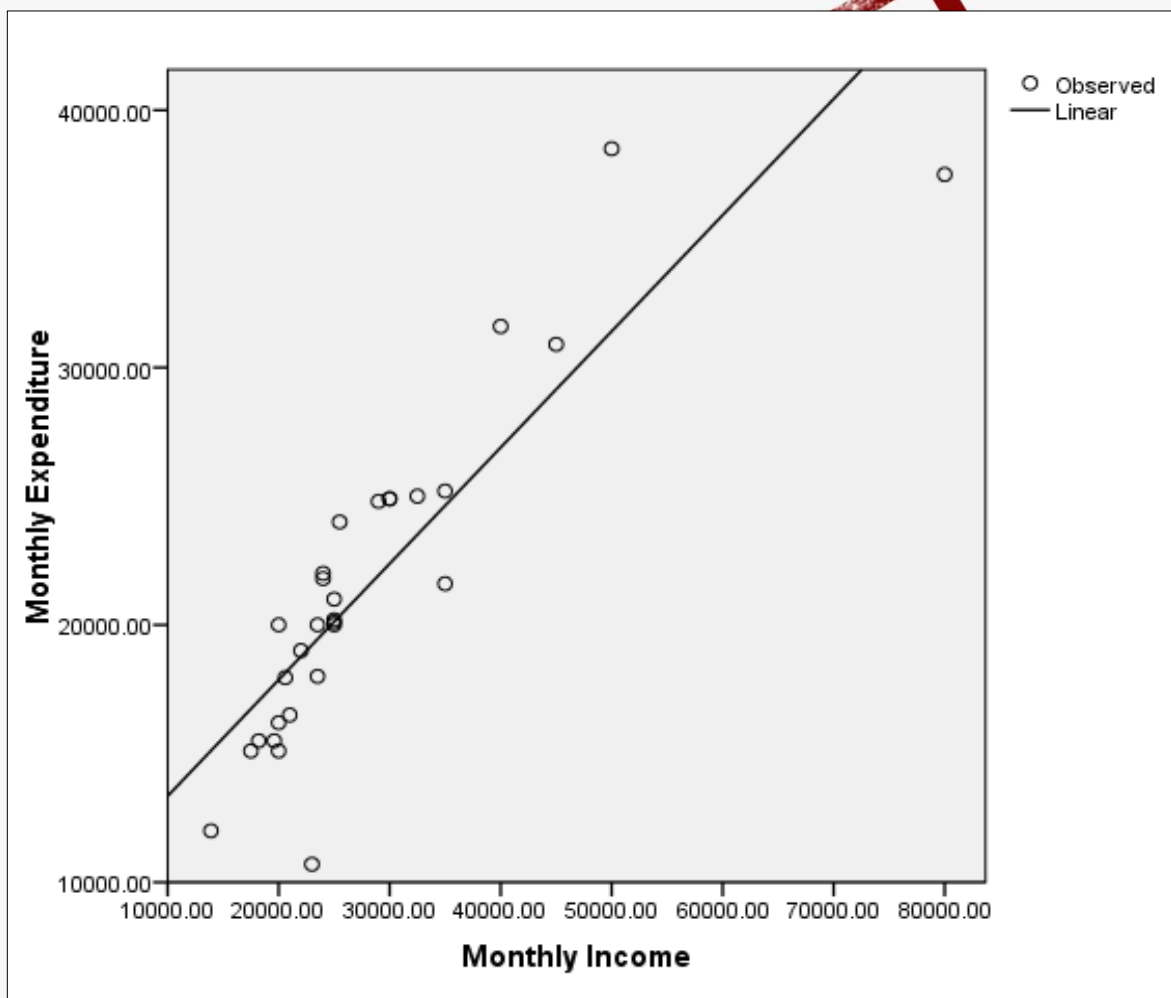

Figure 5. A simple regression model to identify the effect of family income and expenditure

Compared to the values of the monthly income of the 30 family units, the minimum is Rs.13,900 and the maximum is Rs. 80,000. An average income of Rs. 28,093 with a standard deviation of income is Rs. 12,724 was calculated. Accordingly, the value of the coefficient of determination is (R^2) 0.761 that is, 76.1% of the total variation of the dependent variable is explained by the

estimated regression model that is, 76.1% of the average expenses of a household depends on monthly expenses (Figure 5).

Focusing on the sample area, it can be recognized that the majority of people in rural areas are dependent on micro-income sources due to the weakening of the agricultural base. They live by earning daily income without any investments. It is mainly because the salary received by the rural community through microeconomic income is not enough to maintain their standard of living, so they have to fulfill their needs incompletely on other days.
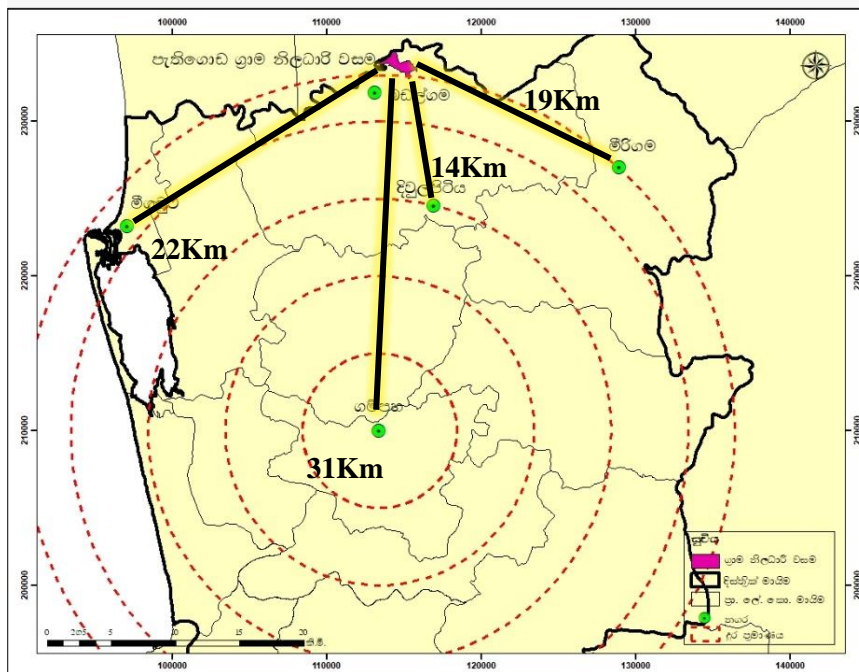

