

# An Analysis of Urban Growth and Urbanization in the Sabaragamuwa Province, Sri Lanka

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## **Abstract**

Many countries have identified urbanization as a progressive process and one of the key forces underlying technological innovation, economic development and socio-political development. In this context, this paper attempts to analyze the urban growth and current level of urbanization in the Sabaragamuwa Province which is one of the plantation areas located in the outer periphery in Sri Lanka. In addition, this study examines the hierarchical order of urban centres of the Sabaragamuwa Province. Data for the calculation of urban growth rates and level of urbanization were collected from several institutions and research papers of the university academics.

Although the Sabaragamuwa Province as a major plantation area had reported a relatively high average annual growth rate of 5.3 percent of urban population during the inter-censal period of 1963-1971, it has slowed down to 2.0 percent in the inter-censal period of 1971-1981. Due to the re-classification of urban areas in 1987 presently the Sabaragamuwa Province has 3 national urban centres. Accordingly, during the inter-censal period of 1981-2001 the average annual growth rate recorded by the Sabaragamuwa Province was -1.6 percent and level of urbanization was 4.2 percent. It is the lowest level of urbanization compared with the other provinces in the country. Accordingly, the slow growth of urban population, low level of urbanization and the very few national urban centres directly and indirectly affect the less dynamic economy of the Sabaragamuwa Province.

**Key words:** Urban centers, Urban growth, Urbanization, Sabaragamuwa Province

## **Introduction**

Demographic point of view urban growth is the increase of proportion of population living in “urban areas” of a country and urbanization is the percentage of population who live in urban areas out of the total population in a country. In the broader sense urbanization is a vast process of development or increasing activities of people in areas known as “urban” reflecting the structural changes in physical, socio-economic, demographic

and cultural factors of human life. Normally, the level of development of a country has a direct relationship with the level of urbanization of the country since the development of secondary and tertiary sectors of the economy influences the urban growth. Accordingly, urbanization offers increased opportunities for specialization, production and goods and services. This process is cumulative and moreover increases the general scale of settlements due to the progressive concentration of people and activities in urban areas, changes the economy where by non agricultural activities become dominant, change the structural characteristics of demography, spreads the urbanism beyond the built-up areas of towns including rural dilution and defuse economic, social and technological changes in the rural areas.

In this context, most of the developed and developing countries have recognized urbanization as a crucial phenomenon of economic growth and social change of a country because it provides a stimulus towards growth and development. They believe that urban areas are the foci and agents of innovation diffusion and socio economic transformation (Mangiza, 2005). Europe has recognized urbanization as a progressive process and as one of the key forces underlying technological innovation, economic development and socio-political change. Most Latin American countries have linked urbanization to the development models because urban growth was seen as a positive agent of modernization including change. Asia and Africa also have identified urbanization as one of the most conspicuous phenomena which has important and crucial linkages with economic growth and social change. These countries now feel that growth strategies based purely on agriculture are not adequate to create economic growth. Especially the developing countries in the past have sought the solution to this problem through agricultural development. However, the past experiences have shown that, it is difficult to achieve an appreciable level of economic growth through investment only in the rural agricultural sector. This is due to some inherent problems associated with the rural agricultural economy such as low agricultural productivity due to obsolete agricultural practice, inadequate irrigation facilities and poor water management, low price for agricultural products and low absorption capacity of labor due to absence of diversified rural economy (Perera, 1996). These causes imply the problem of stagnation of the rural economy. Therefore, this situation has urged developing countries also to promote the process of urbanization as a growth strategy which brings speedy growth and development in regions.

When considering the process of urbanization in the global context, though the level (rate) of urbanization in developed countries is much higher, level of urbanization in developing countries is much lower. For instance, in the South Asian Region the average level of urbanization is around 30 percent, as against the level of 75 percent in industrialized nations (United Nations,

2002). According to Fuchs (1987) low levels of urbanization in the poor regions in developing countries, not merely reflect regional poverty but also a condition for the perpetuation of poverty.

