# Towards Re-Imagining Infrastructure and Urban Development

Proceedings from the CEPA Research Symposium 2015

# Not the traditional research symposium

Re-Imagining Infrastructure and Urban Development, organised by CEPA in November 2015, was an interactive forum – a dialogue – with equal weight given to the presentations and the discussions that followed. It was also a platform for practitioners, policy makers, and researchers to engage with each other.

We have chosen to document the proceedings of the symposium recognising that along with the presenters, the discussants too were key resource people; some bringing out experience as practitioners and some problematising the focus with sharp theoretical and advocacy points of view.

This document captures the highlights of the presentations and the thematic discussions. The chapters are built on presentations made by experts, audience comments, and the subsequent discussions. The publication also includes supplementary information and presentation material.

The symposium, Towards Re-Imagining Infrastructure and Urban Development set out to generate informed debate towards a new policy and research agenda on urbanisation and infrastructure development and challenge the mainstream thinking on infrastructure. It examined three key areas: Making Space for Equitable Urban Growth, Housing Rights of the Urban Poor, and Urban Transport and Mobility which are compiled in chapters two, three and four of this publication. They are considered from the points of view of two crosscutting concerns:

1. Ensuring equity and accountability in urban infrastructure development and
2. Democratising urban governance and planning.

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Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA)
29 R.G. Senanayake Mawatha
(formerly Gregory's Road)
Colombo 7

www.cepa.lk

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All inquiries relating to this publication should be directed to:

Centre for Poverty Analysis
29, R G Senanayake Mawatha, Colombo 07
Sri Lanka
Tel: + 94 (011) 2676955, 4690200
Fax: + 94 (011) 2676959
Email: info@cepa.lk
www.cepa.lk

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# Speakers and panellists

All the designations and institutional affiliations listed here are as of the time of the Symposium (November 2015)

Dr. Harini Amarasuriya
Department of Social Studies,
Open University of Sri Lanka

Ms. Joanne Asquith
Senior Evaluation Specialist,
Asian Development Bank

Dr. Saman Bandara
Former Chairman,
Road Development Authority

Dr. Yapa Mahinda Bandara
Lecturer,
Department of Transport and Logistics Management,
University of Moratuwa

Ms. Charlotte Boutboul
CSR Manager,
Lafarge Holcim Sri Lanka

Mr. Pradeep Dissanayake
Lecturer,
Department of Town and Country Planning, University of Moratuwa

Ms. Debra Efroymson
Regional Director,
HealthBridge

Ms. Karin Fernando
Senior Research Professional,
CEPA

Dr. Nishara Fernando
Department of Sociology,
University of Colombo

Ms. Priyanthi Fernando
Former Executive Director,
CEPA

Mr. Ranjith Fernando
Chairman,
Urban Development Authority

Dr. Udan Fernando
Executive Director,
CEPA

Dr. Lalithasiri Gunaruwan
Former Secretary,
Ministry of Transport

Dr. Locana Gunaratna
Former President,
National Academy of Sciences

Dr. Vagisha Gunasekara
Senior Research Professional,
CEPA

Dr. Nalani Hennayake
Professor of Geography,
University of Peradeniya

Mr. Romeshun Kulasabanathan
Senior Research Professional,
CEPA

Ms. Mansi Kumarasiri
Senior Research Professional,
CEPA

Mr. Nayana Mawilmada
Director General,
Urban Development Authority

Dr. Jagath Munasinghe
Head of the Department,
Department of Town and Country Planning, University of Moratuwa

Mr. Vijay Nagaraj
Senior Research Professional,
CEPA

Ms. Priyani Nawaratne
Deputy Director (Planning),
Urban Development Authority

Dr. Chandrasiri Niriella
Department of Sociology,
University of Colombo

Dr. Nihal Perera
Professor of Urban Planning,
Ball State University, USA

Mr. Madura Premathilake
Architect,
Sri Lanka Institute of Architects

Dr. Rohan Samarajiva
Chairperson,
LIRNEAsia

Mr. Ranjith Samarasinghe
Vice President,
Sevanatha Urban Resource Center

Ms. Nethra Samarawickrema
PhD Candidate,
Department of Anthropology,
Stanford University

Mr. Dishan Shaminda
Affordable Housing and IHB
Programs Manager,
Lafarge Holcim Sri Lanka

Mr. Susil Sirivardana
Senior Advisor,
Ministry of Housing and
Construction

Prof. Geetam Tiwari
Professor,
Transport Planning at the
Department of Civil
Engineering,
IIT Delhi

Mr. Disa Weerapane
Former Director,
Asia Regional Office,
United Nations Habitat Commision

# Foreword

Karin Fernando | Senior Researcher, Centre for Poverty Analysis

**At CEPA, we use our annual symposiums to engage with a wide audience on the various themes and topics that we research. The aim being not just to share our research but also to learn from others and engage with policy and practice.**

Since its early beginnings CEPA has been looking at urban poverty and how the manifestations of poverty change based on the urban-rural dynamic. We have questioned the broad-brush approach of treating all households in under-served settlements as poor. We have also looked at different aspects of urban development such as evictions and re-settlement with the aim of promoting inclusive and socially just urban development. We have examined the processes through which development is delivered and how it impacts people; the types of livelihoods and related lifestyles that determine people's ability to move out of poverty; and how disasters such as floods affect people and how they cope with it. More recently we have concentrated on how the urban poor are served by the city planners and how they are included (or not included) in city making – with the emergence of plans and concepts such as the Megapolis. We have turned our focus to how people themselves shape or adapt infrastructure and the space of a city. Hence over time we have looked at diverse topics, with diverse researchers contributing to the growing body of knowledge.

CEPA's 2015 symposium looked at how urban spaces were being designed and how inclusive and equitable such processes were. The researchers that spearheaded this line of inquiry and also the symposium at CEPA were Mansi Kumarasiri and Vijay Nagraj. They worked tirelessly to bring in the diverse groups of speakers and issues as well as to make the symposium more of a dialogue that built on practical experience combined with empirical research and policy prescriptions. CEPA appreciates the dedication and commitment made by Mansi and Vijay to carry out this work.

CEPA also acknowledges the work done by all the contributors to the symposium, the people behind organising it, documenting it, and helping in so many ways. There was a considerable time lag between the symposium and this publication due to a variety of reasons. It is not always easy to pick up where someone has left off and have to deliver an end product along the same veins that it was conceptualised on. Nirmani Liyanage with guidance from Prof. Nihal Perera certainly rose to the challenge of providing an overall structure, updating the context, re-appropriating the content and coordinating this publication. Sharni Jayawardena synthesised the inputs and transformed it into a compilation of the main issues highlighted at the symposium. We also acknowledge Hanim Abdul Cader whose design talents have contributed to creating a visually appealing book. This will also be available electronically to enable its wider reach.

HealthBridge and Australian Aid are greatfully acknowledged for the financial support extended for the symposium and the 'Think Tank Initiative' for this publication.

We would like to take this opportunity to remember Vijay, who tragically passed away last year. Amongst all his many efforts to fight for equality and justice, he also laboured tirelessly to ensure that urban spaces were inclusive of poor communities, that their ownership and contribution to urban spaces was duly captured. Thus, it is fitting that this report tries to encapsulate the edit evidence and the spirit of dialogue and learning that the symposium fashioned by Mansi and Vijay tried to inculcate. CEPA hopes that this publication supports and inspires the reader to share Vijay's vision of giving rise to inclusive policies and programmes that would take the country's development beyond economic growth alone.

Photo courtesy of CEPA

Ms. Nethra
Madhura
Prematilleke
Ms. Debra
Efroymson

November 2015

Mr. Dilshan
Shaminda
Ms.Charlotte
Boutboul
Mr Disa
Weerapana

Mr K.
Romeshun
Dr Chandrasiri
Niriella

# Introduction
# The Right to the City

## A 'cry and demand for a transformed and renewed right to urban life' is how sociologist Henri Lefebvre defined the *Right to the City*, the concept he introduced fifty years ago. An idea so compelling, it has since become a widely-used slogan.

Geographer David Harvey elaborated on the principle as 'the right to change ourselves by changing the city' and 'the freedom to make and remake our cities.' This echoes Amartya Sen's 'capability approach' – his definition of five enabling 'freedoms' as preconditions for people to achieve their aspirations: political freedom, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantees, and protective security. Journalist and urban activist Jane Jacobs has a similar perspective: 'Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody.' The idea is further developed by Don Mitchell in his own book: *Right to the City.*

In practice, *Right to the City* has been identified as a progressive approach to social change, a response to the political and economic reshaping of the city that dispossesses, disables, and disempowers large numbers of its inhabitants. The 'cry and demand' then would come from, or on behalf of, people experiencing unease and unhappiness with the current realities of urban life, and wanting (to negotiate for) the right to participate in decisions that (re)create and change urban spaces. The *Right to the City* is a paradigm for an alternative framework to reimagine cities and urbanisation, characterised by the socially and spatially just distribution of resources, including investments in housing, common spaces, infrastructure and services. In the global political-economy, cities are also nodes of growth. While generating growth, can they also be inclusive of individual dreams and processes? What kinds of policies and what sort of planning is needed to make this possible?

Participation is the only way in which planners and policy makers can develop grounded policies and programmes that enable city dwellers to better influence decisions related to the production of urban space – a process that tends to exclude dimensions of complexity in its analysis and design. Going beyond the 'right to the city' idea, scholars like Nihal Perera and Abdoumaliq Simone discuss processes in which people actually negotiate, create, and take control of spaces within the city. 'When people are involved in the negotiation of space, culture acts as a third regulator (or a major factor of influence) besides the state (polity) and the market (economy),' stresses Nihal Perera, Professor of Urban Planning, 'Once we go beyond the government-people binary, people are influenced by a multitude of factors including history and the neighbours, in addition to capital.'

Cities are both the stage on which city dwellers and users create and perform their life journeys and the representation of changes so caused. As Perera indicates in *People's Spaces,* the city constantly changes as a result of the conflict between the authorities and the subjects: As they perform their daily activities and cultural practices, people transform urban spaces but, seeing this familiarisation of space as 'messing up', the authorities constantly reorder the city through policy, planning, evicting, and policing among others. For Perera, supporting people's processes of adapting and creating spaces for their daily activities and cultural practices is far more effective than trying to create spaces for these from outside.

## CEPA, Infrastructure and the City

We agree that availability of efficient, reliable and affordable infrastructure is essential for economic growth and development, which in turn can lead to poverty reduction. We also understand that the mere presence of roads, pipelines or electricity does not translate into gains in of people. This is precisely why we need to understand infrastructure beyond its physicality.

The mainstream thinking on infrastructure focuses on structures, services and facilities that enable the core functions of a society – a process that invariably includes circuits of extraction, production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services. An alternative reading on infrastructure says 'it is fluid', because the structures we build also have a relationship to people and society; they are embedded in a larger context of political economy, power and social relations, they have spatial and ecological implications, and they shape access to entitlements.

Inclusive growth needs reliable and efficient infrastructure that can directly mitigate certain forms of deprivation, such as the lack of access to services, and catalyse economic growth. Yet, for many vulnerable communities, physical infrastructure can bring about a radical, even violent, rupture in their lives. The most prominent of these risks is displacement in the name of 'development' as a result of infrastructure projects such as dams, roads, mines, ports, power lines, and urban renewal which can, in turn result in evictions and other social, political, and environmental issues.

This has raised questions about conventional notions of development and called for the analysis of its experiences. Development-induced displacement tends to be justified on the grounds of greater good for larger numbers. CEPA's research on displacement and resettlement has been the basis for advocacy for more equity, transparency, and accountability in processes and actions that force people to move.

CEPA's research thematic on infrastructure is generating evidence to enable the re-imagining of urban development in Sri Lanka that is based on greater equity, inclusivity, and sustainability, drawing on a range of geo-political and policy contexts, interdisciplinary research, and professional knowledge.

Urbanisation will continue to take place but the focus is likely to remain on physical infrastructure as the key to growth will predominate. Cities are home to a wide variety of people whose needs must be supported by the systems and structures in place. Some cannot be excluded in the interest of others. The challenge before us is taking stock of the current situation and reimagining how cities are structured – bringing people who have he right to the city into the conceptualising, planning, and implementation process.

## Defining Urban Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka has a land area of 65,610 sq. km. and had a population of 20.4 million as at 2012, creating a population density of 325 persons per sq. km. The country has one of the lowest annual population growth rates (0.9%) in Asia. Official statistics indicate that the urban population accounts for only 18.2% of the total population. This figure, however, could be deceptive since the definition of 'urban' is purely administrative.

Further problematising the definition and division of 'urban and rural' in Sri Lanka, science writer Nalaka Gunawardene points out that only people living in Municipal Council and Urban Council areas are considered urban, but there is a significant number of Pradeshiya Sabhas (third-tier local authorities administratively classified as 'rural') that are heavily populated. Hidden urbanisation is also acknowledged in the World Bank's report, Leveraging Urbanisation in South Asia: Managing Spatial Transformation for Prosperity and Liveability (2015). The report suggests that as much as one-third of Sri Lanka's population may be living in areas not officially classified as urban, but possessing strong urban characteristics.

Interestingly, Sri Lanka's National Report for HABITAT III 2016 also acknowledges the situation, though obliquely, stating that although 'urban status' is conferred only on areas governed by a Municipal Council or an Urban Council, additional areas could be declared urban development zones under the provisions of the Urban Development Authority Law: 'it is based on the contention that 'urbanisation' is not about the administrative status of a local authority but the availability of urban amenities and characteristics of an urban locality.'

Bilesha Weeraratne of the Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka also acknowledges (IPS working paper 23: Re-Defining Urban Areas in Sri Lanka , 2016) the mismatch between the actual urban population and the estimated numbers – and goes one step further by proposing an alternative definition for urban areas in Sri Lanka. She defines a Grama Sevaka division as urban if it has a minimum population of 750 persons, a population density greater than 500 persons per 2km, firewood dependence of less than 95 per cent of households, and well-water dependence of less than 95 per cent of households. Using data from the Land Use Policy Planning Department and Department of Census and Statistics, Weeraratne estimates that 43.8 per cent of the Sri Lankan population lives in urban areas.

## Urban Growth and Urbanisation in Sri Lanka: the new trajectories

While the debate is still open on how to define "urban", the conclusion of Sri Lanka's violent civil war in 2009 saw hasty and huge investments in infrastructure that took two distinct forms: transport-related projects like expressways and airports, and urban development that emphasised infrastructure development for business and tourism.

