

## **Some Aspects of Youth Unemployment and Poverty in the Southern Province of Sri Lanka**

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### **Abstract**

Unemployment and related issues have disturbed socioeconomic equilibrium in many developing countries including Sri Lanka for decades. The primary sector of the economy, especially agriculture, is considered as the last resort for unemployed and poor people in post independent Sri Lanka by successive governments while improving the capacity of the sector. A number of subsidy schemes, protection from imported items, and land reforms were implemented to make this sector more attractive to the rural population and to make it more effective to reduce rural livelihood related problems with limited success. The capacity in sub sectors such as livestock, fisheries, and forestry has been under utilized due to one reason or other during the same period of time. The story is very much same regarding the agro industry and agribusiness in the country. Similarly, the industrial sector which is critical for economic take off in many developed countries, has failed to usher the economy through higher growth and to absorb the growing labor force in the country. The Southern province of the country, home for two popular youth uprisings, has been a sensitive geographical location due to its higher population density, unavailability of sufficient par-

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cels of cultivable lands, highly educated youth population, and high unemployment rates. The province has higher levels of unemployment, under employment, and poverty compared with many other provinces of the country. The situation is likely to aggravate further due to the gradually growing young population without employment, rising competition for higher education without prospects for jobs, and changing attitudes of new generations for old traditional agricultural livelihoods. A meticulously prepared prudent plan is essential to come out of this complicated economic environment, as there is no magic solution to those protracted issues for long period of time.

**Keywords:** Agriculture; Labour Force; Poverty; Unemployment

## Introduction

There has been a growing concern among the governments of developing countries as well as among international development agencies, that the strides made by these countries in the development process during the last five decades or so have inadequately addressed the twin problems of poverty and unemployment. While the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has grown significantly in most of these countries, the widespread phenomenon of unemployment, particularly rural unemployment, remains largely unresolved. In Sri Lanka too, one of the major problems confronted by the successive governments since independence in 1948 was trying to maintain an appropriate balance between economic growth and social equity.

It is only through acceleration of economic growth that the problems of unemployment, under employment and disguised unemployment could be solved. And there is no other way to create employment opportunities to absorb the already unemployed, underemployed and the new additions to the labor force. While economic growth takes place, certain supportive actions could be implemented to mitigate unemployment, under employment and disguised unemployment especially among the youth.

An important policy measure adopted by successive governments to solve the problems of poverty and unemployment was to increase the labor absorption capacity of agriculture. The standard policy package aimed in this direction include, mainly the supportive prices, input subsidies fertilizer, irrigation facilities and extension services. These policies have promoted output growth and technological development to a certain extent, particularly in the crop agriculture. However, the Sri Lankan agriculture has failed so far to expand em-



ployment opportunities at a sufficiently higher rate to make a significant dent on the unemployment problem. The slow rates of adoption of multiple cropping as well as crop livestock integration have partly contributed to the current low levels of labor use in agriculture. At the same time, commercially oriented farmers adopted labor saving technology. Even the more radical measures like land reforms did not sufficiently help to enhance the employment opportunities in agriculture due to various deficiencies encountered in the implementation stage.

Increased employment and incomes in both the tea and rubber cultivation resulted from replanting with higher yielding clones and improved cultural practices. By raising bush density and using currently under utilized land for livestock and vegetables it was possible to create more employment in tea estates. However, the potential for exploiting unutilized land may be more limited in rubber estates. But, intensive inter cropping and livestock development offer the greatest potential for increasing rural employment and income in coconut estates.

Increased employment in the domestic food crop sector could be a result of from [e.g. promotion of green revolution technology, introduction of the System of Rice Intensification (SRI)] and diversified paddy cultivation via improved technology, price incentives, input subsidies, credit, marketing, institutions and organizations (University of Colombo Community Extension Centre, 2005).

Although development prospects for the fisheries sector in Sri Lanka are promising, thus far fishery resources are exploited by only a small portion of the population. During the last few decades, the traditional fishing industry has been radically transformed by mechanization, the introduction of new fishing technology and the development of export markets. However, the small scale fisheries sector has not expanded to its full capacity (Department of National Planning - Sri Lanka, n.d.). In order for the fishing industry to absorb more labor, it will have to expand more rapidly. The available fish supply could be better exploited by expanding to the larger 200 mile offshore radius. The capital intensive, sophisticated technology and larger ships are required for expanding the radius. With these developments unemployment in the marine fisheries sector can be expected to decline. Inland fisheries and aquaculture, where breeding and harvesting could be scientifically managed, provide a supplementary source of employment in the fisheries sector. Concurrently, consumer preferences for inland water fish needs to be promoted.