In this context, Sri Lanka, similar to most other developing countries, also has been experiencing a slow urban growth and a low level of urbanization as well for a long time. According to the previous data the average annual growth rate of urban population in 1881 in Sri Lanka was 0.8 percent and it was 1.0 percent in 2001. Accordingly, it is obvious that except the highest percentage which was 6.2 in 1963 urban growth in Sri Lanka was slow throughout the last century. Considering the level of urbanization in the last century, in 1891 it was 10.6 percent and 21.5 percent in 1981. However, due to downgrading of Town Councils into Pradeshiya Shabhas with the introduction of the new administrative system in 1987 the current rate of urbanization in Sri Lanka appears as 14.6 percent (Department of Censuses and Statistics, 2001). These statistics clearly show that the process of urbanization in Sri Lanka throughout the last century has been considerably slow.

In addition to this nature of process of urbanization in the country, it is obvious that significant differences exist in urban growth rates, level of urbanization and the number of urban centres among the nine provinces of the country. In this context, the main objective of this paper is to analyze the pattern of urban growth and current level of urbanization in the Sabaragamuwa Province which is one of the plantation areas located in the outer periphery in Sri Lanka. This study also attempts to examine the hierarchical order of urban centres of the Sabaragamuwa Province. The findings of the study will be very useful in formulating the policies and strategies for future urban development in the Sabaragamuwa Province.

## **Methodology**

Basically the data on urban population in Census years published by Department of Census and Statistics were used for the analysis. In addition, data were collected from the reports published by the Urban Development Authority in Rathnapura and some books and research papers of the university academics. The average annual growth rates of urban population and level of urbanization were used as techniques of data analysis and were achieved by applying related formulas. Tables, graphs and maps were used to present the data.

## **Overview of Urban Growth and Level of Urbanization in Sri Lanka**

History of the urban growth in Sri Lanka goes back to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century B.C (Indrasiri, 2001). Most of the towns in this period were in the Dry Zone and

was associated with the tanks, irrigation channels and hydraulic civilization. The locations of these cities changed according to the changes of the kingdoms in the areas of Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Sigiriya, Yapahuwa, Kurunegala and Kandy. By about the 13<sup>th</sup> century AD, there was a concentration of population within the south-western quadrant of the island due to the collapse of the hydraulic civilization in the north-central plains as a result of foreign invasions.

Most of these coastal towns had grown during the Portuguese and Dutch occupations and were further developed by the British. The inland centres were developed by them for the purposes of administrative, commercial, plantation and holiday resorts etc. Most of these urban centres are located within raw material supply routes that are linked to the main administrative centres in Sri Lanka. These urban centres comprise about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the total urban population even today. A large concentration is in the city of Colombo and around it. Therefore, the main urban cluster of the country is in the Colombo district with the polarization of Colombo city. In addition, it is possible to identify certain concentrations in the Dry Zone associated with the colonization schemes and in the central hill country which are directly linked to the plantation economy. After the independence also this distribution pattern continued.

Considering the nature of urban growth and level of urbanization in Sri Lanka, previous data reveal that Sri Lanka has a slow tempo of urbanization and a low level of urbanization as well. As shown in Table 1 the urban population in Sri Lanka has slowly increased from 1871 up to 1981. The average annual growth rate ranged from 0.8 percent from 1881 and 1963 to 6.2 per cent. The natural increase of population and the increase of migration in the Colombo and Gampaha Districts and colonization projects in the Dry Zone were the factors for this sudden increase in 1963. In addition, the creation of 45 towns and the extension of town limits in three municipalities in 1963 have also increased the urban population (Panditharathne, 1996). After 1963 a decreasing trend can be observed in urban growth and in 2001 there was a slight increase in it up to 2.2 percent. The level of urbanization had increased only by ten fold in nine decades. It gradually increased from 10.8 percent in 1871 up to 22.4 percent in 1971. In 1981 this gradual increase declined to 21.5 percent and dropped to 14.6 percent at the Census in 2001.