Sri Lanka's National Physical Plan of April 2010 envisages that by 2030, the country's development will centre around five metropolitan areas. This reflects the post-war emphasis on urban-centric, mega-infrastructure-led development and a broader global trend of creating 'world-class' urban infrastructures as drivers of economic growth.

However, the extent to which infrastructure-led economic growth leads to equitable and inclusive human development continues to be contested by some critical voices from society. A principle issue concerns equity, both in terms of the kind of infrastructure that is given priority and who reaps its benefits.

The newly-elected government of 2015 decided to revise the National Physical Plan and launched the Western Region Megapolis Master Plan Project as their flagship project to cover the entire Western Province. One of its approximately 150 components is the Social Housing Project for the low-income groups located within Colombo's Central Business District (CBD), which has been conceived as the financial and service zone of

the Megapolis. The project will aim to 'meet the social housing needs of low-income categories' and 'ensure optimum utilisation of under-utilised land in the CBD Zone.' This would, of course, demand the relocation and rehousing of people.

The commitment of successive Sri Lankan governments to addressing urban housing needs, however, goes back several decades to the early-1970s when adequate housing for the urban poor became a government priority. In a radical rethinking of policy, Sri Lanka's housing programme further changed in the late 1970s from a provider-based paradigm to one that was support-based – culminating in the ambitious and more inclusive, Million Houses Programme. Within a period of just 12 years, housing and municipal authorities, together with a range of local, national and international agencies and organisations, introduced a series of ground-breaking mechanisms to improve the conditions of 'low-income' and 'underserved' settlements.

Yet, the progress was ruptured during the last regime. In 2011, the Urban Development Authority (UDA) estimated that 68,812 households live in 1,499 underserved settlements in Colombo, accounting for more than half the city's population. Hence, how much the current urban renewal practices have learned from the success stories is questionable.

National Physical Planning Policy and Plan 2011 - 2030: Settlement Pattern 2030 and Schematic Location of Metro Regions

# Making Space for More Equitable Urban Growth

Keynote speakers Dr. Locana Gunaratne and Prof. Nihal Perera presented somewhat different perspectives on the theory and practice of urban planning and development. Dr. Gunaratne revisited theories of urbanisation and how scale may be a key factor in ensuring more equitable growth. Dr. Perera questioned the value of imported theories and models, and emphasised the importance of developing a country's own grounded vision.

## Spatial planning for urbanisation and equity

The urban realm is undergoing a period of dramatic spatial transformation, with urban planning being increasingly referred to as spatial planning, an approach that takes into account spatial dimensions of economics to cause the distribution or positioning of people and their activities. The mega development plans hastily rolled out by the government of Sri Lanka soon after the war prompted architect and urban planner Dr. Locana Gunaratne to carry out a review of planning literature on the concepts and theories which have influenced and/or are relevant to urbanisation in developing countries. In the symposium's Keynote Address I, he spoke about the 2004 review that yielded two different outcomes: a set of utopian concepts from late 19th and early 20th century Europe which forms the base of most current planning approaches adopted in South Asia and a set of more scientifically rigorous theories which could underlie a far more relevant approach to the problems of urbanisation in developing countries. The latter theories, he pointed out, are also of Western origin, and an integral part of spatial economics.

Gunaratne notes that there have been, however, some less useful theories that derive from spatial economics. One of them is the Economic Growth Theory, adopted by developing nations in the early 1950s, which influenced spatial planning through several 'Growth Centers.' This model supported the capital investment in large concentrations at pre-selected geographic points for developing economically lagging regions. Development, it was assumed, would then result and spread from these points. Two decades later, scholarly research revealed the lack of effectiveness of this model. Despite the failures, some development planners are yet to relinquish the model. 'Unwisely,' states Gunaratne, 'We in Sri Lanka base a lot of our work on this very theory.' He sees greater potential in a spatial planning approach that calls for a change in the scale of urbanisation: the development of small and medium-sized urban spaces.

## Small and mid-sized towns

A sound spatial planning approach first drafted at a South Asian seminar/workshop in Kathmandu (1978) has since begun to gain substantial support. Thereafter, two subsequent papers appeared: the first author Rondinelli makes a case for establishing mid-sized cities by stating: that colonial economic policies reinforced by post-colonial economic growth strategies of the 1950s and 1960s were major causes of the rapid growth of a few primate cities in most Asian countries; that the emphasis was on developing urban industry over rural development; that the distributional effects and the spatial implications of investment allocation were largely ignored; that although the effort was to modernise the metropolitan economy (which incidentally is what we in Sri Lanka are trying to do right now), rural regions were neglected and left poor and underdeveloped; also, that in countries with dominant primate cities but without the support of national urban policies, secondary mid-sized cities cannot grow large enough and have sufficiently diversified economies to attract rural migrants, stimulate agricultural economies and promote regional development.

The second paper also justifies the development of small and intermediate urban places. The authors Hardoy and Satterthwaite have based their recommendations on reviews of over 100 empirical studies across third world countries, and a large number of national programmes for small and intermediate towns. According to them, spatial programmes ' . . . can be a crucial component in attaining social and economic objectives such as increasing the…populations reached by basic services; increasing and diversifying agricultural production; and increasing the influence of citizens living in sub-national and sub-regional political and administration units.'

To re-adjust a distorted inter-urban spatial structure towards new development strategies that emphasise equity, small and mid-sized towns are inevitably needed in locations relevant to the new strategies. If the old colonial spatial structure is not re-adjusted in this manner, but those development efforts are focused only on the primate city i.e. Colombo, rural-urban migration will be exacerbated; income disparities across these countries and within the primate city will be accentuated; the consolidation of new slums and shanties will result; and they will become an increasing part of the urban built environment.

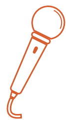
Keynote Speaker I
Dr. Locana Gunaratne
Architect and Urban Planner,
Former President,
National Academy of Sciences

## Urban Growth and Urbanisation in Sri Lanka: The new trajectories

If people have to spend hours in buses, if the bus does not stop for the passengers to get off, when women have to constantly defend themselves from men on buses and in public spaces, when women are restricted to particular places and times, when men are afraid to get out at particular times and visit certain places, when people are not reluctant to hurt others due to ethnicity, sex, caste, class, or political allegiance, when parents have to be vigilant of their kids, when people constantly struggle to get before the other, if one needs to bribe to get ordinary work done, and if the leaders get enormously rich after they assume public office, is this development? Would building dams, highways, and mega cities, cleansing areas of the poor and the powerless, and/or beautifying cities develop such society?

These two rhetorical but crucial questions were raised by Professor of Urban Planning, Nihal Perera, to begin Keynote Address II. He elaborates: 'From Mahaweli to Megapolis, development projects have equated national development to infrastructure building and monumentalism.' He also notes: . . .Most people don't recognise that if buses don't stop for them and women get harassed on buses and trains, these are the development issues we need to confront . . . It is time to investigate the relationship between development projects and policies and their implications for people.'

Dr. Perera examines the course of Sri Lanka's post-independence 'development' and argues that Sri Lankan leaders adopted and perpetuated a deficit model of development which would underdevelop the nation and continue key colonial practices:



"Instead of building on ground conditions, especially the quality of life of the people which was considered high at independence, the national rulers adopted this deficit model [following the West] and transformed Ceylon into a Third World country. The notion has been so hegemonic, even the leaders of the opposition took part in the construction. Moreover, they were blind to the opportunity to question the model, largely because their identity and power also depended on this model. . . Sri Lankan leaders opted to renew the colonial subjectivity and the dependency on core capitalist states within the global political-economy."

Thus Dr. Perera has reservations about simulating development models:

"It is very hard to transfer one type of development from one place to another. I don't believe there is a scientific methodology for this, that there is a model, independent of the person, which can work in another place. In short, we cannot be someone else. For Sri Lankans, it is most pertinent to think from within and develop a vision that neither depends on external models nor is too general, a model expected to work for everyone."

Stereotypical solutions and borrowing other's models, he elaborates, can homogenise communities and create different kinds of deprivation. He cites the example of the post-tsunami recovery project in Hambantota, Sri Lanka, and contrasts it with that of a tsunami-recovery project in Phuket, Thailand. The housing projects in Hambantota were managed efficiently, and provided the victims with architect-designed houses with water and electricity, built on government-donated land. However, the support provided was prescriptive, with a mismatch between people's needs and provisions. The newly built houses were uniform and mass-produced, and the new locations [four km from the sea] distanced people from their livelihoods. People whose lives were already disrupted by the disaster lost their sense of place. Adapting to the new neighbourhoods was a long-drawn-out process.

The Phuket recovery project took a much simpler approach, recognising people as survivors and trusting their ability to build their own lives and environments; families were given a single room raised on four columns, with a toilet and a large roof. They received basic infrastructure and built individualised houses around the core, fulfilling their needs and creating diverse neighbourhoods. The project cost much less than the Hambantota effort, and it was far more empowering. The investment was small, but the change was huge.

Dr. Perera is disinclined to transfer models and scientific frameworks across cultural boundaries:

"I am more interested in looking at successful projects as inspirations. And I think there are many inspirations you can get from this country itself. For example, the support systems implemented in the 1980s as part of the Million Houses Programme (I am not talking about the political aspects of the programme, but its substance), giving up master planning and using incremental planning in the Mahaweli. . . there are lots of examples right here, not to repeat, but to get inspired by. We need to look at the right places. We are looking at the wrong places."

## Current opportunities

The reproduction of the deficit model of development still continues in Sri Lanka. Dr. Perera sees an opportunity in the present, within the new political economy, that needs to be seized; this is to 'negotiate and/or construct the best position for the nation within the emerging political/economy. . . Now is the time to end structural imbalance.' To achieve this, he declares, there is a need to understand the opportunities and alternative paths available for the country, the strengths and weaknesses of the nation, which in turn requires the building of a grounded knowledge, at a national scale. The role of the state, he believes, should be that of an enabler, not a provider: "People have agency; they conceive and carry out their individual development. They create more life opportunities and spaces than the state and other external providers. In so doing, they develop the nation. Hence, people are the main resource and the main beneficiary." They should be viewed as survivors that keep building their life journeys and not victims in need of our help.

The keynote session revealed the complicated relationship between political and spatial legacies. In fact, it was under an executive presidency and strong neo-liberal tendency that Sri Lanka saw one of most far-reaching rights-based housing programmes, the Million Houses Programme. Thus, the relationship between space and authority is a difficult and complex one. Dr. Nihal Perera, for example, saw how the failure of some spaces, according to an official account, may well mean the success of the spaces for the people who inhabit or utilise them, because it has been successfully supported, appropriated and familiarised by the users.

Keynote Speaker II
Dr. Nihal Perera
Architect and Urban Planner,
Professor of Urban Planning,
Ball State University, USA

# Housing rights of the urban poor

A rights-based approach to housing requires space for people to participate in and negotiate within planning and implementation processes. If this does not happen, the results will reflect the failure to respect the right of people to adequate housing and public participation in urban planning. Indeed, flawed processes will thwart desirable outcomes.

## Equity, democratisation, and urban infrastructure development

An urban equity development framework would enable decision-making that does not reproduce or reinforce unequal relationships. It could, for instance, include mechanisms that ensure the fairer distribution of opportunities so that more people could have a say in the improvement of their living spaces and benefit from the wealth of the cities. Moreover, when equity is rooted in urban development strategies, assets and resources are more creatively and efficiently utilised, and social relationships are strengthened. It would, in effect, mean creating a more level playing field, giving people a better chance to participate in city building –and realising their right to the city.

The question of what kind of city we want cannot be divorced from what kind of social ties, relationship to nature, lifestyles, technologies and aesthetic values we desire. I think our ideas of infrastructure and urban development are not only about what kind of a city we want – but in fact what kind of a nation we want as well. It's very much linked to our sense of who we are as a society, as a people. What is interesting about this in the Sri Lankan context, is how little our ideas about these issues have changed over time.

This was illustrated to me recently when I heard from some concerned colleagues that the current plans for the Western Megapolis include removing street children and placing them in institutions across the country. For those of us who have worked in the child protection sector – this sets off all kinds of alarm bells. For years, child protection practitioners have been pursuing a policy of de-institutionalisation because of the hugely negative consequences of institutionalisation on children. If what I heard was correct about proposing institutionalisation as an alternative to street children, then it seems that years of work in the child protection sector will be reversed – not to mention, damaged. Periodically, we have had similar suggestions: removal of beggars, slums, street hawkers – proposals to deal with segments that those with power deem unsightly or not in keeping with their image of urban development. The similarities between these proposals are astounding. So what is it about imagining infrastructure and urban development in Sri Lanka that refuses to change?

Dr. Harini Amarasuriya
Department of Social Sciences
Open University of Sri Lanka

Reimagining and realising alternative, more democratic, approaches to infrastructure and urban development would require greater public engagement. As highlighted by Susil Sirivardana:

"Rethinking, reimagining the subjects we have discussed is a major challenge. Harini Amarasuriya offered us a very innovative and valid idea; she said she is not particularly interested in urban issues or rural issues in their boxes; but she is interested in nation building, in human development. It is a very interesting, a potentially new concept, it's the one thing that we missed out-Nation building. We can turn this into an opportunity now and relate nation building to all the development and development planning. I would like to ask the question: Does that not open new vistas for the creation of knowledge, pursuit of research and for new conceptualisation?"

Sri Lanka also appears to lack a mechanism that would ensure learning from its experiences in urban development, many of them positive, and to take advantage of existing structures that would enable better planning.

What I find tragic is that we seem to have lost our institutional memory. There is a lot that has been done, particularly in the area of urban development, the urban poor, but we seem to repeat certain mistakes … This is a problem; losing our institutional memory may have something to do with politics. When political parties change, you throw everything away and then start again from scratch.

When research is done the first thing you need to do is to look at the research that has been done in the past. Reviewing literature is the basis from which you begin, that has not happened. I hope the UDA will do that.

There have been errors and mistakes but we seem to be one of the few countries that have a structure to define national spatial policy. Very few countries have such a thing and we have a tremendous advantage. It's a department that should be strengthened because it enables us to start looking at the difficulties we would encounter in the future, problems we could avoid with a strong national physical policy and plan. The framework to do that is already there. It's an agency for us to protect.