Figure 6. Relationship between nearby cities

In addition, weak market access is one of the major economic challenges in rural periphery areas. According to the present study, the villagers face transport issues in travelling to cities such as Gampaha city and Negombo city which are located 31 and 22 km away from the periphery, respectively. Therefore, the villagers depend within their village and nearby small towns for their day today needs. According to Figure 6, the nearest city to the study area is Badalgama. In other hand, this study area road system has situated much distance among the cities.

Government policies and politicians' decisions are very important in addressing the socio-economic issues in rural areas. The main feature that can be identified here is that the reality associated with the rural areas according to the political pattern is the increase of the gap that has not existed and the growth of a new class with wealth. It is seen that the problems existing in rural areas are controlled by the activities of political leaders. Political participation is important to reduce the problems arising in terms of infrastructure such as roads, sanitation, water, etc. while paying attention to the low-level infrastructure in rural areas. Some kind of development programs are launched with the participation of political actors only focusing on the vote, whereas these programs are implemented targeting only the voters who vote for their party.

It is very important to identify the environmental challenges in the rural periphery of rapidly developing districts. The environmental situation in the rural area has a lot of impacts on the quality of life of the rural people. Through the survey conducted through structured interviews, it was revealed that in the past it was possible to access safe drinking water by the respondents. Moreover, due to the presence of water in Ma Oya, there was a fertile environment as a water catchment area. Focusing on the study area, the rural agricultural people are suffering a lot mainly due to the scarcity of water in the area. It could be identified through the sample survey that they are trying to depend on external sources of income as they are under the challenge of maintaining their daily life.

Discussion

According to the literature review, rural people have been facing various development challenges in developing countries, underdeveloped countries and developed countries. Especially, villagers living in Asian, African, and Latin American regions have been facing economic, social, cultural and environmental issues.

Consequently, the main socio-cultural challenge in the rapidly developing rural areas of the studied district is lower education. Many social challenges have arisen centered on lower education. In rural areas 86.66% of the people are motivated to complete their education from primary or secondary due to economic difficulties and only 6% are directed to tertiary education. Due to the existence of a low level of education, it can be identified that it is mainly caused by using drugs and resorting to early marriage. Male children and youth who complete their education are seen turning to drugs. Also, it was confirmed in the study that the majority of female children who complete their education get married at a young age and thus fail in family life due to a lack of understanding about family planning, casual relationships, lack of responsibility towards children, etc. Accordingly, it is implied that other social challenges have arisen based on low educational status.

Due to the weakening of the agricultural base, the lack of stability of the income, and the water problem in the area, the majority have resorted to micro-level jobs, and it was confirmed that 55% of them are low-income families who work for hire. Due to the insufficient income received, there is a tendency to take microfinance loans and to take loans to settle the debts. As a result, they suffer from a debt trap. Due to the inclusion of rural peripheral elderly people who depend on political parties and the majority of people with low educational status. in the village, instead of intelligent voting, it was seen that rural issues have been politicized. Moreover, they have been exploited by outsiders.

Sample surveys identified that insufficient drinking water, weak agricultural base, access to micro-level jobs, etc. are the environmental challenges faced by rural peripheral people. Accordingly, due to the rapid development processes of the district, it is implied that its environmental impact has extended to the rural periphery. Powerlessness, spiritual poverty, isolation, and physical weakness were mainly seen in the rural periphery. Inability to understand something and incomprehension, reluctance to comment, dependent mentality, economic backwardness, negative attitudes, and distant coordination with the city are the backward characteristics of the rural community in the rural periphery.

Conclusions

This research effectively identified the multifaceted development challenges contributing to the socio-economic backwardness of the rural periphery within a rapidly developing district in Sri Lanka, focusing on the Pathigoda GND of the Gampaha district. Through a comprehensive analysis of the rural periphery, the study identified key challenges in four major domains: sociocultural, economic, political, and environmental factors. These challenges, which collectively impede holistic development, were discerned through a combination of community feedback, field observations, and structured questionnaires. The findings underscore that addressing development challenges requires a nuanced approach, integrating both community insights and practical interventions. The research also highlights the critical role of the public sector in fostering human-centred development. Beyond the enhancement of physical infrastructure, the emphasis must be placed on human development, prioritizing education, healthcare, and community empowerment to ensure sustainable progress. In conclusion, this study advocates for a collaborative development model where local stakeholders, policymakers, and development agencies work in unison to bridge the gap between the rapidly advancing urban core and its rural periphery. By focusing on integrated and inclusive strategies, the challenges of the rural periphery can be effectively mitigated, paving the way for equitable and sustainable development across the district.

Acknowledgements

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