The major reasons responsible for this decreasing trend of level of urbanization are the absence of an acceptable definition of urban settlements and an- island wide Census in 2001. Definition of urban areas of a country is a very important factor in understanding the real picture of urbanization of a country. Unlike most of other countries an “urban area” in Sri Lanka is not based on any definite criterion as regards the size of population, population density, proportion of the male population in non agricultural occupations or status of civil administration (Panditharathne, 1996). In Sri Lanka, “urban status” is

conferred on area by the Minister in charge of Local Government purely for local administrative purposes. However, Ministerial discretion seems to be based on “the nature of the development of the locality or its amenities and urban character” (Mendis, 1982). In this connection, those areas which are defined as “urban” are administratively classified. Before 1987, areas which were identified as urban were classified as Municipal Councils, Urban Councils and Town Councils. After 1987, with the setting up of Provincial Councils, delimitation of urban areas also changed including only Municipal and Urban Councils as urban and excluding newly established Pradeshiya Sabhas which were previously Town Councils.

As a result, 89 urban settlements were classified as rural settlements after the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution in 1987. These downgraded Town Councils included some of the most dynamic and densely populated suburbs of Colombo such as Maharagama and some fast growing small towns in the Dry Zone. For examples, Ambalantota had an average annual growth rate of 4.6 percent between 1981 and 1993 while Tissamaharama had a growth of 6 per cent (Department Census and Statistics, 2005). Even district capitals such as Polonnaruwa have been excluded from the urban status (Wanasinghe, 1995). After 1987, 21 towns in the Colombo Metropolitan Region lost their urban status and 9 and 6 towns in the district of Jaffna and Galle also lost the urban status respectively (Wanasinghe and Karunanayake, 2003). Furthermore, in 1994, 203 towns which have emerged after 1981 have been identified (Indrasiri, 1997). All these towns also are (Table 1)

Table 1: Urban Growth in Sri Lanka, 1871-2001

Census years	Urban Population	Average annual growth rate of urban population (%)	Number of Towns	Level of urbanization (%)
1871	260,376	-	19	10.8
1881	281,065	0.8	20	10.2
1891	321,413	1.4	20	10.7
1901	414,046	2.9	28	11.6
1911	537,666	3.1	37	13.1
1921	631,871	1.7	42	14.2
1931	737,273	3.4	42	15.0
1946	1,023,044	1.9	42	15.4
1953	1,239,133	2.1	43	15.3
1963	2,016,285	6.2	99	19.1
1971	2,848,116	4.1	135	22.4
1981	3,192,489*	1.2	134	21.5
	2,036,237**	-1.1		
2001	2,467,171	1.0	45	14.6

\*\*Excluding population in Town Council

\* including population in Municipal Councils, Urban Councils and Town Councils

Source: Department of Census and Statistics, 2005

excluded by the present urban definition. However, due to the re-classification and the loss of 89 urban settlements, the level of urbanization appears to have declined further to 14.6 percent at the 2001 Census of population. This is due to the direct result of the downgrading of 89 urban centers, the failure to revise city boundaries and to incorporate emerging dynamic centres. Therefore, As Wanasinghe and Karunanayake (2003) pointed out, the country has under-estimated the rapidity of growth of the urban population. According to the Urban Development Authority a more realistic degree Urbanization would 30 per cent and this proportion is projected to increase to 65% by the year 2030.

The other reason for decreasing trend of level of urbanization is the absence of an-island wide Census in 2001. The Census of population in 2001 enumerated only 18 out of 25 districts due to the war situation in the North and Eastern provinces.

Taking the province wise urban growth of the country into consideration, it is obvious that significant differences exist in urban growth rates, the number and the level of urbanization among provinces of the country. According to Table 2 except for the Western Province, all other provinces still experience a low level of urbanization. Western Province being the urbanized core region in the country consists of the highest percentage of urbanization and the highest number of urban centres. All the other provinces of the country have not gained a significant urban growth even today. The clear observation in terms of the levels of urbanization in other provinces (in plantation regions and Dry Zone areas) is their slow growth or stagnation during the last 20 years. However, one noticeable feature of the level of urbanization of the provinces is that the level of urbanization of Dry Zone is somewhat faster than that the level of urbanization of plantation areas. Currently, the level of urbanization of the North-Central Province is higher than that of the Uva and Sabaragamuwa Provinces. This is directly due to the relationship of colonization schemes and the urban development of the Dry Zone areas (Figure 1).