Dr. Locana Gunaratne
former President, National Academy of Sciences

In 2009, with the end of decades of violent civil war, Sri Lanka saw the adoption, by the state, of a particularly 'vigorous' approach to urban renewal and infrastructure development that did not heed the calls of its considerable critics. But what difference will the 2015 change in government, elected on a platform of good governance, make?

The triumphalism that accompanied the end of the war, the dream that was created of post-war Sri Lanka, was one in which the city and urban life played a central role. The development dream that was sold was aggressively about showing the rest of the world that we were not just good, but better than everybody else. This included having 'world class' cities with all the amenities to be found in any other city in the world. Yet, the basis of the post-war idea of infrastructure and development was not new – and neither is the idea of the Western Megapolis. These plans and ideas have been in circulation and in existence for several decades – different regimes cherry picked their pet areas.

We woke up to some of the worst excesses of these development plans – the extent to which issues of equity and democratisation were being compromised during the last several years, simply because of the crudity of methods employed in implementing these plans. A unique feature of urban development during the previous regime was that many of the powers were taken away from the traditional political authorities and handed over to an authority and a person who could claim to be 'non-political'. The UDA under the previous regime was a place that got things done – whatever the consequences.

The major difference between the last regime's urban development plan and that of the current regime is the return of authority to the political establishment – and this is perhaps a good thing in the sense that the chances are that the powers that be, may have to be a little more concerned with political consequences, which is a good thing for democratisation. Yet, the more important question remains as to how the same ideas get recycled over and over in almost deliberate denial of the obvious problems of the proposed plans? Are cities of the kind that we envisage, the infrastructure and urban development we plan, sustainable in this age of climate change and fossil fuel scarcity? These are issues that should concern those across the political ideology spectrum. How is it possible for us to simply ignore these challenges and stubbornly cling to the old, tired, unimaginative ideas of infrastructure and urban development? Our ideas and visions have remained pretty static. This sense of inevitability regarding a very particular vision of infrastructure and urban development that we are pursuing is I think the greatest challenge to issues of equity and democratisation.

Dr. Harini Amarasuriya
Department of Social Sciences
Open University of Sri Lanka

A key component of Sri Lanka's post-war urban development upswing is the concept and construction of the Western Region Megapolis Planning Project. Interestingly, one of the six key 'development challenges' it professes to address is 'gentrification pricing out low and middle income earners.

The alarm from the floor is, 'Look, by focusing on the Megapolis, are we going to derail the whole thing? Are we going to end up in a situation like Mumbai?' The answer is no, simply because the Megapolis is not the only thing we have on our agenda. Because in parallel

there is much emphasis on trying to look at the existing urban conglomerations – Galle, Kandy, Trincomalee, Jaffna and Batticaloa and really work on those cities as well. The Megapolis is really about how to manage the growth that is happening. I agree that if we only look at the Megapolis we have a problem. I don't think that is right by any means. I would urge more focus in public fora on how we do this.

There is a recognition that we need to understand the social issues better and we also need to think beyond the house. I think the foundation of the relocation programme, the urban regeneration programme as it is called, is really how do you transform the lives of these people who live without tenure, without legal title to the land, who live in pretty bad circumstances? How do you upgrade their lives? How can the transition into permanent housing with legal titles become a catalyst for a shift in their lives? and that really doesn't happen with the real estate alone. It needs to be accompanied by social programmes, education programmes, skill development and employment generation programmes says, **Nayana Mawilmada** the Director General, Urban Development Authority

Although the discourse and practice related to resettlement in the name of urban regeneration has changed to reflect concerns of equity, the economic and psychological repercussions to the displaced require more nuanced and creative planning approaches.

I think the biggest issue that planners and architects face in the 21st century is how could we improve a place without displacing people? We need to figure out how we could develop and improve communities, rather than places? We need grounded knowledge and grounded innovations. We need a lot more patience. Things take time.

I am not sure whether we can keep thinking of the urban and rural in the traditional way – for example, that the people in the rural areas should be producing food for urban people. I think there are sophisticated discussions around these concepts and their relationships such as urban agriculture. We need to rethink the urban, the rural, and how to organise these and their relationships. Do these categories make sense anymore? Should we have different categories to understand spatial dynamics?

Dr. Nihal Perera
Professor of Urban Planning,
Ball State University, USA

# The right to housing of the urban poor and their protection from forced evictions

'The rights approach should be an approach that is legally enshrined,' asserts **Susil Sirivardana**, advisor to the Ministry of Housing and Construction. Speaking on Housing as a right – the Million Houses Programme and Beyond, he said: 'It should be an approach that is justiciable. And in the last analysis, it must be something the poor can take to a court of law and use as a defence, saying 'Here you are, we have rights, these are the rights, and these rights are being violated.' The right to housing has also been recognised by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR) as a fundamental right. How do conventional societies see rights? Conventional societies see the urban poor as people without rights. And people not having the right to rights.'

A particularly unconventional and generally acclaimed housing programme for the urban poor, the Urban Housing Sub Programme (UHSP) of the Million Housing Programme, took a diametrically opposite view, states Sirivardana, one of its main architects. The strategies of the UHSP were framed based on the recognition that the urban poor are an integral part of the community. They were placed at the centre of the process:

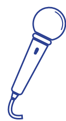
"The impacts of this state policy were very dramatic. The poor were energised, they were motivated, they were full of hope, they saw an opportunity for them to take the ball and run to realise and fulfil themselves; and they committed themselves to the programme, to the process and methodology as full owners of the programme?"

Government efforts to improve low-income settlements began in the early 1970s with new policies and regulatory measures recognising slum and shanty dwellers as legal residents of the city. With a change of government in 1977, public resource allocations for housing and urban development radically increased. The National Housing Development Authority (NHDA) and the Urban Development Authority (UDA) were created to implement extensive public housing construction and integrated urban development programmes. The UDA established the Slum and Shanty Division (SSD) to improve both housing and amenities in poor urban settlements and enable people to gain security of land tenure and access to affordable housing loans. In the early

1980s, the Government decided to focus more on the development of 'core' housing that would be affordable to low-income communities, using a community action planning approach. Government interventions changed from essentially being a 'provider' to one that supports and enables community-based housing development and service provision.

The Urban Housing Sub Programme (UHSP) of 1985 integrated the successes of the SSD into the Urban Housing Division of the NHDA. House ownership and self-help upgrading was the basis of the programme, which provided technical support and loans to poor urban households that did not have access to housing finance either through the public sector or the formal private sector.

Sirivardana concedes that the Urban Housing Sub Programme was not without its flaws:



"In this programme we had one major fault line. I would like to apologise on behalf of the agency that worked with the people, for this major lacuna in this programme. Perceptually they had the right to tenure, there was no issue regarding tenure, but we all know what happened during the last regime. Because people didn't have the piece of paper to go to court and say: 'We have a deed, we own the land, we own the house, which we have built. Some of us have repaid the full amounts of the loans we took to build the house.' An anti-poor state just came and bulldozed them and used the army against them and I am afraid the state of fear in the country was such that no one opened their mouths – either from the state sector or from the non-state sector. They were a lone voice. So that was a huge fault line. We never thought it would become an issue. There was perceived tenure as far as we were concerned and we were working so much round the clock with the programme that we never sat back and realised that there was one major final step which had to be taken as a part of the housing process, that is to issue the permanent deed."

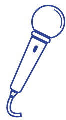
There are recent indications that the government is offering house deeds to both urban and rural communities. As Sirivardana points out, this delay has been at a terrible cost. The government that came into power in 1994 relegated the UHSP; it was virtually dumped.

"We were in a state of limbo. There was no clear policy or strategy. Various agencies, individuals, practised ad hoc policies and programmes, there was no consistency, so the continuity was disrupted. We need to reconnect with what was done before with the UHSP, it is a rich reservoir for those who want to learn from the past. It is all there very clear. Well documented. We need to work towards what I would call a holistic nation-building, national spatial policy that is based on the primacy of the human community – and reframe everything else around it."

## Trends in urban housing

The recent study of **Dr. Chandrasiri Niriella** of the University of Colombo on the relationship between the state, the market and social classes in Colombo relates to urban housing policy and its implementation. It focuses on three major urban housing complexes in the Colombo Metropolitan region, which he classified, based on income.

Niriella notes that neo-liberalisation policies introduced in Sri Lanka in 1977 brought about major changes in urban space, with the labour-oriented economy replaced by a service economy. It resulted in the growth of job opportunities and the urban housing market. He sees this as a reflection of "urban biases in the operational work of development … per government policy." The rising demand, especially among middle and upper income groups for private housing, Niriella points out, has resulted in a steep rise in land prices, making private housing out of reach for the low income groups, who then look for government housing schemes:



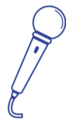
"The current housing status and urban renewal of Colombo city is not different from several so-called developing countries where a few mega-cities are now competing to be the 'world class' cities, and in the process, their states are losing control on (or withdrawing from) basic human services meant for average citizens. The whole process has led to the emergence of urban social classes very distinct from one another and drawing an identity from the housing structures."

Niriella underscores the need for change in the present housing delivery system to supply houses for people who experience dynamic change in their socio-economic status. At the same time, he recognises that although the housing policy of the government has been focused mainly on providing housing for the poor, the major beneficiaries of the various housing programmes and related policies – bank policies, housing loan schemes – focus on middle and higher-middle income groups.

"The poor seemed to have benefited only marginally. The main vision of a future housing policy shall have to be on adequate provision of land (space) at appropriate locations to low income settlements and the provision of supportive infrastructure along with security of tenure. Moreover, Sri Lankan politicians, policy makers, and city planners must pay more attention the social issues and human needs rather than focusing on housing production. The overall objective of creating a new city or town plan should be to provide a better environment for residence, business and recreation."

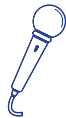
# Accountability politics and urban renewal

How can the urban poor hold governments accountable for their policies, investments and expenditures? Presenting a paper on Urban Development-induced Displacement in Colombo **Dr. Nishara Fernando** of the Department of Sociology, University of Colombo, sees the need for what he calls 'accountability politics' to ensure socially - and environmentally - responsible development that would benefit the less powerful. Moreover, he recognises an increasingly evident reality:



"Urban renewal projects are often carried out to prepare areas for private development by forcibly relocating people into new settlements. However, urban relocation is defined as housing instead of economic, social and cultural reconstruction. There is no acknowledgement that urban relocation is not just picking up urban communities and settling them down somewhere else."

The study on people's displacement carried out as part of urban development by Fernando examines the forced relocation and social vulnerability of four low-income settlements. The Involuntary Resettlement Policy that Sri Lanka adopted in 2001 is focused on addressing issues of relocation of people affected by donor-funded development projects. Yet, according to him, the authorities do not think about relocation as a process:



"Relocation has been so poorly planned, inadequately financed, and incompletely implemented and administered that these projects end up being development disasters. Forced relocation can be seen as a shock that generates various stresses and risks. In new settlements they face difficulties to earn an income by accessing common property resources, face lack of new employment opportunities, lack of infrastructure, poor quality of housing and fragmented relationships with the host community (which sometimes lead to physical conflicts)."

People are also displaced due to natural disasters and conflicts, and their particular relocation concerns are not addressed within the policy. 'There are significant differences among population groups displaced due to diverse circumstances. The need for a national policy to guide the relocation processes cannot be ignored.'

One of the more successful relocation initiatives for low-income groups has been the Lunawa Environmental Improvement and Community Development Project (LEI & CDP) – an extension to the Colombo Flood Control and Environmental Improvement Project (CFC

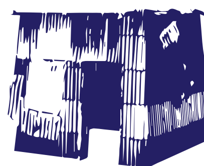
& EIP). A factor that contributed to the project's success appears to be its five-year time frame and the measured process it enabled, incorporating some of the more innovative and exemplary mechanisms adopted by Sri Lanka's housing authorities through the years.

The Lunawa project, involving peri-urban communities, combined 'involuntary resettlement' with the upgrading of underserved settlements. The project, which resettled 870 households, had the objective of 'improving the living conditions of people in Lunawa catchment by mitigating the flood damage through an integrated programme of improvement of urban drainage and canal systems.' It is one of the first projects that translated Sri Lanka's National Involuntary Resettlement Policy into practice, with households been given three options: 1. To settle on four relocation sites prepared by the project with all basic infrastructure such as access to roads, water supply, electricity and sewerage facilities (relocation), 2. To settle on lands purchased by affected persons (self-relocation), or 3. To settle on the original site after regularising the plots (on-site resettlement).

Nishara Fernando notes several forms of accountability mechanisms that people could utilise on their way to becoming official property owners: the investment of time and resources in careful relocation planning and implementation; government officials working in partnership with NGOs who worked closely with the relocated families; the formation of community development societies; the relocation of homes with minimal disruption to livelihood activities and social contacts; and the provision of security of tenure, and the construction of resettlement sites through community contracts.

However, the Sahaspura housing project, part of the Sustainable Township Programme (STP), implemented under the Urban Poverty Reduction Strategic Plan of the People's Alliance government had its own problems. This was not the conventional approach to on-site upgrading; people were allowed to exchange their land for equity in new condominiums. The 13-storey, 671 apartments complex relocation project encountered complications with regard to management of the scheme, provision of public amenities, social organisations and intra community relationships.

SETTLEMENT INFORMATION



No. of Under-Served Settlements (USS)

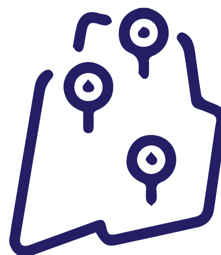
**1,735**

No. of Households

**77,957**

Population

**470,542**



Extent of Under-Served Settlements (USS)

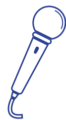
**970 Acres**

Source: Sevanatha Urban Resource Centre 2012

Regional Director of Healthbridge, **Debra Efroymson** spoke of the need to see the integration of different classes in the city:

"Part of the criticisms against high-rise housing for the urban poor is that you are segregating [and concentrating] them into areas where they know and interact only with other poor people. They need the influence of the middle class to help develop social skills to move out of poverty. It's also a question about how we organise our city; whether we want to segregate or whether we want to see more mixing – interaction that can benefit all income groups. You can, for example, have a mix of six-storey apartment buildings that cater to different incomes, rather than high rises."