The large scale industrial sector too has not grown fast enough to absorb the growing numbers in the labor force. Therefore, the need for promoting more vigorous growth in industry, particularly in manufacturing, has become apparent.

The growth and employment in these traditional sectors including industrial and service sectors have either declined or increased marginally during the last two decades. Agricultural employment including fisheries has declined from 42.2% of total employment in 1992 to 31.3% in 2007 (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2009). Industrial including rural industry and service sector employment rose marginally; industrial employment from 20.1% in 1992 to 26.6% and service sector employment from 37.7% to 42.1% during the same period.

In view of this state of affairs the current paper is written with the following objectives in mind.

- a) To identify the means to develop human resources in the Southern Province focusing on the current and future requirements in the job market and to identify the potentials for development and investment opportunities in order to meet the demand for jobs from the increased labor force in future.
- b) To examine how to develop and optimally utilize human and physical resources with a view to reduce unemployment and poverty in the province; and
- c) To explore the ways and means of empowering the young generation through Vocational Training and Education (VT&E) in selected fields and skills development aiming at the current and future job market.

From the analysis of the available secondary data and views expressed by the Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) it was revealed that the most acute problem faced by the youth in the province is unemployment. On one hand, there is a growing problem of educated unemployment and on the other hand, there is a large number of youth who drop out from the education system annually. Only a limited number of youths enters the universities or other tertiary level educational institutes or colleges (Ministry of youth affairs - Sri Lanka, 2007). It was also found that the unemployment rate among females is twice the rate for males. Thus, there is a need to streamline and strengthen the Vocational Training & Education in the province at various levels including



craft level training and higher-level diplomas, which suit the demand in the current and emerging job market as is done in the Sabaragamuwa Province for example (Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission of Sri Lanka, 2009). Special emphasis needs to be placed on career guidance and counseling as well. In addition, the youth in the province face many problems in the economic, social, and cultural fronts, and policies and programmes pertaining to the province need to be reoriented to address these issues (Ministry of youth affairs - Sri Lanka, 2009; 2010).

## **Analysis of the Present Situation of Manpower and Employment in the Southern Province**

### **Profile of the Labor Force in the Southern Province**

The total estimated mid year population of the Southern Province in 2009 was 2,476,744 persons (Southern Provincial Council Chief Secretary's Office: 2009). Out of this 43.4% live in the Galle district, 33.6 % in Matara and 23.1% in the Hambantota district. The total population of the Southern Province is 12.25% of the total population of Sri Lanka. Around 49% of the population of the Southern province consists of males and the balance 51% is female. The annual increase of population stood at 1.1% in 2009. The percentage increases in Galle, Matara and Hambantota were 1.13%, 1.09%, and 1.06% respectively.

Table 1 shows the district-wise distribution of the labor force in the province in the year 2008. The labor force as a percentage of population over 10 years of age was 47.5% in Galle, 49.5% in Matara and 53.1% in the Hambantota district. Thus labor force as a percentage of population over 10 years and above worked out to be 49.3%. This is slightly below the national average for Sri Lanka which was 49.5% in 2008. In the Southern province in the same year 86,014 persons were considered as unemployed. This is about 8.1% of the total labor force in the province. This is a very high figure when compared with the national level unemployment rate of 5.4%. The unemployment problem is acutely felt in the Hambantota district where 9.6% of the total labor force there is unemployed. Matara district also has a comparably high level of unemployment rate of 8.9%. In Galle however, the unemployment rate is 6.5% which is about 1% point higher than the national average.

Table 1: District Wise Distribution of Labor Force in the Southern Province - 2008

	District			Southern Province	All Island
	Galle	Matara	Hambantota		
Population Average 10 Years & Above	928,887	701,464	525,600	2,155,951	16,319,065
Total Labor Force	440,887	347,141	278,892	1,066,920	8,081,702
Labor Force as a Percentage of Population	47.5	49.5	53.1	49.3	49.5
No. Employed	412,315	316,351	252,240	980,906	7,648,305
Percentage Employed	93.5	91.1	90.4	91.9	94.6
No. Unemployed	28,572	30,790	26,652	86,014	433,397
Percentage Unemployed	6.5	8.9	9.6	8.1	5.4
Economically Not Active	466,000	354,323	246,708	1,067,031	7,235,040