Presently, provinces that comprise of plantations are experiencing a very slow growth and a low level of urbanization when compared to the other provinces of Sri Lanka. Uva and Sabaragamuwa being predominantly plantation areas have a very low share of urban population and a fewer number of urban centres. It implies that, though favorable conditions were created by the colonial government for investments and entrepreneurs in these areas in the nineteenth century, at present, such forces have weakened in these areas.

Table 2: Average Annual Growth Rate of Urban Population by Provinces in Sri Lanka, 1963-2001

Province	Average Annual Growth Rate (%)		
	1963-1971	1971-1981	1981-2001
Western	4.8	1.18	0.2
North Western	3.95	1.09	-0.5
Central	2.02	0.7	0.36
Southern	2.08	0.92	-0.42
Northern	5.63	1.62	-
Eastern	5.7	2.17	1.60
Uva	2.23	0.28	-0.46
North Central	4.17	1.36	3.32
<b>Sabaragamuwa</b>	<b>5.3</b>	<b>2.00</b>	<b>-1.06</b>

Source: Department of Census and Statistics, 2001, Mendis, 1982

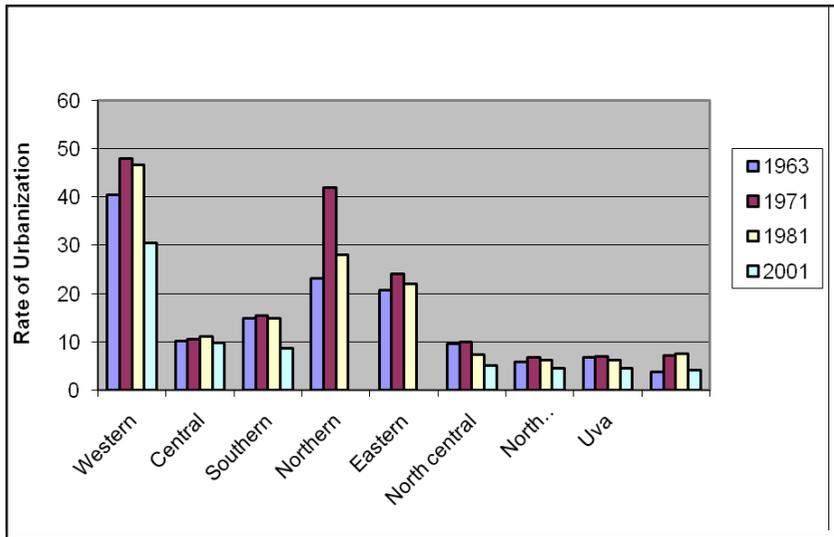


Figure 1: Level of Urbanization by Province

Source: Department of Census and Statistics, 2001; Mendis, 1982

In the nineteenth century after opening up of hill country areas for the plantation crops, a number of factors contributed to the urban growth in these areas. The immigration of British planters and South Indian plantation workers and rail transport were initial stimulus to the urban growth in these areas. However, after the Independence, a tremendous negative impact existed on urban growth of the region due to certain events such as the

handling of inputs and outputs directly by the state, signing of the Sirima-Shastri pact, the decreasing importance of railways as a transporter of freight and the decimation of the urban hinterland through out-migration contributed to the reduction of the influence of factors that had originally stimulated urban growth in the plantation areas. Thus, with the Independence in 1948, the contribution of the plantation sector to the overall economy of the country has declined gradually.

## **Discussion**

### **Urban Growth and Level of Urbanization in the Sabaragamuwa Province**

Sabaragamuwa Province which is one of the nine provinces located outer periphery in Sri Lanka. (Samarasinghe 1984, Moor, 1984, Wijedasa, 1992, Wanasinghe, 2001). It is bounded North by the North-Western and Central Provinces, East by the Uva Province, South by the Southern Province and West by the Western Province. It covers an extent of 4968.2 Sq. Km of land area and it is 8 per cent of total land area of the country. It consists two administrative districts namely Rathnapura and Kegalle. In terms of climatic conditions, 67 percent of the land area in the province falls within the Wet Zone of the island and the rest of 26 percent is covered by the intermediate and dry climatic conditions. The agro-climatic divergence in the province produces a wide range of agricultural products such as tea, rubber, coconuts, paddy and other export crops, vegetable and fruits. According to the Census of 2001, Sabaragamuwa Province had 1.8 million of population. It accounts for about 10 percent of the national population, in comparison with the 8 per cent of the total land area. The share of population of the province is relatively low when compared with some other provinces such as Western, Central and Southern.