Similarly, excluding the poor into exclusive zones, is not an option Mr. Susil Sirivardana would consider:



"No one has talked about incrementalism, and no one has talked about Wanathamulla, the former gang land and bomb land of Colombo which has been transformed into Seevalipura. Nine thousand families, not a single relocation. Everything was urban upgrading. A thriving middle-income settlement. Money has come from Middle East for some families. They have gone up two floors, three floors. I think that's the direction we want to take. We will build mixed settlements we don't want ghettos. We need a policy that offers options and alternatives vertically to every income category. All housing should be voluntary. I would completely negate the relocation option for policy – it is not an option. Why do we need a relocation option? In my view, we need it because of poor professionalism and professionals who want to take the easy way out."

## Public Participation

Participation is a concept embraced by both the government and non-governmental organisations in matters relating to development. Planning for urban development in a complex and multi-layered process and ensuring participation of the poor poses a number of challenges. How can we deepen the democratisation of urban governance and infrastructure development?

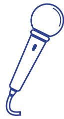
Participation is seen as a key mechanism to draw vital information and broader experience into decision-making – as well as a means of empowering people to hold authorities accountable and influence their decisions. Yet, despite many examples of exemplary participatory projects, there seems to be little incorporation of the best practices and learning into new initiatives.

It is the multiple definitions of public participation that causes most issues around development not the general level acceptance of the concept. Susil Sirivardana says:

"Participation and community participation are loaded words. You won't find a single bureaucrat in the Sri Lankan state who will admit that he doesn't believe in participation. In fact, they will act as if they are great champions of participation. But we have learned to be careful of this loaded word. And we had a very simple slogan in the Million Houses Programme (MHP). That is: Who is participating in whose process? In provider-based housing, the provider-based paradigm, the state is inviting the people or the poor to participate in a process of the state. In the MHP, it shifted 180 degrees to a people-centred, people-based, community-based, paradigm. It was very clearly the reverse.

The state was participating in the mainstream process of the poor. Meaning, the poor have been building houses for themselves in Sri Lanka for millenia. Hence, we conceptualised that process as the mainstream. So in the second paradigm the state was participating in the mainstream process of the people. So it's a very clear, very explicit way of understanding who is participating in whose process."

Nihal Perara further problematises the concept by questioning the basics of the idea and the promise of participation:



"I would like to revisit the idea of participation. Who is participating in whose process? I think we need to be very careful about the language. When we say participation it sounds like we are doing a very progressive thing. If some people have already built houses for themselves, what is the meaning of us all of a sudden saying that they have the right to participate. What are they going to participate in? They have actually built their own house but all of a sudden they become the participants. The strategy is calling their homes slums. If you start by calling somebody's house a slum, it's very bad. This is not even noticed because we use a language that is not familiar to us.

We learn these words, in a foreign language. These categories may have come from the United Nations, but we don't even know what we are talking about. Why should the self-builders have a right to participate in our programme based on providing housing that victimizes them? We are the ones who are encroaching into whatever they are doing. All of a sudden relocation becomes a politically neutral word. Who has the right to relocate someone? What is relocation?

There is also the question of funding. When you say foreign-funded, it sounds as if the foreigners are doing this out of their generosity. They are investing to earn a lot more money. It is speculative development. I think we need to understand the language we use and the problems it creates. Is it language of discrimination?"

## Situating urban renewal squarely within a rights framework

In his paper on Building structures to building communities – reflections on community mobilisation, **Ranjith Samarasinghe**, Vice President of the Sevanatha Urban Resource Centre, noted the key elements of the enabling environment that made the Sri Lanka Million Houses Programme the achievement it has been: security of tenure; service improvement; housing finance and housing advisory provision. Underlying these elements was people's participation through the mobilisation of communities:

"Implementing the million houses programme, especially the urban housing sub-programme in Colombo city and other local authority areas, there was an institutional structure to support community processes. The Community Development Council (CDC), at the settlement level, and the Housing and Community Development Committee (HCDC) at the municipal or urban local authority level. These structures supported community participation in the housing sector. Then we had participatory development methodology, we used community action planning and management, which provided a real opportunity for the community to participate in the decision-making process, starting with a settlement planning workshop, where the community discussed its issues, and developed a vision for their future. That action plan includes, strategies, options and costing. And crucially, when we come to the issues like land, housing, livelihoods, savings, that kind of thing, there were a series of issue-specific workshops, which provided opportunities for people to participate in decision making in a collective way. This was a combination of physical and social development. It was not typical house construction – it was housing."

The National Housing Development Authority facilitated the Million Houses Programme, with the government providing housing grants and supporting the development of infrastructure. Samarasinghe notes that the key characteristic of the initiative was that it was incremental housing, people constructed the basic structure and improved it when they got the money. Infrastructure development took place through community contracts, an important tool for people to participate in improving their services. Moreover, it was a capacity building exercise for community members.

The process of community mobilisation and consultation was adopted by the Lunawa Environment Improvement Project, which adopted the good practices of the Million Houses Programme. Samarasinghe points out that the original plan for resettlement was a block of apartments, but the community did not accept it, they went for low-rise housing on two-perch lots. In contrast, the Sahaspura high-rise complex adopted the strategy of social marketing, to market the concept; a product was marketed to the community.

How can we find a cost-effective, practical and a viable approach to providing access to housing for people? Housing is a human right, enshrined in the human rights declaration of 1948 and later expanded in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of 1966 which actually expanded the scope of rights to say, it's not just a roof over the head of a person but also entails freedoms, rights and entitlements.

An efficient solution is to help people who already have houses to better their conditions. It has been attempted and proven to be the most effective solution. Unfortunately, the politicians and policy makers are not quite happy to follow that lead.

Our discussion is not limited to community participation, it also concerns empowerment. Empowerment comes out of the processes we have given to make the participatory approach of housing successful. What we mean by empowerment is realigning the power relations within a group or within a community to ensure that they are able to use new powers, new rights, new capabilities, new skills, to achieve desirable outcomes. The point has to be made in this session of the symposium that just helping the community to build houses is not enough; at the same time, we have another step to take, i.e., to find ways to give the poor access to housing resources, land, finances, technology, and also to improve their power relations.

Disa Weerapana
Former Regional Director,
Asia and Pacific UN-Habitat

## The state can listen

A more recent housing relocation project, the Slave Island Redevelopment Programme, was the subject of the presentation by **Priyani Navaratne,** Deputy Director (Planning) of the Urban Development Authority. In her presentation titled, The State Can Listen: Community engagement in housing re-development, Navaratne spoke specifically about Stage II of the Beira Lake Development Project. It is a high-rise project based entirely on foreign investment and contractors. The project has the objective of 'developing and utilising the land in a more productive manner to contribute to the national economy by releasing prime lands to the property market . . . and enhancing the living environment for more than 150 railway families' (who will be relocated).

The UDA opted to engage the people. It started with the participatory development of a database of the communities that would be relocated. Navaratne explains:

"The most successful strategy to ensure social safeguards was listening. We listened to people for hours on end, even though this involved time. For example, we took over a year to work on the design of the new houses, with the people. I had to let go of three assistant managers who were impatient with the time-consuming nature of the process. Listening was key. We gave people our mobile numbers, so they could contact

us anytime. We also provided people with options for their housing. Many families were occupying single houses, so we gave people the option of buying additional houses. We also offered people commercial space."

## The private sector can contribute

Lafarge Holcim Sri Lanka initiated an affordable housing programme in 2013, combining commercial and corporate social responsibility objectives, to help low-income people to access (affordable) housing under Lafarge's international theme 'Building Better Cities'. The company has been working in partnership with the microfinance provider Bimputh Finance and Habitat for Humanity Sri Lanka, particularly in peri-urban areas.

**Charlotte Boutboul**, CSR Manager of Lafarge Holcim Sri Lanka recognises that there are a considerable number of households that simply want to improve their houses, where the foundations were laid, but only one room was built. She identifies three 'breaks' that inhibited housing improvements and the construction of new house. The first is financial: even when people made enough money to access a bank loan and had the capacity for repayment, they did not have financial statements and the documentation needed for a mortgage. The second is technical. People need help to translate their ideas and needs into drawings, often taking vasthu beliefs into account in their designs. They also need assistance for the preparation of the bill of quantities. The third is quality, i.e., ensuring the availability of techniques and workers for good quality construction.

Lafarge Holcim took these factors into account when designing the company's participatory approach to low-cost housing. Boutboul outlines the company's partnership with house builders:

"We provide support to address all three of the 'breaks'. So we provided support for the loan application process, for design and construction, and for quality control. When people have salary slips we direct them to commercial banks. When it comes to the lower-income individuals without a salary slip then we connect them with a micro-finance company. We link very poor families with Habitat for Humanity. We provide technical assistance at each step of the process of building the house."

The company found that everybody wants to have a customised house, that it is very difficult for the people to agree to a standardised model house. It was important for us to enable people to build their homes based on the designs they wanted.

"That's where technology really helped us to customise our products for every single individual that we were helping. We defined an application which integrates a catalogue of programmes with different kinds of renovations and extensions so we can develop the design on site with the people. The sketch is useful to develop the bill of quantities (BOQ). We also provided assistance to train masons who were not adequately skilled. … we partnered with building material suppliers to ensure quality products and provided discount schemes. This way, we innovatively remapped our supply chain with distributors and retailers to provide support to the communities."

## The need to recognise changing situations

A concern expressed by both CEPA's Karin Fernando and Sevanatha's Ranjith Samarasinghe, was that the classification of urban housing does not reflect the changes taking place. 'We know it's true that once the slums get upgraded they can't be declassified,' states Fernando. 'In the end the numbers don't reduce, they are still called slums because you can't call them something else. Why is that? Are there legal issues coming into play and what are the issues for the community if you do declassify it and call it something else?' Samarasinghe recognises that this is an issue that needs to be addressed:

"In every survey we have done in 1987, 2000, and 2012, we had different t ypes of settlements. Slums, shanties, and slum tenements. In parallel, we did upgrading, on-site improvement, relocations, a lot of programmes are going on, but people are not moving beyond their classification. The settlements we upgraded were called upgraded settlements even in the Sevanatha classification, but again it falls into the underserved category."

**Dr. Anila Bandaranaike**, former Assistant Governor of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, shares a similar view:

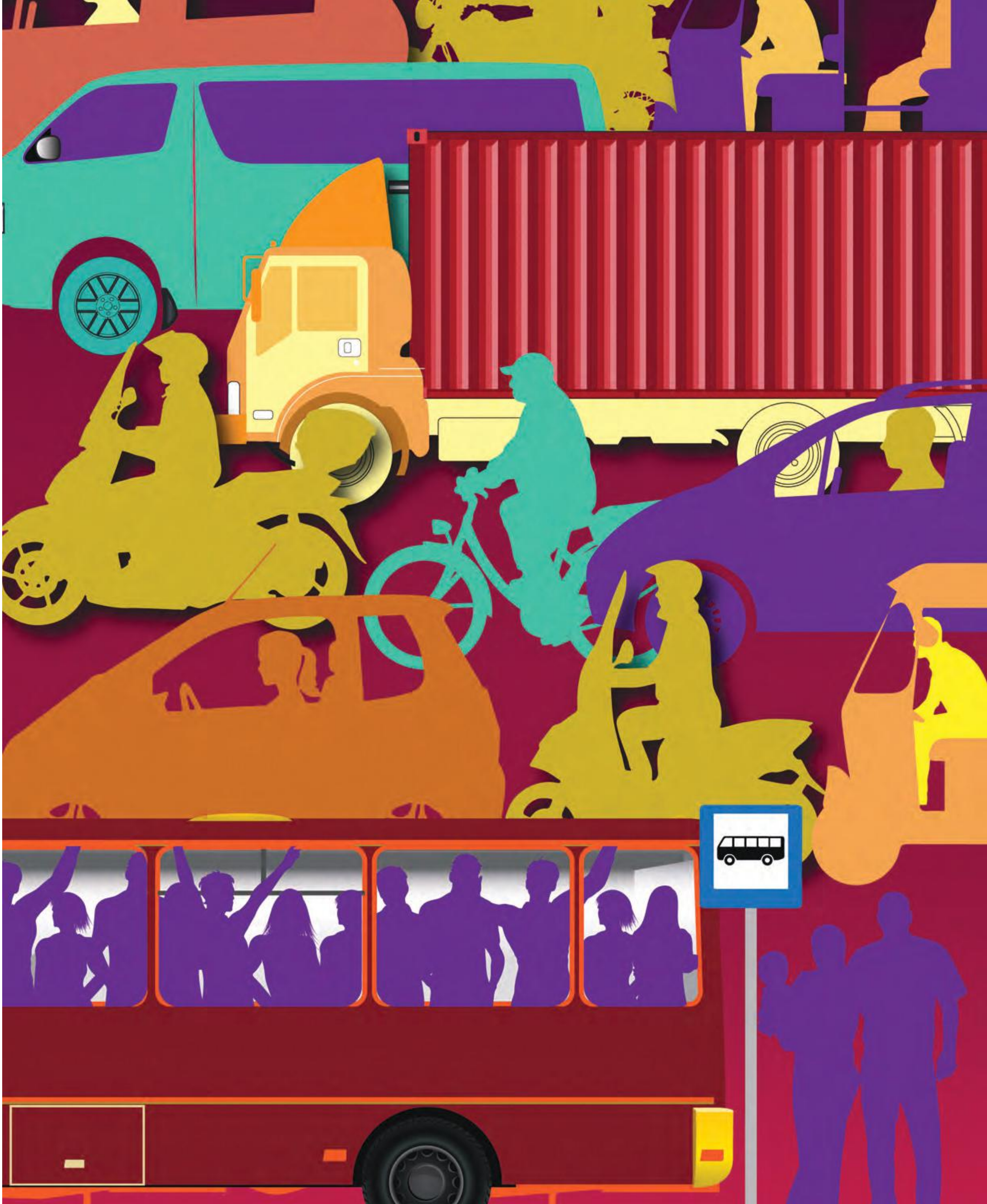
"One aspect that we need to recognise in the context of Sri Lanka is that the situation has indeed changed. People are moving out of poverty to higher levels, their aspirations are at a different level within the lower-income level. Even though the poverty lines might be outdated, you can see visibly that there have been huge improvements. Still, the approach I see, especially at the political level, is one of patronage. What we have not done in this country is educate people, and I think the last presentation showed, the breaks,' she said,

‘people do not know how to use their savings, how to save to improve, that kind of knowledge is not encouraged, because it’s political patronage now, replacing what was feudal patronage a hundred years ago. So there is a necessity to raise awareness. I was really impressed with what Lafarge is doing, giving people the tools they need to take the decisions into their own hands. I am dismayed to know that when we talk about 1700 under-served communities, nobody really knows. Because some of these communities have moved way out of what we call ‘slums’ or ‘shanties’. So actually, we don’t know what the extent of the problem is. We have to recognise the improvements that have taken place in this country over the last few decades and have a new approach that takes account of the current ground situation. We need to know the real magnitude of the problem in the urban settlements.”