Source: Department of Census &amp; Statistics - Sri Lanka, Statistical Abstract 2009



**Table 2: District Wise Distribution of Population as a Percentage by Age - Census Year 2001**

Category	Galle	Matara	Hambantota	Southern Province
Children (0 -14 Yrs)	27.2	27.8	29.5	28.2
Working Age (15-59 Yrs)	61.0	60.5	61.2	61.1
Elderly (60 Yrs & Over)	11.8	11.7	9.3	10.7
Some Other Indicators				
Literacy Rate (2006)	92.8	88.2	87.4	89.5
Sex Ratio (2008) Percentage	94.4	93.2	99.1	95.1
Population Density (2008)	657	647	224	454
Average HH Size (2001)	4.1	4.2	4.2	4.1
Dependency Ratio (2001) Percentage	63.9	65.3	63.4	64.4

Source: *The Southern Province in Figures 2009*, Southern Province Planning Secretariat

Another noteworthy characteristic of the labor force in Southern Province is the presence of a large number of economically inactive populations. This was about one million persons in 2008 and was 49.5% of the population over 10 years of age. For Sri Lanka as a whole, economically inactive population was 44.3% in the same year. The distribution of economically inactive population among the districts were 43.7% in Galle, 33.2% in Matara and 23.1% in Hambantota.

Table 2 shows the age-wise distribution of the population of the province in the three districts. It also shows some other indicators relating to the population and labor force in the province.

According to the data given in the Table 2, 61.1% of the total population in the province belongs to the working age of 15-59 years. The proportion of children 0-14 years stands at 28.2%, while the elderly population 60 years and over is around 10.2% of the total population.

Another important characteristic of the population and hence, the labor force, in the province is the high literacy rate 89.5% among the people. This is slightly lower, however, than the national average of 89.9%. On average, there are 95 males to every 100 females in the population while the dependency ratio in 2001 was 64.4%. The average household size in the province is moderate, being 4.1% per household.

### Labor Force Participation Rates

Table 3 provides information on labor force participation rates for the constituent districts of the Southern province. As is evident from this Table, male participation rates for the year 2007 were 68.8%, 64.4% and 63.9% for the districts of Hambantota, Matara and Galle respectively. The female participation rates in all the three districts are much lower than the male participation rates. The highest female participation within the province is reported from Hambantota district which stands at 35.3%. This was followed by Galle 29.7% and Matara 29.3%. It is worth noting here that the labor force participation rates for males in all the three districts are more than double the female participation rates reported.

**Table 3: Labor Force Participation Rates by District and Sex 2007**

Districts	Total Percentage	Sex	
		Male Percentage	Female Percentage
Galle	45.9	63.9	29.7
Matara	45.7	64.5	29.3
Hambantota	51.7	68.8	35.3
All Island	49.8	67.8	33.4

Source: Department of Census and Statistics - Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka Labor Force Survey Final Report 2007

This pattern however, is in conformity with the average Sri Lankan situation even for more recent years (Department of Census and Statistic, 2010). Table 4 below, shows the estimated economically active population or labor force of the Southern province for the year 2007. It shows that in the Southern province too the share of males in the labor force has been almost two-thirds of the total labor force of the three districts. The shares of economically active female population were 34.9% in Hambantota, 34.1% in Matara and 34.0% in Galle. The male and female shares of economically active population for Sri Lanka as a whole were 64.9% and 35.1% respectively. Thus in the case of female shares, Galle and Matara districts lag slightly behind the national average of 35.1%. But the reasons are not clear.



**Table 4 :Distribution of Economically Active Population  
(Labor Force) by Sex and District 2007**

Districts	Economically Active Population		
	Total Percentage	Male Percentage	Female Percentage
Galle	100.0	66.0	34.0
Matara	100.0	65.9	34.1
Hambantota	100.0	65.1	34.9
All Island	100.0	64.9	35.1

Source: Department of Census and Statistics - Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka Labor Force Survey Final Report 2007

### **Present Employment in the Province by Major Industry**

Table 5 presents information on the district wise distribution of employed population by major industry categories. It is seen that service sector employment is the highest sector in Matara and Galle districts employing 40.2% and 36.3% of the labor force, respectively. In both of these districts agriculture sector is the second largest contributor to employment. The share of agriculture in employment is 36.3% in Matara district and 34.1% in Galle district. However, in all three districts industrial sector occupies the 3rd and last place in terms of providing employment to the labor force. But, this does not show a divergence from the national picture. The share of industry in total employment in the country averages to about 25% (Ministry of Finance and Planning - Sri Lanka, 2005). In the Hambantota district, agriculture sector has absorbed 39.3% of the labor force while service sector has become second and industrial sector 3<sup>rd</sup>. This picture is bound to be changed in the near future with the opening of the new sea port and the new international air port.