The economy of the Sabaragamuwa Province predominantly consists the agricultural sector. The agricultural sector consists mainly of plantation and paddy cultivation including minor crops. According to the general land use of the Sabaragamuwa Province, nearly 76 percent of the area in the province is under agriculture. 47.2 percent of the population in the Rathnapura District and 31.2 percent in the Kegalle District are engaged in agriculture (Department of Census and Statistics, 2002). As in the case of other provinces in Sri Lanka, the industrial sector of the Sabaragamuwa Province is highly insignificant. The gem industry is one of the important sectors of the economy of the Province. According to most of the socio-economic

indicators Sabaragamuwa Province is one of the slow growing regions in Sri Lanka (Uduperuwa, 2005, Uduperuwa, 2007)

Presently one of the noticeable features that can be clearly identified with regard to the urban growth in the Sabaragamuwa Province is the slow urban growth and the low level of urbanization compared to other provinces of Sri Lanka. According to Table 2 and Table 3 though urban population in the Sabaragamuwa Province in the inter-censal period of 1963-1971 had increased at a relatively higher average annual growth rate of 5.3 percent it has slowed down in the inter-censal period of 1971-1981 up to 2.0 percent and situation has worsened further after 1981. After 1987, with the setting up Provincial Councils, delimitation of urban areas was changed including only Municipal and Urban Councils as urban and under this situation the Sabaragamuwa Province has only 3 urban areas. Accordingly, in the inter-censal period of 1981-2001 the average annual growth rate of urban population in the province was -1.06 percent.

Table 3: Urban Growth in the Sabaragamuwa Province (National Level)-1963-2001

Census years	Population		Average annual growth rate (%)	Number of towns	Share of the country (%)
	Total (000)	Urban (000)			
1963	1124500	43800	5.3	12	0.4
1971	1316100	93800		2.0	12
1981	1482000	112700	-1.6		12
2001	1787938	75801			3

Source: Dept of Census and Statistics, 2001, Mendis, 1982

In addition to the slow growth of urban population, Sabaragamuwa Province is experiencing a low level of urbanization. According to the data, the level of urbanization in most other provinces in of Sri Lanka is higher than the Sabaragamuwa Province from 1963 to 2001 (Figure 1). Even in 1963 the Sabaragamuwa Province had recorded the lowest level of urbanization (3.8 percent) among all the provinces in Sri Lanka. In 1971 it increased up to 7.1 percent while it was 7.6 percent in 1981. According to the Census in 2001 the level of urbanization of the Sabaragamuwa Province was 4.2 percent. It was the lowest value compared with most other provinces of Sri Lanka.

Though there was a considerable increase in the level of urbanization within the intercensal period of 1963-1971, it has slowed down after 1971. Although, in 1981 it has increased up to 7.6 percent and the increase is only 0.5 percent during the 10 year period.

However, according to the Census in 2001, at present the total urban population of the Sabaragamuwa Province is about 75,801. It accounts for 4.2 percent out of the total population of the province. Between the two districts in the province, Rathnapura is more urban than Kegalle. The Rathnapura District accounts for 3.3 percent, while the Kegalle District accounts for 0.9 percent (Table 4). It is far below than most other districts and the national level.

### **Spatial Distribution of Urban Population in the Sabaragamuwa Province**

Similar to the urban population in other provinces in the country, the urban population in the Sabaragamuwa Province is highly unevenly distributed within the Province. Although there were 12 officially declared urban centres at national level in 1981, according to the present administrative structure, the Census in 2001 has identified only 3 urban centres at the national level in three DS Divisions out of 25 DS Divisions (Table 4). All other 21 DS Divisions have no urban areas according to the present administrative system. Rathnapura District consists of 2 urban areas namely Rathnapura and Balangoda while the Kegalle District comprises only one urban area namely Kegalle.

