

The Potential of GIS in Planning for Rural Development: A Case Study of Hambantota District in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

The efforts towards development planning at the local and regional levels have brought about most daunting challenges before planners and policy makers in the developing countries. In order to reach the development goals of planners, there should be appropriate strategies, which have been designed with participation of the local people. However, the need for accurate and timely information as prerequisites of planning are by no means underestimated. Recent advances in information technology has provided with ample opportunity to capture, update, analyze and present information as guidance for local and regional level planners. This paper is an attempt to identify the capabilities of GIS as information technology in developing spatial databases, which supports the decision-makers in relatively backward rural areas in Sri Lanka.

Hambantota District in Southern Sri Lanka is a rural area where majority of people depends on peasant sector. Many villages have been underserved by public utilities, lack integration with urban sectors and people have been suffering for decades due to issues related with resource use, natural hazards and deteriorating social conditions. Many development projects implemented in the district have marginalized some segments of the people. The district is divided into Divisions and Grama Niladari Areas (village level) for administrative purposes. There are also local government authorities formed of elected members to look after welfare and development of their respective areas. Some Line ministries, statutory bodies and NGOs also function in the district according to their operational areas. Therefore, the data and information on different aspects of the development have to be collected from various sources at different spatial units and time periods. Using GIS methodology and presenting as maps showing spatial patterns of socio-economic conditions can minimize the complexity of data availability.