Table 5 provides information on percentage distribution of employment by occupation for both sexes. What is revealed here is that 216,186 persons or 23.4% of the employed population in the

**Table 5: Distribution of Employed Population by Major Industry Group and by Districts & Southern Province -2010**

Districts & Southern Province	Employed Population by Industry			Distribution of Jobs of Non Agricultural Informal Sectors	Unemployment
	Agriculture	Industry	Services		
Galle	33.3	27.4	39.3	52.1	4.7
Matara	36.9	24.8	38.3	50.0	*
Hambantota	43.6	23.3	33.2	55.3	4.2
Southern Province	37.9	25.2	36.9	52.5	7.8

Note: \* Reliable estimates cannot be provided due to small cell size

Source: Department of Census and Statistics - Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka Labor Force Survey 2010



Table 6: Currently Employed Persons by Occupation Group – Both Sexes Southern Province

Occupation Group	No. of Employed	Percentage Employed
Senior Officials & Managers	7,337	0.79
Professionals	50,382	5.45
Technical & Associate Professionals	38,879	4.20
Clerks	33,818	3.66
Proprietors & Managers of Enterprises	58,669	6.35
Sales & Service Workers	62,209	6.73
Skilled Agricultural & Service Fishery Workers	220,340	23.83
Craft & related workers	174,595	18.88
Plant & Machine Operators & Assemblers	62,195	6.73
Elementary Occupations	216,186	23.38
Total	927,955	100.0

Source: Department of Census &amp; Statistics - Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka Labour Force Survey 2007

Southern province is engaged in elementary occupations and another 174,595 persons or and 18.9% in craft and related workers categories. Skilled agricultural and fishery worker numbered 220,340 which represent about 23.8% of the total employed persons. Women tend to dominate this category because many women are employed in tea, rubber and coconut estates. The percentages of employees in all other categories are very small. Senior officials and managers numbered 7,337 or 0.79% of the total employed population. Since Professionals include Teachers and Nurses etc., this category also tend to be dominated by females.

By examining the percentage distribution of employment by status of employment to the labor force in the Southern Province it is evident that paid employees account for 55.8% of total employees. When considering Sri Lanka as a whole paid employees account for 56.5%. In the Southern Province own account workers are 32.5% of the total employees where as share of unpaid family workers stands at 9.4%.

At present in Sri Lanka, a comparatively higher percentage of employees both in the private and public sectors engage in non agricultural activities (Department Census and Statistics - Sri Lanka, 2010). Table 7 shows however, that the importance of the informal sector employment in the non agricultural sector is quite significant (Perera et al., 2009). Overall, about 52.1% of the non agricultural employment falls under the informal category in the entire country.

It is seen from the Table 7 that the informal sector employment in the non agricultural sector is highest in the Hambantota district which accounts for 60.6% of all non- agricultural sector employment. This shows the limited availability of formal sector employment in both public and private sectors in the Hambantota district when compared with an all island figure of 52.1%. In the other two districts within the province also, share of informal sector employment to formal sector employment in the non-agriculture sector is quite significant representing 55.0% in Galle and 54.2% in Matara. Most of these informal sector jobs in the nonagricultural sector are in the self employment category.



**Table 7: Percentage Distribution of Informal Sector  
Employment in Non Agricultural Sector – 2007**

Districts & All Island	Percentage
Galle	55.0
Matara	54.2
Hambanthota	60.6
All Island	52.1

Source: Department of Census and Statistics-Sri Lanka, Labor Force Survey Final Report 2007

### Rate of Unemployment in the Province

Table 8 shows that the rates of unemployment prevailed in the year 2007 in all three districts within the province were quite high when compared with the national level unemployment rate. According to the Department Census and Statistics - Sri Lanka, the unemployed population is defined as persons who are not employed and who are available and looking for work, and had taken specific steps to find a job during the reference period. It is seen from the Table 8 that unemployment rate for Sri Lanka as a whole was 6.0% in the year 2007. When compared with this figure unemployment rate of the Southern Province accounted for 8.5% of the labor force which was 2.5% points higher than the national average. This speaks of the severity of the unemployment problem in the Southern Province. According to the table the highest rate of unemployment is recorded from Matara district 9.2% within the province. It is worth noting here that, Matara district also recorded the highest unemployment rate when considering the country as a whole as well in the year 2007. The rate of unemployment in Hambantota too was also very high where it stood at 8.8%.