### **Urban Hierarchy of the Sabaragamuwa Province**

According to the Central Place Theory (Christaller,1933) a hierarchical order of service centers of a region or a country is a vertical class system in which service centers might be classified according to the threshold and range values of their functions. Generally orders of a hierarchy could be identified using different criteria such as the rank size of service centers based on population, the extent of area served by a center or the magnitude of the complementary region, types of service functions provided and the number and value significance of functions etc.

Table 4: Spatial Distribution of Urban Population in the Sabaragamuwa Province, 1981-2001 (National Level)

<b>AGA Divisions Rathnapura District</b>	<b>Number of urban centres - 1981</b>	<b>Number of urban centres- 2001</b>	<b>percentage of urban population - 2001</b>
Ayagama	-	-	-
Balangoda	1	1	0.7
Eheliyagoda	-	-	-
Elapata	-	-	-
Embilipitiya	-	-	-
Godakawela	1	-	-
Imbulpe	-	-	-
Kahawatta	1	-	-
Kalawana	-	-	-
Kirialla	-	-	-
Kollonna	-	-	-
Kuruwita	-	-	-
Nivithigala	-	-	-
Opanayake	-	-	-
Pelmadulla	1	-	-
Rathnapura	1	1	2.6
Waligepolla	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3.3</b>
<b>AGA Divisions Kegalle District</b>			
Aranayake	-	-	-
Bulathkohupitiya	-	-	-
Dehiowita	1	-	-
Daraniyagala	-	-	-
Galigamuwa	-	-	-
Kegalle	1	1	0.9
Mawanella	1	-	-
Rambukkana	1	-	-
Ruwanwalla	1	-	-
Warakapola	1	-	-
Yatiantota	1	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0.9</b>
<b>Province</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4.2</b>

Source: Dept of Census and Statistics, 2001, Mendis, 1982

Theoretically widespread economic growth of a region or a country requires the creation of an articulated and integrated system of settlement composed of towns and cities of different sizes and functions that are large and diversified enough to serve not only their own residents, but also to the surrounding rural areas (Christaller, 1933; Berry, 1967; Johnson, 1970; Rondinelli and Ruddle, 1978). Towns and cities are seen as links in the

system of distribution and exchange between agricultural areas and urban areas. Therefore, absence of a well developed hierarchical system of urban centers obstructs the emergence of sectorally and geographically balanced pattern of economic growth. Poor countries without such a spatial system cannot achieve geographically diffused development and reduce regional and rural-urban disparities, because, without access to an integrated system of urban hierarchy farmers cannot easily sell their surplus, obtain input, modernize their technology and adopt products to consumer demand (Rondinelli, 1984).

In this context, it can be observed that Sabaragamuwa Province has no well developed urban hierarchy. Although there were 12 officially declared urban centres at national level in 1981 according to the present administrative structure, Sabaragamuwa Province consists only 3 urban centres at the national level in three DS Divisions out of 25 DS Divisions. This is mainly due to the absence of an explicit definition of urban settlements in the country. This situation is a major barrier to realize the current real picture of the urban growth in Sri Lanka and the Sabaragamuwa Province as well.

According to the present administrative structure, urban areas such as Pelmadulla, Kahawatta, Warakapola and Mawanella are presently incorporated into the Pradeshiya Sabhas and are not officially declared as urban centres at the national level though demographically and functionally they are growing faster than other centres in the province. According to section 154 of the Thirteenth Amendment of the Constitution in 1987 only the urban local authorities Municipal and Urban Councils have the powers to implement the economic plans under the Municipal Councils Ordinance. As a result, Pradeshiya Sabhas are restricted in their capacity of independent decision making and actions. Under this situation the expansion of urban economic activities, urban services and utilities of most of the towns are restricted as they have not been promoted to Municipalities or Urban Councils. Hence, this situation inhibits the urban growth and its impact on the development in the Sabaragamuwa Province. It restricts the promotion of all kinds of activities such as industries, urban services, constructions, transport, communication and utilities in such towns. This is a great barrier for the dynamism of the centres in the province.