Most speakers did not support involuntary resettlement. In the 1980s, it became the unwritten law that people should not be evicted. The ‘unwritten’ was the fault line used by the last regime to invoke the older method of evictions that still continues. In regard to policy, the discussion highlighted the need to recognise the close link between the rights-based approach and political accountability. The two key questions to examine, then, are: what does it mean to embrace a rights-based approach – and how does this translate into practice? Who are the duty bearers and how could they actually be held to account?

DR. NALINI
HENNAYAKE

Poverty Briefs



# Urban Transport and Mobility

## How do infrastructure development interventions in relation to mobility and transport impact poor communities and their access to land, public spaces, housing, social networks, and economic opportunities? This is the key concern of this section.

Transport infrastructure and connectivity play a decisive role in people's accessibility to the city and its services; the unevenness of this accessibility also affects the spatial differentiation in the city. Understanding transportation in the context of poverty requires a broadening of the way transport is defined to include the concerns of those in poverty, and a critical analysis of the causal links between transport conditions and poor people's livelihoods.

There are various frameworks and approaches, from 'transport poverty' to 'transport hardship' to 'poverty of access' that consider income-cost ratio/affordability, distance, time, and other factors. While affordability continues to be the dominant frame, it is often only responding to income-poverty. It is crucial to developing a contextually relevant and more complete conception of poverty in relation to transport.

The extent to which the informal economy and non-motorised transport are accounted for in transport infrastructure policy are critical markers of its sensitivity to poverty; inadequate attention to them or their exclusion often reveals an institutional and structural bias. All of these concerns and issues assume particular importance in Sri Lanka's significant post-war emphasis on transport-related interventions–completed, underway, or proposed – including the Western Region Megapolis Transport Master Plan.

## Urban transport decision-making

**Dr. Geetam Tiwari**, Professor of Transportation Planning, at the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, delivered the Symposium's Keynote Address III on Sustainability, Mobility and Metro Systems in South Asian Cities: Impact and Relevance. She highlighted key aspects of the Indian urban transport experience of the past several decades, providing some key insights into the status of Sri Lanka's transportation conditions.

Tiwari notes that, since the 1980s, city authorities in India have responded to growing traffic congestion and vehicular pollution by improving the road network by adding signal-free corridors, elevated roads and ring roads. In the last decade, the discussion shifted, predictably, to the need to promote public transport

systems. When evaluating mass transit options for Indian cities, underground metro rail systems are given the preference over surface systems: 'There is a strong belief that a road-based bus system cannot cater to the capacity requirement as much as metro systems. …metro railway is perceived to have higher levels of comfort, speed, and efficiency compared to bus systems.'

The situation is compounded by a complexity of factors, outlines Tiwari:

"The benefits of metro rail systems are being calculated unscientifically. Promoters claim that there is a reduction in congestion and pollution with a shift from road-based motorised modes to metro rail systems. This is not the experience of metro rails in low- and middle-income countries around the world. Evidence suggests that available space on the road very quickly gets filled up with motorised vehicles due to induced demand and does not result in reduced congestion or air pollution. The high construction and operation costs of metro rail systems that necessitate financial support do not seem to deter policy makers, elected representatives and bureaucrats from promoting metro rail systems in the cities across India. Metros have become an investment opportunity for big companies who want quick success. It is not being implemented as a transport solution. Metro railway needs to be integrated with other systems and that requires a systems planning exercise that needs both time and detail."

Tiwari emphasises that transport cannot be viewed in isolation from the city; it can induce the kind of city we want. Conversely, urbanisation and the way we organise the city has a lot to do with the kind of transport; it is a two-way relationship.

A sustainable transport system must enable easy and affordable access to the majority of the city's people. In fact, poor people are also not homogenous, there are the employed poor and the unemployed poor. Some of our detailed studies show that this is where we are at a complete loss. We don't know how to define the city; we don't know how to model it.

Yet another bottleneck to better urban transport is the lack of recognition of the symbiotic relationship between the informal sector and the formal sector: Located right next to planned development, there will be what you may call self-organised informal sector development. Why is it that the two are always close to each other; because they depend on each other.

Dr. Geetam Tiwari
Professor for Transportation Planning
Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi

## Road-based public transportation

For the majority of residents in developing cities, road-based public transportation is the only means to access education, employment and public services; it is central to economic growth but does not adequately serve the mobility-needs of the people. Formal bus services are often unreliable, while more informal services, like three-wheelers, are expensive, but provide benefits like on-demand mobility, jobs for low-skilled workers, and service coverage in areas without formal transport.

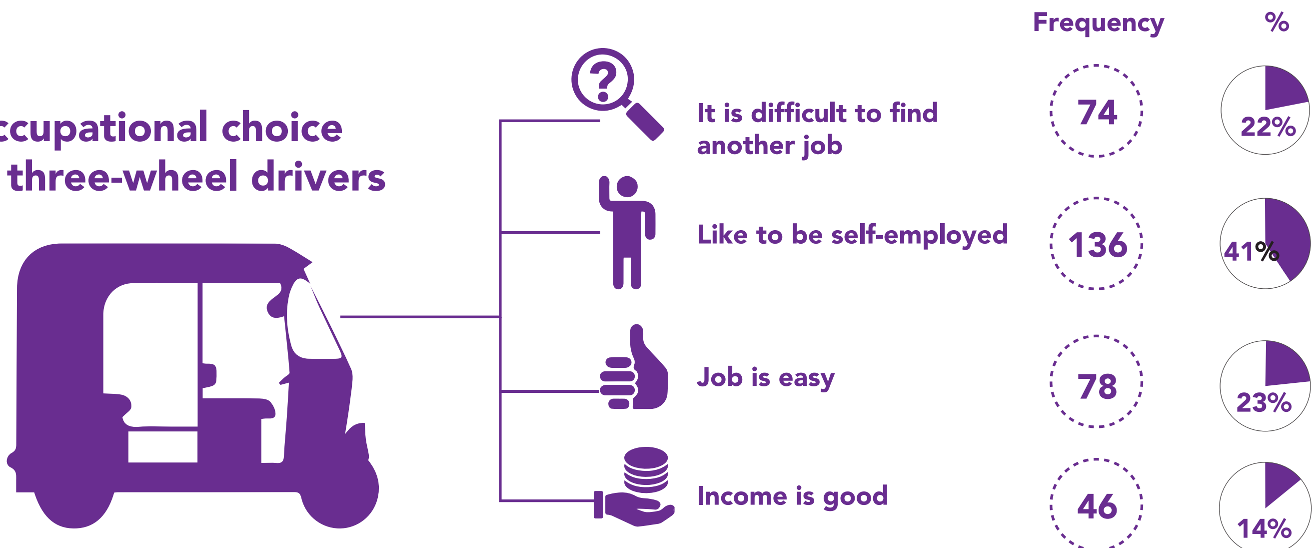
Informal Passenger Transportation and its Relevance to Poverty Alleviation was the subject of the paper presented by **Dr. Yapa Mahinda Bandara**, Transport Economist at the University of Moratuwa. The main focus of the paper is the para-transit, three-wheeler taxi service and its underlying socio-economic features with regard to poverty alleviation.

Over a million three-wheelers operate in the country, but under minimal regulatory requirements, catering mostly to urban centres. Most operators belong to associations formed by loose collections of operators from a particular locality. These associations impose a degree of self-regulation with respect to fares. The three-wheeler taxi service has also been perceived as an urban poverty-reducing instrument. Several factors have contributed to the rapid development of the three-wheeler industry, particularly the lack of public transportation to accommodate short distances on all road networks and an inadequate job market for young people. Three-wheelers have been estimated to constitute approximately 15% of the country's motor vehicle fleet and 6% of passenger kilometres.

Based on a survey of 342 three-wheeler drivers, Bandara summarises the main reasons for people to choose this livelihood option:

Of the drivers surveyed, 95% were full time three-wheeler drivers. More importantly 55% of drivers had previously opted out of other jobs and moved to driving three-wheelers. Roughly two-thirds of the three-wheelers (67%) were owned by the drivers and the balance 33% was rented.

The monthly rental paid by three-wheeler drivers to three-wheeler owners on average was Rs. 10,463.63 with a maximum and a minimum range of Rs. 15,000 to Rs 7,500. The drivers were paid a daily wage of Rs. 350 on average. The owners of the three-wheelers earn an income of about Rs. 45,000 a month.



Bandara concludes that the present market characteristics of the three-wheeler industry show that operators and owners of three-wheelers have benefited:

"They like the job, they like to continue the job and more are coming into the trade. In the end, the fine thing is actually that this profession has contributed to alleviating poverty, without direct government support.  Over one million people are living above the poverty line because of one particular mode of transportation, that is the three-wheeler."

Privileging car use – the scourge of urban transport systems and unpacking transport poverty  by **Mansi Kumarasiri** and Priyanthi Fernando attempted to understand the concept of road and road space in relation to poverty and inequality and how roads manifest inequalities in terms of congestion, pollution and safety:

"When we try to understand the road and the road side, what we know is that the road is a structure and it is built and maintained with public money and it is used for transporting goods, services and people. There is another dimension to it. It is also a public space. Writing about Hyderabad, Dienel, Jain and Bonaker (2011) declared that road space is a threatened common."

Road and the Roadside as urban commons

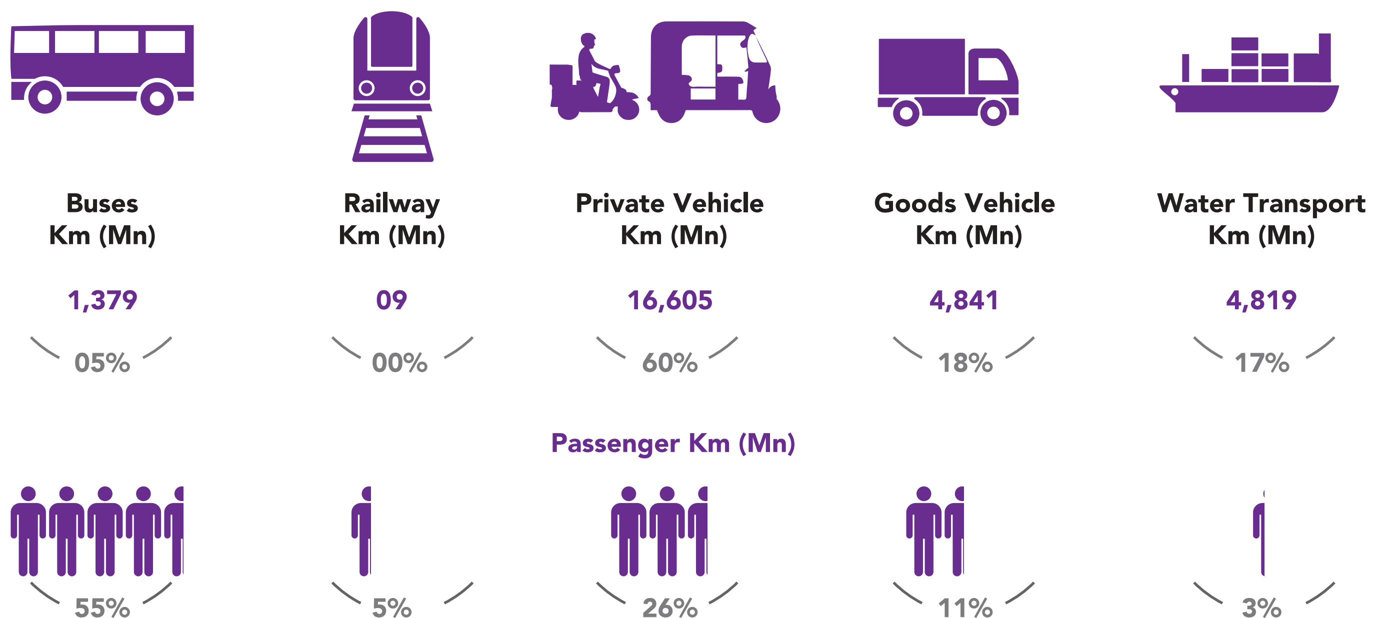
'Road space, however, being very isolated, individualised, frequented by strangers and in a fast flow, is a threatened common. The idea of roads as part of public space is endangered by motorised transport and related infrastructure.'

Dienel, Jain and Bonaker, writing about Hyderabad, India

In South Asia, roads are common spaces because they have many different uses and functions, notes Kumarasiri. There are different types of travel, different types of livelihoods and a range of social and cultural interactions and events that straddle the road and the roadside. When the space is reserved for or predominantly occupied by one user, the others are at a disadvantage.

'What we understand from "road as a public good" is that there is no equal access and the quality of service is low,' asserts Kumarasiri. 'Inequality in transport creates pollution, congestion and safety risks – with the poor being the most adversely affected. Creating equitable road usage should factor into planning. Sri Lanka's Urban Transport Master Plan recognises that there are transportation inequalities and it focuses on improving public transportation through rapid transit and managing the transportation demand by moving people from cars to public transport. We need to push for its implementation.'

## Transport Activity and Modal Shares in the Colombo Metropolitan Region, 2012




Source: Graphic based on data from Sivakumar, 2012

There is no win-win situation. We will have to make difficult decisions. If you reserve spaces for buses, yes, the cars will be adversely affected. For me, the question is, if India is a true democracy and the numbers indicate that only 6-7% people use cars, why are we so bothered? So we want to support public transportation as long as it does not affect car use. You can go underground, you can go elevated, or use a corridor, but there must be plenty of space for cars to move fast and then you can think of buses. So there is a conflict.

Dr. Geetam Tiwari,
Professor for Transport Planning
Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi

According to a 2014 report by CoMtrans, The Urban Transport System Development Project for the Colombo Metropolitan Region and Suburbs, in the last 28 years, the number of passengers crossing over into the Colombo Municipal boundary by private mode of transport increased by approximately 250% while the number of passengers using public transport remained roughly the same. Colombo attracts more than a million daily commuters using 160,000 vehicles.

