

Social Changes that Have Taken Place with the Development of the Hambantota Port

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The Hambantota Port of Sri Lanka is located at the very centre of the main international shipping route that connects the East and West. The port lies approximately 16 nautical miles from the main trade route of Asia and Europe, earning its name as the 'gateway to South Asia'. The Hambantota Port was a crucial investment to Sri Lanka as it increased the nation's ability to accommodate greater volumes of naval vessels and diversify into other port-related services. In addition, across international linkages generated as a result of this investment, Sri Lanka attained the opportunity to expand its maritime network, while improving port connectivity. As such, the industrial zone has achieved the potential to attract industries that are looking to connect easily to their regional markets. Accordingly, the main objective of this study is to explore the social impact of the construction of the Hambantota Port in the Hambantota District. This survey is conducted by distributing questionnaires to a group of 120 people selected at random from amongst citizens living in the vicinity of the Chinese port in Hambantota, the Hambantota district and individuals employed at the Hambantota port. In addition, a face-to-face interview was also held with the Human Resources Manager of the Hambantota Port Authority. The data collected depicts the manner in which the Chinese Port of Hambantota has affected the areas in the Hambantota District. This research chiefly aims to examine the positive and negative effects of the development of the Chinese Port of Hambantota, the future trajectory of the port and other proposed development activities concerning the port. The evaluation of the data revealed that the construction of the Hambantota Port has both positively and negatively impacted society. The construction of the Port yielded positive outcomes to society such as the development of the region of Hambantota, expansion of the highway network, creation of transport facilities, creation of new employment opportunities and new markets as well as self-employment opportunities for residents living akin to the port. In contrast, the research reveals that adverse effects such as rise in pollution levels, deforestation due to urbanization, disruptions to the daily lives of residents near the port area have been caused by the construction of the Hambantota Port. Therefore, the study concludes that despite the undesirable changes, the construction of the Port is perceived as means of progress to the nation and society.

Key words: China - Sri Lanka relations, development, Hambantota port, social changes, positive and negative impact

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