However, at present, at the local level the Urban Development Authority has identified 96 service centres in the Sabaragamuwa Province (Urban Development Authority, 2005). The Rathnapura District consists of 46 centres and the Kegalle District consists of 50 centres. The Urban Development

Authority has classified these 96 centres into 5 orders based on existing population of centres, availability of administrative activities, roads and transport, commercial and services, manufacturing activities, social recreation, health services, education facilities and other infrastructure. Out of these 96 central places 20 service centres have been declared as urban centres at the local level by the Urban Development Authority for the planning Purposes (Table 5 and Figure 2). The orders of the hierarchy of service centres of the Sabaragamuwa Province are as follows.

1. First order - Regional Capitals with a Population over 20,000

Rathnapura town, being the Provincial Capital and the administrative centre of the province from ancient times, is in the first order and dominates the urban hierarchy of the province. According to the Census of 1981 the Rathnapura town had a population of 37354 and 46309 in 2001.

2. Second order -District Capitals with a Population of 10,000-19,000

Kegalle town is the capital of the Kegalle District and the only one urban centre in the second order of the provincial hierarchy. Kegalle town had a population of 14928 in 1981 and 17430 in 2001.

3. Third order-Small and Medium Size Towns with a Population of 10,000-19,000

Third level consists of only of 16 service centres and 13 service centers have been declared as urban centers in the local urban hierarchy. Although all the service centres in this order had a population between 10,000 and 19,000 both in 1971 and 1981, at present, some urban centres have exceeded 19,000.

4. Fourth order-Rural Service Centres with a Population of 2500-10,000  
This order consists of 17 service centres. Depending on the development of the service centre only 5 of them have been declared as urban centres in the provincial urban hierarchy.

5. Fifth order-Village Service Centres with a Population below 2500

The majority of the centres of the Sabaragamuwa Province are village service centres. This order consists 63 settlements.

Table 5: Local Urban Hierarchy in the Sabaragamuwa Province

Order	Urban centre	Size of population (000)		Change of population within 20 years (000) (1981-2001)	Average annual growth rate (%) 1981-2001
		1981	2001		
First order	Rathnapura **	37354	46309	8955	1.2
Second order	Kegalle **	14928	17430	2502	0.8
	Balangoda **	10263	12062	1799	0.9
	Pelmadulla	6153	8000	1847	1.5
	Mawanella	13898	23501	9603	3.5
	Kuruwita	*	8000	-	-
	Ehaliyagoda	*	8900	-	-
	Embilipitiya	*	22000		-
Third order	Ruwanwella	4856	7850	2994	3.1
	Rambukkana	5952	7790	1830	1.5
	Warakapola	4701	7984	3283	3.5
	Kahawatta	3650	5980	2330	3.5
	Galigamuwa	*	5890	-	-
	Deraniyagala	*	4270	-	-
	Yatiantota	2217	4285	2028	4.6
Fourth order	Rakwana	1799	3985	2186	6.0
	Dehiowita	6950	8190	1240	0.9
	Nivitigala	*	6000	-	-
	Anguruwala/	*	4850	-	-
	Karawanella				
	Bulathkohupitiya	*	3110	-	-

\*\* National urban centres

\* No urban status in 1981

Source: Urban Development Authority, (2005)