**Table 8: Unemployment Rates by Districts & All Island - 2007**

District	Unemployment Rates
Galle	7.8
Matara	9.2
Hambanthota	8.8
Southern Province	8.5
All Island	6.0

Source: Department of Census and Statistics -Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka Labor Force Survey Final Report 2007

Table 9 presents the distribution of unemployment rates by age groups and sex in the three districts of Southern Province. It reveals that the female unemployment rate reported is higher in each age group than that of males. In fact the female unemployment rate is more than double than the unemployment rate of males in the total population as well as in all age groups considered here. The figures in the Table 9 also shows that unemployment among youth in the 15 - 29 age category account almost entirely for the unemployment problem within the province in case of both sexes.

Table 10 presents information on unemployment situation within the province according to the level of education. It is seen that rate of unemployment is highest among those who have passed General Certificate Examination (Advanced Level) and higher qualifications irrespective of the gender. The reported unemployment rate among this group accounted for 15.3% in the Southern Province.

The corresponding figure for the entire island works out to be 11.8%. This shows that Southern Province is a province where educated unemployment is at a comparatively higher level when compared with many other provinces in Sri Lanka. In terms of educational level, female unemployment rate is much higher than that of males.

### **Underemployment within the Province**

According to the definitions used by the Department Census and Statistics - Sri Lanka, underemployment rate in Sri Lanka for the year 2007 was about 4.5%. However in the Southern Province the average underemployment rate in the same year was 6.5%, two percentage points higher than the national figure. Among the three districts within the province Galle district had a much higher underemployment rate than the other two. Underemployment rates for Hambantota and Matara districts were 5.8% and 5.5% respectively Table 11. The rate of underemployment is usually high in the agriculture sector, and contributes to the declining productivity of the Sri Lankan labor force, especially those engaged in agriculture.



**Table 9: Unemployment Rates According to the Age Group in the Southern Province – 2008**

	Total Population	15-19 Years	20-25 Year	25-29 Year	30 & Above
Total Population	8.1	32.0	25.6	16.5	2.9
Male	6.0	32.2	18.5	11.1	2.0
Female	11.7	-	36.4	26.8	4.4

Source: Southern Provincial Council - Chief Secretary's Office 2009

**Table 10: Unemployment Rates in the Southern Province According to the Level of Education – 2008**

	Total Population	Up to Grade 5	5-9 Passed	GCE (O/L)	GCE (A/L) & Above
Total Population	8.1	-	7.2	11.9	15.3
Male	6.0	-	6.3	8.8	9.4
Female	11.7	-	9.3	16.9	20.3

Source: Southern Provincial Council - Chief Secretary's Office 2009

**Table 11: Underemployment Rates by Districts of Southern Province & All Island – 2007**

Districts, Southern Province & All Island	Underemployment Rates
Galle	10.5
Matara	5.5
Hambanthota	5.8
Southern Province	6.5
All Island	4.5

Source: *Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka, Labor Force Survey Final Report 2007*

### Poverty Levels within the Province

It was shown earlier that poverty levels have come down by a significant extent from 1990 / 1991 to 2006 / 2007. Table 12 presents information on the Poverty Headcount Ratios (PHRs) for the three districts within the province in the last four Household Income and Expenditure Surveys conducted by the Department Census and Statistics - Sri Lanka. Accordingly, the largest drop of poverty levels are reported from the Hambantota district where it has come down from 32% in 1990 / 1991 to 13% in 2006 / 2007. The poverty levels in the other two districts too have reduced by about 50 % in between these two time periods.

**Table 12: Poverty Head count Ratio in the Districts of Southern Province**

Districts and Southern Province	1990/ 1991	1995/ 1996	2002	2006/ 2007	2009/ 2010
Galle	29.7	31.6	25.8	13.7	10.3
Matara	29.2	35.0	27.5	14.7	11.2
Hambantota	32.4	31.0	32.2	12.7	6.9
Southern Province	30.4	32.5	28.5	13.7	9.5

Source: *Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka, Household Income and Expenditure Surveys*



Table 13 shows the percentage of poor households classified by district, based on the official poverty lines of the respective districts. Even here, it is evident that poverty levels within the province have nearly halved from 1990 / 1991 to 2009 / 2010.

