
Impacts on Natural Resources in the Southern Coastal Area of Sri Lanka after 1980s

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Coastal areas are abundant in natural resources that are important economically, socially and environmentally. The area consists a very high biodiversity such as fish, mangroves, seagrass, water and coral reefs. However, rapid population growth and its associated development over recent decades have led to severe loss and degradation of these important habitats in the coastal area. The main objective of the study is to examine the impacts on natural resources in the Southern coastal area. Specie objectives are to examine the quantity and scale of the impacts on above natural resources. Research was done in 2015 and a structured questionnaire used for primary data collection, using random sampling and also field observation method was used. 2154 respondents were interviewed. Findings disclose that large amount of fish resources has been caught from the coastal sea by the fishermen for a long period. Correlation coefficient values represent positive relationship between the increase of fish production and increase of active fishermen in Matara and Galle District coastal areas ($R^2 = 0.87$ and $R^2 = 0.53$ respectively). Hikkaduwa, Rumassala, Weligama and Polhena reef areas live coral cover was reduced from 1985 to 2015 period by different percentages (30% - 70% range). Galduwa, Mahamodara kalapuwa and Polwatumodara River mouth area mangrove cover also decreased through the last few decades especially from 1994 to 2017 period, (-49.43, -57.65 and -34.83 respectively). Seagrass degraded due to destructive fishing practices (20.9%), used to catch fish (29%) and solid waste (10.9%). According to the distance from the sea (>100m), different pollutants dumped into the sea (pastic 39.1% and solid waste 22.3%). Correlation of distance to sea and different pollutants dumping by distance revealed the positive relationship between each pollutant dumping situation and the distance to the sea in which pollutants were dumped highly within the low distance area. The coastal resources of Sri Lanka are declining and degrading due to a combination of rapid population growth, urbanization, coastal developments, overfishing and destructive fishing methods. Such declines have increased poverty among coastal fishermen's who are directly affected by changes in demography and development in the coasts.

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