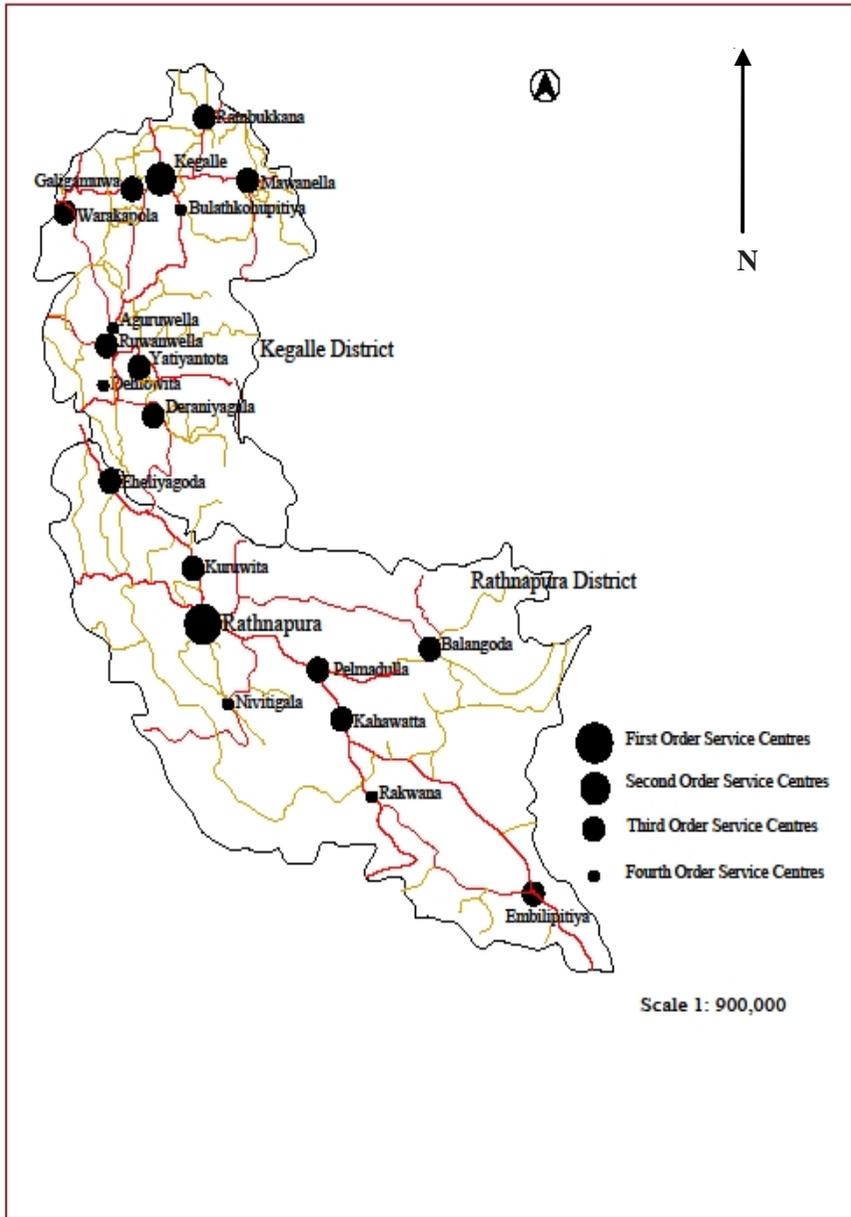


Figure 2: Urban centers in the Sabaragamuwa Province

Sabaragamuwa Province is one of the slow growing regions located in the outer periphery in the country. With the establishment of British power over the entire island in the early decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it became a major plantation area of the country. The development of plantations in hill country areas resulted the development of a communication system, services, transport, commerce, health care and education in these areas. All these

factors as well as the immigration of British planters and South Indian plantation workers contributed to the emergence of a number of service centres in the hill country areas. During that period these service centres played a vital role as collecting centres of agricultural produce and catering goods and services to the population in these areas. After Independence, a number of negative impacts existed on the growth of service centres in these areas due to the gradual decline of the plantation sector. After Independence these service centres developed within a separate framework. Since the population in the country increased rapidly after Independence these service centres had to cater to a large population.

Presently, the most striking feature in relation to the urban growth in the Sabaragamuwa Province is the very slow growth (in 2001 negative growth) of urban population and the lowest level of urbanization among all other provinces of Sri Lanka. It still remains as a highly agricultural region though there were a number of development programs during the last 20 years. Although Sabaragamuwa Province has several functionally and demographically dynamic service centres, they have not been identified as urban centres at the National level and only 3 centres have been identified as national centres. Therefore, the spatial distribution of urban population in the province also is highly uneven.

The absence of an accepted definition for urban areas is the major factor which is responsible for inhibiting the real picture of urban growth and urbanization in the regions as well in the country. Due to this situation the country has under-estimated the rapidity of growth of the urban population. Therefore, redefinition of urban areas is essential for the country.

Since urbanization is a powerful instrument for promoting economic and social change, the slow growth and low level of urbanization directly and indirectly affect the less dynamic economy of the province. Therefore, if necessary actions are not taken to promote the process of urbanization in the Sabaragamuwa Province, it will be a major obstacle to the development of the Sabaragamuwa Province.

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