

## **Decentralization of Power and Its Impact on Regional Development and Rural Development in Sri Lanka: A Case Study of Sabaragamuwa Provincial Council**

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Since the independence Sri Lanka has been concentrated on decentralization of power with different intentions. Particularly, as a solution to the ethnic conflict, ensure the public participation at the local level, and promote regional development and rural development. Provincial Council System (PCS) was set up with these intentions in 1988 under the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the 1978 Constitution of Sri Lanka, and powers were decentralized to provincial councils, and thereby it was expected regional development and rural development. However, the expectation was not attained due to certain reasons in general, Sabaragamuwa province in particularly. Therefore, the study focused to explore the role played by the Sabaragamuwa Provincial Council (SPC) in terms of regional development and rural development. In line with this, following are the specific objectives; to identify the regional development and rural development disparities within the Sabaragamuwa province and to analysis the different problems and challenges faced by SPC while implementing the regional development and rural development policies. The study was based on both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The Qualitative and quantitative data were gathered by using primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected through structured questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussion and observation. The study sample was consisted of 100 respondents. Beside that content analysis was employed to gather secondary data such as published books, research reports, symposia proceedings, journal and newspaper articles and internet. To analyse quantitative data statistical method was used with SPSS. The discourse analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data, and they were presented using texts, tables, chats and figures. The study found that absence of systematic decentralization mechanism has made huge regional development and ruler development disparity in Sabaragamuwa province. Imbalanced development, disparity in resource allocation, unavailability of effective and efficient service providers, asymmetrical priority in development and severe financial crisis became a significant factor for continuation of regional development and ruler development disparity in Sabaragamuwa province. Additionally, lack of powers of SPC, financial inadequacy, limited revenue sources, high degree of central government interference in making decision on development, lack of institutional capacity, top-down regional development and limited resource allocation are also significant barriers to attain regional development and rural development goals of Sabaragamuwa province. For the improvement of regional development and ruler development goals of Sabaragamuwa province, the study recommends provide enough power for SPC, decrease central government interference in making decision on development, introduce new revenue sources, improve the institutional capacity, mobilizing public to participate in development activities, introduce systematic mechanism to equal resource allocation in the area and find out alternative service providers.

**Keywords:** *Decentralization, Public Participation, Regional Development*