In fact, the percentage of passengers using public transport as opposed to other modes of transport is decreasing rapidly (in 2004, 67%; in 2013, 58%). Private vehicles occupy 60% of the road space, and carry 26% passenger kilometers; buses occupy 5% of the road space and carry 55% of passenger kilometers.

In September 2015, car registration increased 57% over the previous month. Car registration in 2015 increased by 400% over the previous year. The report points to the urgent need to develop an extensive congestion-free public transport system.

One of the key issues that has emerged throughout the discussion is the current tendency to monetise land. CEPA's senior researcher **Vijay Nagaraj** points out that any discussion on infrastructure needs to include land:

"What does monetisation of land imply in terms of the used values of land for the poor? I do not refer to its exchange value for the rich, but the use value for the poor? So this tension that surrounds monetisation is also extremely pertinent for us to reflect on."

Nagaraj further elaborates: “Prof. Tiwari talked about how the tele-metros’ viability was actually pushed on the basis of the monetisation of land that the metro was able to generate. Did that lead to equitable outcomes? Did that even lead to the most desirable transport solutions? Indeed, the answer seems to be a No. So monetisation is another crucial issue. It also raises another important question which Karin Fernando raised about the categorisation of slums and why there seems to be no change so to speak in the number of underserved communities in the city? Perhaps, one way of thinking about that question is: When we talk about slums and freeing Colombo of slums, are we actually talking about freeing up land? So the question of land is particularly important.

# Urban commons, land and public spaces

**Public space is an essential component of the city and is a critical social infrastructure that defines the quality of urban life. These spaces are also viewed as urban commons, whose nature, quality and accessibility are shaped by political, economic and social relations. A somewhat different perspective suggests that common spaces should be distinguished from public spaces. Architect and activist Stavros Stavrides defines common spaces as 'those spaces produced by people in their effort to establish a common world that houses [accommodates], supports and expresses the community they participate in.' He sees public spaces differently, as 'primarily created by a specific authority (local, regional or state), which controls them and establishes the rules under which people may use them.'**

At the conclusion of Sri Lanka's protracted and violent civil conflict in 2009, the Defence Secretary took over the Urban Development Authority and launched an urban 'beautification' and regeneration project, which saw urban spaces coming under pressure to generate ideas and projects for building 'world-class' cities, rendering them vulnerable to the demands of the global market place. It is in this context that the exclusion and inclusion of urban communities in poverty in Sri Lanka's post-war engineering of public/common urban spaces needs to be considered.

The creation of new and the upgradation of older public spaces, with their social and aesthetic benefits, was accompanied by serious questions over militarisation and the 'exclusive' and overly-scripted nature of the new spaces, as well as accusations of privileging the privileged, rather than reclaiming the city for the wider public good. Economic dimensions had asserted themselves to make urban renewal far from participatory, and less than democratic. New forms of socialities emerged, but subject to specific regimes of control and discipline. The resilience of urban communities, however, could be an important factor at play.

Dr. Nihal Perera argues that there is the danger of overestimating the reach of the state, as people often script 'lived' spaces out of 'abstract' spaces provided by the state and capital and can adapt, adjust, and even create familiar spaces rather than always being adjusted by the spaces imposed upon them.

# Transforming the city: Interplay of power and politics

'Gotabhisation' is the term **Pradeep Dissanayake** of the Town and Country Planning Department of the University of Moratuwa opted to use to comprehend and identify the previous government's process of reshaping Sri Lanka's urban spaces, led by President Mahinda Rajapaksa's brother Gotabhaya Rajapaksa. In his paper Gotabhisation' of Colombo: creating a world-class disciplined state, Dissanayake argues that it is impossible to reduce Rajapaksa's influence on the city to an individual's effort. Instead, he sees it as part of the dominant discourse and a great representation of Sri Lankan middle class consciousness which has shaped the country's current spatial thinking.

Rajapaksa was focused on the relocation of the poor in order to release and find the optimal use for so-called 'under-utilised' lands and to transform Colombo into a slum-free city by 2020. The city's transformation was effected mainly through the (re)construction of infrastructure that required the purging of the unbeautiful and undesirable low-income settlements and removing the disorganised and undisciplined informal roadside traders to make way for new capital. According to the Centre of Policy Alternatives, 135,000 families were evicted (mostly with direct military involvement) through Gotabhisation. The urban renewal programme had been disinclined to recognise its potential for social transformation and unable to reimagine the city in order to construct/alter processes that generate economic growth and development for all.

"The people of our country are now awaiting the victory in the "economic war", in a manner similar to our victory in the war against terrorism."

(Mahinda Chinthana Idiri Dekma: 2009: 08)

Dissanayake compares and contrasts Gotabhisation with similar urban development practices such as Haussmannisation in Paris in the late 1850s and Robert Mosses' restructuring of New York City in the 1940s and 1950s. He also identified political, economic and social motivations that precipitated the demand for Gotabhisation and the disciplining of Colombo. He questioned Gotabhaya's knowledge of a 'world-class'

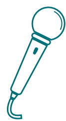
city, especially whether it was simply based on the appearance of physical space in cities like Singapore, Tokyo and/or New York, and attempted to locate the socio-cultural dimensions of the imagination and the practice. Alluding to the idea of 'right to the city,' the paper highlighted both the intentions and the practice of Gotabhisation and the lessons that we can learn for Sri Lanka and the region.

Furthermore, Dissanayake maps out Gotabhaya's vision and notes that he simply emulated physical forms and the external views of 'successful' cities rather than taking their socio-cultural dimensions into account:

"Gotabhaya worked in the context of the extended Mahinda Chinthana which became the development manifesto of the nation since 2010. The manifesto reveals and underscores the aim of his brother, President Mahinda Rajapaksa, to achieve huge economic growth during his second term. Since 'urban development' was reduced into the main indicator of 'national development', the physical transformation of Colombo was prioritised, with government allocations for urban development rising sharply during this period. Gotabhaya Rajapaksa and the Ministry of Defense was waging a new war to achieve economic prosperity."

Rajapaksa implemented a range of urban beautification projects such as the creation of parks and open spaces, improved the walkability of selected roads, and appropriated and converted select colonial buildings into high-end business and social spaces. The main objective was the shaping of spaces for the purposes of recreation, consumption, and entertainment.

'Gotabhaya strongly stuck to the belief that gentrification is the key to urban development,' says Dissanayake. 'Although he sent his architects at the Urban Development Authority to France, he never realised that the world-class city is not merely a combination of expensive construction projects, but a space that allows people to reshape the process of urbanisation. There is hardly any evidence of such understanding.'



"On the one hand, Rajapaksa's approach to making Colombo a "world class" city is based on the neoliberal agenda of creating spaces (in the name of investment) and serving the global surplus capital,' says Dissanayake, 'On the other hand, Rajapaksa wanted to bring a Sinhala identity to his emerging urban spaces in order to show that his approach was inspired by nationalist thoughts and national pride. His ambiguity with nationality and the neoliberal urban model is indicated in the lion statues that are incorporated in most of the regenerated projects."

Over the course of the twentieth century, residents have restructured the Fort's colonial houses, streets, and neighborhoods to suit their needs. Over time, they have vernacularised colonial architecture. For instance, many of the Fort's religious space are in colonial buildings. The takkiyas and zawiyas – sufi religious sites – have modified the European styled arches to resemble the shapes of minarets. The Buddhist temple has done the same, turning the arches into Bo Leaf motifs. Fort People have also modified the houses according to their own needs. In the seventeenth century, Dutch planners built long and narrow houses to maximise the Fort's limited space and Muslim residents have divided these elongated houses into several sections to maintain the separation of genders. When you go through the veranda there's a room for men to receive male guests, and through it another room where women and families were received . . . there are many things that are distinctive and significant about the ways in which residents of the Fort use its spaces. For them, what is significant is not the buildings and spaces of the colonial past, but the living breathing neighbourhoods that they inhabit.

Nethra Samarawickrema
Anthropologist

Expatriates today own over a fourth of the three hundred or so houses in the Fort, many of them converted to boutique hotels. This massive transformation of ownership was facilitated by government tax exemptions to promote foreign investment. The attendant land price inflation incentivised families to sell their property and move elsewhere, making it almost impossible for locals to afford the property.

When **Nethra Samarawickrema** began her ethnographic study in 2009, little had been done to secure an effective voice for the Fort residents to participate in the process of change. The community was riddled with misgivings and fears:

"Many of the families I spent time with were concerned because their neighbours were leaving. There was fear that the thriving social life in the neighbourhoods would disappear, that the streets would become empty. Reading about gentrification in many parts of the world–especially in heritage sites where mixed-income neighbourhoods had been replaced by elite spaces –I too shared this fear. And yet, I found over time that the urban transformations in the Fort, did not unfold according to the standard narratives of gentrification. While many families left, many others chose to remain. They took advantage of the growing tourism by converting parts of their homes into restaurants, cafes, and guesthouses. Today, many families have opted to renovate their homes in accordance with the new heritage aesthetic and gone through the formal approval process, not so much because of the colonial nostalgia that you see in the boutique hotels, but because it is a way of participating in the tourist economy."

Samarawickrema examines the wider questions on urban planning and management emerging from the Galle Fort experience:

"Because the heritage managers, architects, and urban planners were so focused on sprucing up the colonial buildings rather than attending to their significance for the people who live there, the Fort could have easily become another failed project of revamped colonial heritage – like the racecourse and the arcade in Colombo. These colonial buildings have become attractive shells that are empty inside, lacking in real use and meaning for most of the city's inhabitants. In Galle Fort, the colonial built environment had long been incorporated into local social and ritual life, in ways that hold deep attachments for Fort residents. Thus, even as they adapt to the changes and take advantage of increased tourism, the walled city has retained its neighbourhood life. It continues to reflect the Fort People's economic aspirations, religious practices, and long-standing attachments to home."

In her presentation titled Income generation and inclusiveness in public spaces, Regional Director of HealthBridge **Debra Efroymson** states that the right of the poor to earn a living can be accommodated while increasing, not decreasing, the quality of life for other urban residents. She echoes some of Sri Lanka's current urban concerns by arguing that, 'Rather than banning vendors from public spaces, a sensible strategy would be to enforce regulations that enable them to earn a living while decreasing problems that may occur from their presence … The presence of vendors in a public space can also enhance enjoyment in a number of ways. The availability of food where fixed restaurants are lacking or unaffordable means that families can enjoy an extended outing; even the possibility of buying something as simple as peanuts, cassava chips, cut pineapple/mango, and a cup of tea can greatly enhance the pleasure of an outing.'

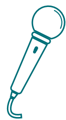
Efroymson underscores the many faceted importance of public space for the poor:

"Public spaces are particularly important for the low income families who do not have access to private and expensive recreational facilities. They also tend to blur the public and private realms, as still occurs in more traditional societies... Public space can, at different times and in different places, be of particular importance to certain groups. These often include children, who enjoy and learn from the opportunity to play freely outdoors with others and to interact with and observe people of all ages; young people, who find few places where they are welcome to congregate; and the elderly, who can suffer from great loneliness and isolation if they do not have a place to meet their peers."

There is increasing evidence of urban development creating physical enclosures that transfer public spaces to private ownership. Effroymson expresses her concern about the increasing privatisation of urban space:

"For large numbers of people to coexist peacefully in densely populated cities and to work together towards common goals, people need to mix freely with those different from themselves. This mixing can only happen successfully in free and freely accessible public spaces. Where vendors can sell goods and services in public spaces, poverty is reduced and the middle income can access a wide range of affordable goods and services without requiring extra travel. Additional measures are also needed to ensure that public spaces are welcoming to women and those with disabilities."

**Dr. Nalani Hennayake,** Professor of Geography at the University of Peradeniya, summed up the spirit of the discussion:



"One of the biggest problems in the entire development discourse is that it is classist: We never see the rich as a problem. We see only the poor as a problem. We don't see how the rich have become a problem and the consequences of that on the poor. There is a need to highlight this and present it to policymakers in a straightforward way."

Political and spatial legacies have complicated relationships. In fact, it was under an executive presidency and strong neo-liberal tendency that Sri Lanka saw one of most far-reaching rights-based housing programmes, the Million Houses Programme and an innovative planning approach in the Mahaweli Project. So the relationship between space and authority is very complicated. Prof. Nihal Perera continued to highlight how the same space (or project) viewed as failure by an official may well be successful from the inhabitants' and users' stand point, because it has been successfully appropriated and familiarised by them. So, social space has complicated relationships.

DR. NIHAL PERERA
MR. VIJAY NAGARAJ
DR. HARINI AMARASURIYA
DR. LOCANA GUNARATNA

MS. MANSI KUMARASIRI
PROF. SAMAN BANDARA

# Decision Making and Equity

Urban infrastructure embodies major economic interests and is at the heart of large flows of domestic and global capital. How do models of financing and policies of public provisioning, deregulation and privatisation impact on equity and accountability? How can we integrate equity and democratisation into urban infrastructure development?