### **Issues Relating to Manpower and Employment**

There are a number of key issues relating to manpower and employment in the Southern Province. These include;

#### **a) A Large Share of Employment in Informal Sector**

In Sri Lanka a large proportion of the labor force is employed in the informal sector. This adversely affects the remuneration, working conditions and job security of a large segment of the labor force. In the Southern Province too, informal sector employment in non-agricultural sector is highest in the Hambantota district which accounts for 60.6 % of all non agricultural sector employment. This shows the limited availability of formal sector employment in both public and private sectors in the Hambantota district when compared with an all island figure of 52.1%. In the other two districts within the province also, share of informal sector employment to formal sector employment in the non-agriculture sector is quite significant representing 55.0% in Galle and 54.2% in Matara. Most of these informal sector jobs in the non-agricultural sector are in the self-employment category.

#### **b) Lack of Entrepreneurial Culture of the Youth and Queuing for Public Sector Employment**

When examining the unemployment situation within the province according to the level of education it is seen that rate of unemployment is highest among those who have passed General Certificate Examination (Advanced Level) and higher qualifications irrespective of the category of sex. The reported unemployment rate among this group accounted for 15.3% in the Southern Province. The corresponding figure for the entire island works out to be 11.8%. This shows that Southern Province is a province where educated unemployment is at a comparatively higher level when compared with many other provinces in Sri Lanka. In terms of educational level. Female unemployment rate is much higher than that of males.

Table 13: Key Poverty Indicators in Districts &amp; Southern Province 2009/2010

Districts & Southern Province	Percentage of Head Count Index	Percentage of Poor Households	Percentage of Poverty Gap Index	Gini Coefficient of Household Expenditure	Gini Coefficient of Per Capita Expenditure
Galle	10.3	7.9	2.1	0.35	0.34
Matara	11.2	8.3	1.7	0.37	0.38
Hambantota	6.9	5.4	1.3	0.33	0.27
Southern Province	9.8	7.5	1.8	0.35	0.34

Source: Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka, Household Income and expenditure survey



It is the widely held belief that the private sector should assume the greater responsibility in providing employment opportunities to a larger portion of the increasing labor force. However, it has become the tradition of the private sector to consider very good social, political and school backgrounds of job applicants in recruiting prospective employees to their institutions. Most of the private sector jobs are offered not purely on merit and, or educational qualifications, but mainly on other considerations such as, urban background, good communication skills in English, higher social background and good social and political connections. For the less privileged majority what are available from the private sector are unskilled and lower grade jobs. Hence, most of the educated unemployed youth in the country join long queues for public sector jobs and wait for a longer period of time to obtain such jobs. The situation in the Southern Province is no exception. Information gathered from Focus Group Discussions and Key Informant Interviews.

#### **c) Lack of Quality Employment Opportunities for Women**

The female unemployment rate in the Southern Province is more than double the unemployment rate of males in the total population as well as in all age groups considered in this paper. The unemployment among youth in the 15-29 age category account almost entirely for the unemployment problem within the province in case of both sexes. Thus there is a large number of unemployed females in the age group of 15-29. In most cases their marriages are getting delayed due to lack of employment or a source of reliable income. The quality of the jobs offered by the tourism industry to this group is poor and they entail socially unacceptable jobs. The alternative available to them is migration to foreign countries in search of jobs mostly as housemaids and domestic aids.

#### **d) High Unskilled Labor Migration**

According to the views expressed by the participants at the FGDs migration of unskilled labour both men and women particularly to the countries in the middle east is quite high in the Southern Province. This is because majority of these laborers do not possess acceptable vocational training or technical skills. Therefore they get very low salaries and are employed under poor working conditions.

Apart from these key issues, there are a number of other issues related to these including, illegal remittance of foreign currency, lack of a proper vocational education and training system, absence of social security programs for the unemployed, ageing population, child labor, absence of legislative coverage for the informal sector and adversarial system of industrial relations that affect the level of employment and unemployment in the province.

**e) Government Policies Relating to Manpower and Employment.**

Most of these key issues relates to policy issues affecting the sector. Such issues can only be resolved through policy actions that need to be taken and implemented largely by the Central government.