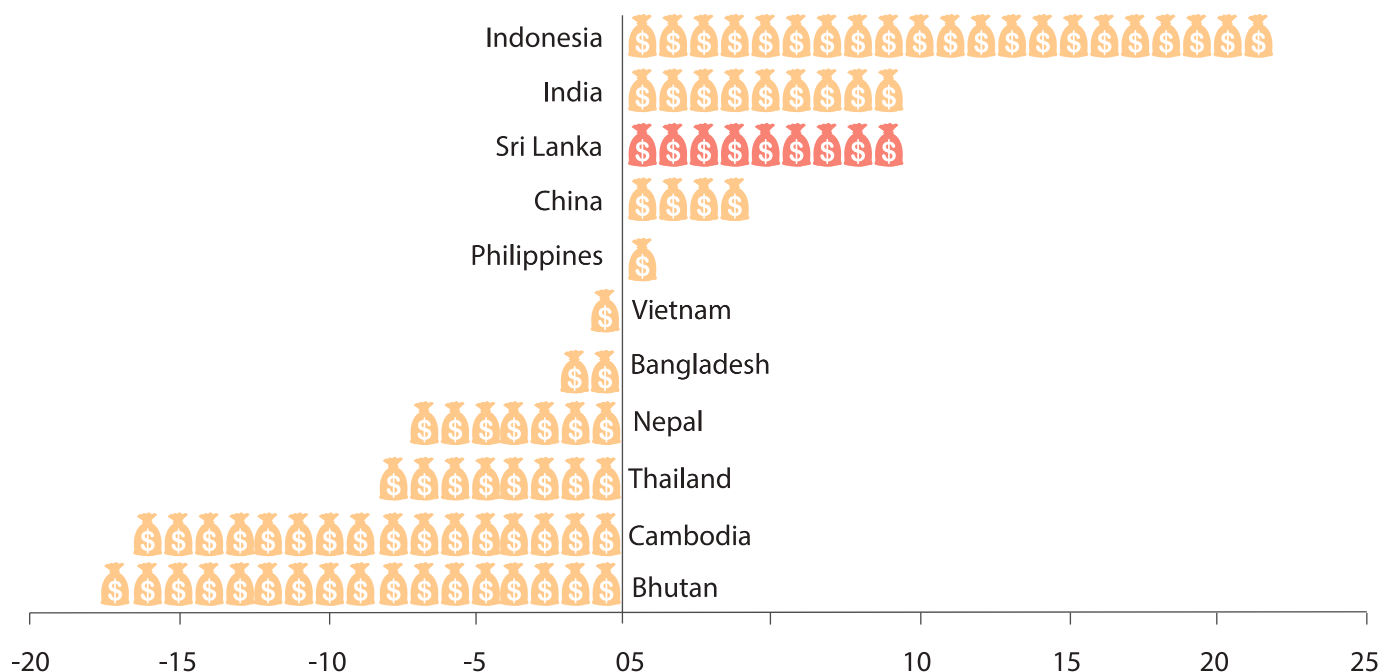
## Inclusive growth

Inclusive growth is a concept that is receiving more and more attention because of its potential to promote good governance and accountability and address social and political disparities. It was adopted by the ADB in 2008 as one of its top three development objectives, along with environmental sustainability and regional cooperation and integration.

**Joanne Asquith** of the Asian Development Bank's Independent Evaluation Department explained how the ADB defines and operationalises the concept:

"Inclusive growth is really a response to growing inequality worldwide. Asia has experienced some of the fastest economic growth rates in the world and a rapid decline in poverty has come with that, including in Sri Lanka. This has come with growing inequality. So, while Asia has become less poor, it has also become more unequal; it is not just income inequality, but also non-income inequality that is on the rise. Access to human development and education also remains unequal. So where does Sri Lanka stand in terms of its pathway towards best life quality? This chart shows those countries leaning towards equal distribution of income and those moving away. Sri Lanka is amongst the countries that have become more unequal. The baseline is 1995. Over the last twenty years Sri Lanka has become more unequal."

## Change in Income Inequality 1996 - 2004

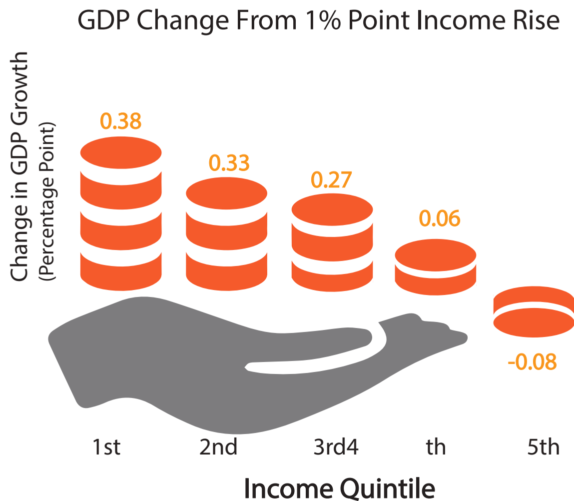



Source: Adapted from a powerpoint presentation made using data from Independent Evaluation Unit of ADB

Today, 750 million people live on less than US$ 1.25 a day and a significant proportion of people live just above this limit and very close to the poverty line, which makes them extremely vulnerable to falling back into poverty. "It is important to maximise safeguards and minimise vulnerability," says Asquith. In 2014, it was found that lower net inequality is associated with faster and more durable growth. The more equal a country, the more sustainable its growth is likely to be. This is important because the longer growth period allows for higher investment in human capital and health and education."

Asquith points to an inverse relationship between income share and economic growth. If income share of the bottom 20% is lifted by 1%, then the GDP growth increases. Conversely, if the income share of the rich is lifted by 1% point then the GDP decreases. So the rich getting richer has a negative impact on the future GDP growth. What this shows is that policies that promote greater equity are not incompatible with growth.

## Why Inequality Matters




Source of Data: Norris et al. 2015. Causes and Consequences of Income Inequality: A Global Perspective . IMF Staff Discussion Note

'Inclusive growth requires much better project diagnostics (a lot more research work to be done) and it needs close coordination with the government, and government policy,' concludes Asquith. 'ADB projects on their own can't deliver inclusive growth, only the government can. That's true for all projects. It also requires working closely with other development partners. In order for infrastructure to be inclusive there needs to be links with other donors. Social protection for instance is absolutely critical and it is not really covered by ADB even though it is a part of the ADB's definition of inclusive growth.'

In terms of social protection, Asquith offers the example of the Mexican and other Latin American governments introducing cash transfer programmes to reduce inequality, resulting in improved Gini Coefficients. Cash transfer programmes require the compliance of 'co-responsibilities' aimed to develop human capital and ensuring that poverty is not transferred to the next generation. 'There are indications,' says Asquith, 'of Asia under-investing in social protection. In Sri Lanka it takes the form of price control and price subsidies which are shown to not adequately benefit the poor. There is room for reforming Sri Lanka's social protection systems and the possibility of introducing very well-designed, well-targeted cash transfer programmes.'

## Making Growth More Inclusive

## Public investment and equity

Increasing pressure on existing infrastructure networks is forcing researchers, planners and policymakers to pay more attention to investments in public infrastructure, across a range of sectors. When the objective is inclusive growth and equity, identifying and prioritising public infrastructure service needs, the best financing options, and greater efficiency in the delivery of the services are highly relevant. The government has the primary responsibility of ensuring that infrastructure investment is in the best interests of the wider community.

**Dr. Lalithasiri Gunaruwan**, in his presentation Decision-making on public investment in infrastructure and equity concerns, concurred with Joanne Asquith:

"I think what she mentioned is important. Clearly! Inclusivity with growth is what is needed. If growth happens without inclusivity the whole purpose of development is lost. I am focusing mainly on project planning and implementation procedures in Sri Lanka. Whether infrastructure is being financed through ADB money, World Bank money or if it is a consolidated-fund financing infrastructure project, there are three dimensions which are equally important: Inclusivity by way of modal choice, inclusivity by way of the purpose of investment, and inclusivity by way of the method of financing and implementing a project."

Infrastructure necessitates public investment and it is the government's capital budget which will finance the projects that give rise to infrastructure, notes Gunaruwan:

"Public investment demands either taxation or debts. Either you directly tax the citizens of the country, collect money, and then finance your infrastructure projects or go for public debt; that again is taxes in the long run. So either taxes in the short run or taxes in the long run. That is what is going to finance the debts."

Gunaruwan cautions that the very same projects that are being promoted to fly the balloon of socio-economic development high can pull it down if the projects are not carefully planned and financed. This includes identifying and prioritising the appropriate infrastructure:

"Investment productivity should be a factor in the design and appraisal of projects. A choice should be made on the most appropriate modality of implementation and execution and the most favourable method of financing. This way we can try to ensure that we keep the balloon in the air and rising."

Transport gives mobility and mobility is needed for social inclusivity. If you read through the Journal of Advanced Transportation of January 2015 you will find a research paper on research conducted by the University of Colombo. The research outcome clearly demonstrates how social inclusivity was supported by the bus operations of the Sri Lanka Transport Board from 1958 to 1988. In Sri Lanka, we don't give credit to public transportation for social inclusivity and welfare levels of Sri Lanka, particularly the extraordinary welfare indices, HDI and PQLI. We generally give credit to free education and free health care but we rarely associate that to transportation. Our research econometrically proved that at times the bus services, the bus kilometers provided by the CTB, is a more significant factor for PQLI than some direct welfare provisions like health and education. This shows how inclusivity is provided by transportation.

Dr. Lalithasiri Gunaruwan
University of Colombo

Investments in transport infrastructure to support our mobility needs are often unwise. Gunaruwan demonstrates this by using the example of the government prioritising highways over the railway. He measures this in terms of the capacity of flow: a four-lane highway can carry a maximum of 500 passengers per minute, whereas a dual railway can carry a minimum of 1500, with longer trains having the capacity to carry 3000. In terms of the space usage, a two-lane one-way expressway would require at least 30m of land space whereas a dual carriage railway would only require 20m. This is a huge saving on land usage and acquisition; this causes minimal disturbance to communities and minimal displacement and relocation. In terms of capital cost, highways have been estimated to cost ten times as much as railways.

In terms of operational costs too, the railways offer a large capacity of mobility, states Gunaruwan. A fifty-seater bus requires 13 litres of diesel to operate 2000 passenger kms and a car with four passengers needs 50 litres of diesel to operate 2000 passenger kms. In contrast, a train would require less than 5 litres of diesel to carry 2000 passenger

kms. 'What does that mean?' asks Gunaruwan, 'If you go by equity, by economic sense or by the social norms you have to prioritise railway whether it is long distance or suburban connectivity. What happened in Sri Lanka is totally the opposite. The highways are being promoted and the railways are being neglected.' Failure to make the right choice leads to resource wastage. It also requires excessive capital investment. The issue of affordability comes into the picture. Investment in productivity is important to avoid unnecessary expenditure and to maximise and distribute its benefits.

## Democratising infrastructure

The argument presented by Dr. Gunaruwan provides a good base for the discussion of democratising infrastructure, says the former Executive Director of CEPA, **Priyanthi Fernando:**

"He talked about modal choice, productivity, and most importantly, about methods of financing. How equal or democratic are those means? How do we make the right choices? How do we ensure that there is less wastage, that there is more integrity? How do we, as citizens, engage with infrastructure investment?"

There must be more conversations about those who are disadvantaged due to infrastructure development, says Fernando. She emphasises the need to recognise that infrastructure is not neutral, that people are not homogenous, and there are competing interests among them. Thus, a democratic process employed for the development of urban transportation should include the people who are not car users:

"When we use the term inclusive growth, we are trying to expose some of the [non-inclusive] ways in which our government is making decisions. We are asking, how can we change that to benefit more people and not just for the benefit of few interests? This is related to Joanne Asquith's point that 'Policies that promote equality are compatible with growth.' Focusing on the choices within it, Fernando asks: 'Is the kind of growth we are pursuing compatible with promoting equality?' I think that's the question on the table, that's something that we will answer in different ways depending on our orientation and our political and economic training."

In conclusion, Fernando presented two key ideas: First, the participation of people is crucial for the democratisation of the infrastructure. However, for participation to happen there must be a lot more openness in regard to the information available on infrastructure investments. Second, if we are democratic in how we develop our infrastructure, we need to ask ourselves: 'whose needs are we addressing?'

Karin Fernando, Senior Research Professional at CEPA emphasised the need for citizens to monitor the development processes to ensure integrity and inclusivity:

"The big question is, 'Are we planning right? Are we thinking right? Is it really ok that we have sectoralised everything, saying this is our job and this is someone else's job?' Are there higher ideals like equality and wellbeing for all that should go into planning? And can we handle inequality in other ways than by looking at its relationship with 'growth'?"

## Towards an inclusive and equitable approach to planning urban development

Following a change of government in January 2015, Sri Lanka has a major project to develop a Megapolis covering the entire Western Province. In preparing this plan, the Transport Master Plan as well as the National Physical Plan – with a significant share in the urban planning process – is being revised. Yet, it is not clear how much experience the new approaches will utilise.

Despite the range of innovations made over the years to improve the living conditions of the urban poor, the state has not been able to sufficiently document and institutionalise good practices and learning within and across its various authorities. Moreover, research has fallen short of informing, changing, and enhancing practice. It could even be argued that current urban renewal efforts are not based on comprehensive and accurate information on the character of urban poverty and, indeed, does not adopt a rights-based or inclusive growth approach that would promote the holistic concept of the Right to the City.

The Chairman of the Urban Development Authority Ranjith Fernando stated that his presence at the symposium signalled the change that is taking place both in the government as well as in the UDA. He

sees this as a commitment to engaging in dialogue, a more participatory approach. Although the UDA Act compels the authority to engage in urban planning that is integrated, he concedes that very little of that has been done. Besides, the more recent gotabhisation of parts of the urban environment called for colossal institutional sacrifices:

"We have spent that money putting up structures with no estimation of the viability, durability and the sustainability of those projects. To convert the UDA towards a more sensitive organisation that consults and works for the public and for the poor is an enormous challenge. We are trying to cope with that. Trying to change to a people friendly democratic process and not ego projects or those of individual whims and fancies is a challenge. The people within the institution also are people used to taking orders. As they were in the Defense Ministry and defense predominated, they have got used to following orders. We had a system where people were moved out at gunpoint. Payment hawkers were given one hour to shift. Today the UDA has adopted the policy that we will never break a house and dislodge a person unless we can give alternative accommodation."

UDA's chairman **Ranjith Fernando** proceeded to give an example of how the UDA is trying to turn things around:

"We had a project to build over 400 houses in Borella, to be funded by the UDA, the houses were to be built by a private contractor and rented out to government servants, with the UDA collecting the rent to recover the money that we spent. The UDA has 10,000 tenants on its roll now, all over the country. You need an army of people to collect the monthly rent and many of them don't pay the rent. So in this backdrop we were poised to add another 400 to the lot. We stopped it, decided to get the banks involved. The banks are prepared to offer twenty-year loans to the people who buy the house, at the lowest interest possible. We persuaded them to gradually balloon the installments because government servants start off with a small salary but as they go on their salary increases considerably. We have also introduced insurance. It's a one-premium policy which we will add to the loan, which is called mortgage insurance and if the person dies during the prepayment of the loan, the full loan will be paid back by the insurance company, so that the family is free of debt. The banks are funding the project, we are only facilitating. This is one change we have made and we are going to repeat that process."

The UDA Chairman underscored the importance of creating innovative ways of working with the private sector and adopting a process of integrated planning, synchronising and coordinating with other sectors. The government, he believes, should be enabling and policing the projects, not implementing them.