Nevertheless, following strategies can be considered as highly relevant to the theme of the present paper. They include;

- a) Increase employability of youth
- b) Create more opportunities for income generation for women
- c) Promote foreign employment opportunities
- d) Increase skilled migration
- e) Ensure welfare and development of migrant workers and their families
- f) Revise available graduate programs to meet modern needs
- g) Regularize employment opportunities within the informal sector

**Conclusions**

There is no easy way to solve unemployment, under employment and disguised employment. Expansion and growth of an economy is necessary to create employment opportunities to reduce youth unemployment in the province. Nevertheless, while economy is made to expand, certain supportive actions are needed to mitigate unem-



ployment, under employment and disguised employment of available manpower especially among the youth.

A major objective of this paper is to identify the ways and means to empower the young generation through Vocational training in selected fields and skills development aiming at the current job market. From the available secondary data and views expressed by the Key Informants it was revealed that the major problem faced by the youth in the province is the unemployment. On one hand, there is a growing problem of educated unemployment and on the other hand, there is a large number of youth who drop out from the education system annually. Only a limited number enters the universities or other tertiary level educational institutes or colleges. Thus, there is a need to streamline and strengthen the Vocational Training & Education in the province at various levels including craft level training and higher-level diplomas, which suits the demand of the current and emerging job market. Special emphasis needs to be placed on career guidance and counseling as well. In addition, the youth in the province face many problems in the economic, social, and cultural fields and therefore needs special treatment in the policies and programs of the province.

However, in addition to those given in section 4.0 there are some major issues relating to the employment prospects in the Southern province. The first is the educated youth unemployment. The unemployment rates among those who have passed General Certificate Examination (Ordinary Level), General Certificate Examination (Advanced Level) and above and who also fall in the age group 20 - 30 is quite significant. Moreover, the major portion of these unemployed youth is comprised of females. In addition to these, there are a large number of school dropouts who will enter the labor force in significant numbers during the foreseeable future. According to the information provided by field level officials' majority of these dropouts also aspire to get public sector jobs. The rates of growth of employment in the traditional sectors like agriculture, industry services etc. in the province are at a very low level.

Special mention needs here on the mega projects now being implemented in the Southern Province by the Central Government with foreign assistance. Development of Hambantota Port which involved a construction of a breakwater, two berths, approach channel and the deepening of harbor basin was one of them. The estimated

cost of the 1<sup>st</sup> phase of this project was US\$ 360 million while the 2<sup>nd</sup> phase is being estimated to cost US\$ 600 million. Thus, the total cost of the project is going to be US\$ 1 billion. Another mega project which is being implemented is the development of the Galle port as a tourism gateway.

This proposed harbor consists of the construction of a new multipurpose terminal and the breakwater. The estimated cost of this project is US\$ 170 million. The 3<sup>rd</sup> mega project namely, the Second International Airport at Mattala is also being constructed at an estimated cost of US\$ 210 million. This airport consists of construction of runway of 4 kilometers, parking apron, a taxiway connecting runway and the apron, terminal building, cargo storage, fuel farm and fire services building. The Second International Airport at Mattala will also promote trade and tourism in the province as well as attract industries and investments in to these areas creating more employment avenues.

The development of Hambantota sea port as an important calling point for provision of port facilities and other marine services will open up numerous direct and indirect new employment opportunities not only within the Hambantota district and the Southern Province but also in other districts such as Moneragala and Ratnapura. Similarly, by developing Galle Port as a tourism port it is believed that in addition to passenger ships, this port will attract a large number of medium and small size vessels. This will boost the tourism industry thus expanding employment opportunities and increasing incomes of those who are engaged in this industry. The Central Government has commenced several island-wide training centers in a number of fields through the Vocational Training Authority (VTA), to train youth for these new opportunities. VT&E system in the Southern Province needs to identify such new employment opportunities and should introduce new courses and training programs to the youth in the province thus enabling them to secure the benefits of development.

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**Keywords:** Agriculture, Dry Zone, Rural Women, Social Networks, Social Movements

*Abstract:* This article has been developed to discuss about social networking of rural women in dry zone villages in the southern villages in Amravathur District. Research was conducted in the dry zone villages in 2011.

*Keywords:* Agriculture, Dry Zone, Rural Women, Social Networks, Social Movements

*For methodological details of the study, please refer to 'About the Authors' page.*