Dr. Gunaruwan, however, saw a somewhat more restrained role for the private sector:

"I would rather position myself in the middle – in regard to the roles of the government and the private sector. I would not say that the state must do everything, particularly planning and implementation. On the other hand, I wouldn't go to the extreme in the other direction that the state is only playing a guiding role and letting the private sector do the implementation."

With respect to public transportation, **Dr. Lalithasiri Gunaruwan** believes that it has been a mistake that the state has not adequately intervened, particularly in the urban context:

"We have been letting the people decide how they would want to move. . . and whoever has money gets their private vehicles and come on the road. We can't stop private decision-making. On the other hand, look where we are today, spending a lot of money to build roads, which is not going to solve the problem. The more roads you build, the more vehicles come in. These are areas where the market fails. When you realise the market failures for heaven's sake, you intervene. That has to be democratic, scientific, and evidence-based. We have universities, research institutions, and professionals for that; let's get all these people, have a participatory effort, do the groundwork, and evaluate alternatives and intervene. There is no sin in intervening. Had we intervened properly 12 to15 years ago, we would have probably prevented the mess we are in today. When you look at mobility – our approach has been to run behind the demand and try to supply. We have not thought of managing the transportation demand; integrated human settlement planning can result in taking care of a significant percentage of transport demand."

The Chairman of the Urban Development Authority is trying very hard and succeeding in his attempts to make the UDA a learning institution,' says **Susil Sirivardana:**

"For an institution to learn it has to be ready to unlearn. It has to be ready to relearn from the people, which he said he was doing in a formal way, and it has to be ready to act on the basis of the learning. Having completed that experience with several colleagues, including several who are seated here Mr. Disa Weerapana, Dr. Gunaratne, in the NHDA from 1978 to 1993, I can say that being in a learning institution is fascinating, greatly challenging and an inspirational experience. We worked 7 days a week, almost 18 hours a day, but we never felt tired when we went home. Why? Because of the inspiration, dynamism and the brightness in the eyes of the people that we were interfacing with. That is development. That is the creativity of development. And that is the imagination that development workers have to cultivate."

Sirivardana concedes that the failure to learn is an intellectual failure in Sri Lanka that must be acknowledged:

"Sixty-seven years of independence, we have not yet realised our potential. I think the creative poor in Sri Lanka, the poor who are rich in Sri Lanka, intuitively feel that their so-called leaders across parties have let them down. We are responsible, as professionals. We have successfully calibrated a new set of standards for us to use in our day-to-day work. Whether it's for housing, transport, or climate change . . . the standards we have come up with at the symposium is an attempt to move from the simplistic to a higher level of consciousness. Meaning, more holistic, making them deeper and making them sharper. It is the duty of professionals and the institutions that produce professionals to develop the professionalism that will ask new questions, so that they will be able to digest the experiences, to learn primarily from their own successes."

It's important to address development and planning more as processes than as a product, says Nihal Perera. 'Instead of making a plan and sticking to it, it is much better to regularly update the plan according to the changing conditions and what the planner learns, like Priyani Navaratne who spent one year trying to figure things out. I think the problem of planning education in this country is that it produces plan-makers – plan-makers cannot plan. We need planners, i.e., reflective practitioners, who can think and change, think and change, think and change . . . Be at the job all the time, not plan and run. We need to pay attention to the ground, local communities and their specificities. Ideas that we borrow from other countries may have assumptions that may not actually work here.'

A broad issue that emerged in the discussions is the question of infrastructure of knowledge. We heard references to grounded knowledge but we also heard questions being raised as to who are the experts? For example, people have built many more houses and spaces than the state has ever done. So who are actually the experts? And how can powerful institutions that are state and non-state account to this reality? How can we avoid knowledge orthodoxies? Of falling into dominant or outmoded theories, concepts and categories?

The discussions also highlighted some specific questions that need to be addressed: Spatial planning is a primary responsibility of the state. How should this responsibility actually be determined? How do we ensure that the state's responsibility for planning is not translated into dominance or over determination?

How can community-driven and organic development complement or be integrated into state driven approaches? There is obviously a tension there. When and how should the state act as an enabler for the market? What does this enabling role to facilitate the private, non-state initiatives actually look like? To extend it a bit further, how can the dominance of private and market interests be avoided and counteracted? What is the role of the private sector? How can we redefine its responsibilities? We are talking about redefining the responsibility of the state but what about the responsibility of the private sector – sharing of benefits and profits so on and so forth? How do we ensure institutional memory is built and leveraged to promote doing based on learning? This issue has come up throughout.

We talk about Sri Lanka having a wealth of experience internally, but why is it that we are not learning from both successes and failures? How can we ensure meaningful collaboration and linkages between state agencies, researchers, academics, planning professionals and others concerned?

How can we change our practice based on this? How do we align the state and the market in the broader economic and ecological interest?

And finally, in the context of post-war Sri Lanka, it would be appropriate to recall the plea made by architectural historian Anoma Pieris to consider 'architectures of humility'. To move from architectures and designs of triumphalism to architectures and infrastructures of humility. How can we do that? How can we link it to the broader nation-building context?

Mr. Vijay Nagaraj
Senior Research Professional,
CEPA

# Future Directions

**The main objective of this symposium was to generate a discussion and make recommendations on what we should focus on next, as researchers, policymakers, and practitioners, to achieve an inclusive and equitable approach to urban development. Dr. Vagisha Gunasekara reflects on and synthesises the two days of the symposium, particularly examining the conceptual aspects and providing a basis for practical interventions.**

Post-war Sri Lanka has witnessed two distinct patterns of infrastructure development. One is the unprecedented levels of investment in expressways, roads, bridges, airports, ports, and other mega infrastructure. The other stresses on urban development, especially in Colombo, to render the city a business, investment and tourism hub, with an emphasis on beautification. Mansi Kumarasiri established very early that we are not here to negate the benefits of infrastructure. Rather, this symposium has been about understanding infrastructure beyond its physicality.

Conceptually, the proceedings have attempted to challenge the mainstream thinking on infrastructure which simply talks about structures, services and facilities that enable the core functions of a society. Mainly focused on urban development, many of the presentations have conveyed an alternative reading on infrastructure as constructions that are embedded in a larger political economy rife with uneven power and social relations. The speakers have made a compelling case that infrastructure has spatial and ecological implications and shapes access to entitlements. The mainstream approach, the one that we've had for a long time, tells us that we must carry on business as usual, perhaps in a more technocratic way. The alternative tackles the politics of infrastructure and urban development; the politics of divestment. These concerns have been viewed over three areas pertinent to urban centric infrastructure:

1. Housing rights of the urban poor
2. Urban transport and mobility, and
3. Urban commons, land, and public spaces

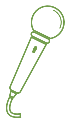
Prof. Lochana Gunarathne posed two very important questions at the beginning of his keynote address: Is the urbanisation process inexorable? If it is, can the process economically and socially benefit those in the margins of society?

Dr. Nihal Perera's address put the first question in the context of the relationship between the global political economy, regional geopolitics and national processes of urban development. What we see is, while economic processes were rapidly globalising and cities were trying to carve out their niche within the emerging new divisions of labour of production and of consumption, political transformations – pursued by policymakers of all ideological stripes and colors – were initiated in an attempt to align local dynamics with the imagined, assumed, or real requirements of a deregulated international economic system, whose political elites were vigorously pursuing a neoliberal dogma.

Heralded by some as the harbinger of a new era of potential prosperity and vilified by others as the source of enduring restructuring and accentuated social polarisation and marginalisation, the urban arena became a key space in which political-economic and social changes were enacted. The urban development policies and practices, developing in parallel with the new neoliberal economic policy, squarely revolved around re-centering the city. Old forms and functions, traditional political and organisational configurations, had to give way to a new urbanity, a visionary urbanity that would stand the tests imposed by a global and presumably liberal world order.

Repositioning the city on the map of the competitive landscape meant reimagining and recreating urban space, primarily for the outsider, the investor, developer, businesswoman or –man, or the money-packed tourist.

I think the speakers have articulated very well that large-scale urban development projects have become one of the most visible and ubiquitous urban revitalisation strategies pursued by city elites in search of economic growth and competitiveness. But, what we would have liked to see more debate on is something that surfaced from Dr. Chandrasiri Niriella's presentation which was on the emerging relationship between the state, market and social classes in Colombo following the post-1977 reforms. Which is, to think about the kind of politics, political institutions and regimes that current thinking on urban development gives rise to. By urging us to pay attention to the path of dependency of post-1977 economic reform, he insisted that it is exactly this sort of urban policy that actively produces, enacts, embodies, and shapes the new political and economic regimes that are operative at local, regional, national, and global scales. These projects are the material expression of a developmental logic and politics that views megaprojects and place-marketing as means for generating future growth and for waging a competitive struggle to attract investment capital.



Urban projects of this kind are, therefore, not the mere result, response, or consequence of political and economic change choreographed elsewhere. On the contrary, he argued that urban development projects can be the very catalysts of urban and political change.

It is such concrete interventions that express and shape transformations in spatial political and economic configurations. They illustrate the actual concrete process through which postmodern forms, post-Fordist economic dynamics, and neoliberal systems of governance are crafted and through which a new articulation of regulatory and governmental scales is produced.

In other words, the kind of urban development policies, practices and politics around it that we saw when the previous regime was in power are now are legacies of post-1977 policy reforms. Mr. Pradeep Dissanayake's presentation on Gotabhisation started a debate about whether there is a sole orchestrator of a particular model of urban development, or whether they are agents of the

political economy riding the rising tide. Though one could argue whether we could really brand Colombo's post-war urban development as Gotabhisation, when Mr. Rajapaksa and others of the regime adopted a model executed and thought out by the late Lee Kuan Yu of Singapore, that's beside the point. Dr. Niriella's presentation showed us how an entire ecosystem of agents that entered the economic and political arena in the aftermath of the post-1977 reforms, like construction companies, real estate companies, building manufacturing suppliers, and banks have come together to cater to the middle and upper-income groups for private housing colonies, pushing low-income groups out of the areas that they deem valuable.

Characteristic of this ecosystem is the symbiotic relationship between these commercial actors and the people they fund – the politicians, policymakers, who in turn enact and implement urban development policies in favour of a few corporate interests. Prof. Geetham Tiwari's presentation on why we should rethink policies such as implementing urban metro systems spoke to this argument and nudged us, with evidence, that developments such as metro systems rarely have the urban poor at its heart.

The political culture as we know it has many revolving doors between elite corporate interests and elite political interests that are currently shaping our preferences about infrastructure and deceiving us that this is what we want, and that the appalling experiences of the urban poor are a small price to pay for growth, and in time, when prosperity befalls our nation, that all these 'small' problems will disappear. This gradual evolution of the political culture has obviously made the 'haves' more equal before the law and the state than the 'have-nots', and has led to what Mr. Susil Sirivardana said in the morning: 'the poor don't have rights to have rights anymore.'

In light of this argument,

should we not instigate debate on the kind of politics that current vision and processes of urban development will shape, ten to twenty years from now? What does this mean for the future of democratic processes and institutions in Sri Lanka?

This brings me to the argument that Dr. Harini Amarasuriya made in her intervention yesterday. Which is, to carefully think about nation-building through urban development in this post-war era, not in the nationalistic sense when we constructed Sri Jayawardenepura Kotte, but in an inclusive process that facilitates reconciliation among and within communities and one that has transitional justice at its core. If this is what we aspire to do, then we need much more debate on infrastructure priorities, not only in urban centers, but also in the rest of the country, where the majority of our population lives. What this means is that the policies and process of urban infrastructure development should be embedded in a larger political discussion and activism leading towards state reform, that we have failed to do many times in history.

And the approach we may want to take might well be what Dr. Nihal Perera proposes – grounded knowledge – but we have to be careful about the hierarchies in knowledge that such an approach will invariably produce, reflecting uneven economic, social and political power of individuals depending on their gender, ethnicity, class and caste.

Prof. Gunaratne called for a re-adjusting of the old colonial spatial structure and the embedded economic processes within it. What does this re-adjusting look like? In light of the recent budget speech, it seems like the state will continue to be a political vanguard for neoliberal agendas and our infrastructure priorities will be shaped by it, and vice versa. Can this facilitate the much-needed re-adjustment that we are calling for? I think Dr. Perera's question – "Can we expect the same model(s) that exclude ordinary people to facilitate inclusion?" – is quite pertinent here and something that should initiate public debate, because this is the very essence of the kind of democracy that we will see a few years from now.

As a researcher, I think that the kind of research and evidence that we should produce is the kind that allows us to understand social reproduction through spatial/infrastructure realities. We need to better understand how the processes of infrastructure development coupled with market forces are reconstructing people's identity, livelihoods and ways of life, and thereby the kind of state-society relations we have.

Dr. Vagisha Gunasekara
Senior Research Professional,
CEPA

World-class urban infrastructure is widely seen as a key driver of economic growth. The emphasis on infrastructure development is also justified in relation to enhancing access to basic services and improving the quality of life of the rapidly growing global urban population. However, positive and universal social development outcomes don't always flow automatically from world-class infrastructure. This is particularly true with respect to the urban working class and the poor who are often on the margins of policy-making and are in such a state of economic and spatial precariousness that infrastructure development can in fact have adverse consequences for them.

Given Sri Lanka's recent policy history, especially the post-war emphasis on urban-centric mega-infrastructure-led development and the ongoing processes of urban transformation and urbanisation in general, CEPA's 14th Annual Symposium in 2015 focused on the challenges of realising equitable, democratic and inclusive urban infrastructure development in Sri Lanka.

"Re-Imagining Infrastructure and Urban Development", was an interactive forum – a dialogue – with equal weight given to the presentations and the discussions that followed. It was also a platform for practitioners, policy makers, and researchers to engage with each other. This publication, structured differently to the traditional symposium proceedings captures the highlights of the presentations and the thematic discussions. The chapters are built on presentations made by experts, audience comments, and the subsequent discussions. It also includes supplementary information and presentation material. The publication examines three key areas: Making Space for Equitable Urban Growth, Housing Rights of the Urban Poor, and Urban Transport and Mobility from the point of view of ensuring equity and accountability and democratising urban governance and planning.

29 R.G. Senanayake Mawatha
(formerly Gregory's Road)
Colombo 7
www.cepa.lk

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