



The Socio-economic Development Efforts in the Post-war Northern Sri Lanka: A Review of the Secondary Data

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Abstract

In the fourteen years since the end of the war, the Northern province of Sri Lanka has made some progress toward post-war recovery. In the absence of a comprehensive post-war need assessment and strategic development plan for the province, this research intends to answer the question of to what extent the socio-economic development investments made by the government and international development partners impacted improving the socio-economic indicators of the Northern province. It is hoped that the paper will contribute to developing strategies for post-war development planning by summarizing the post-war socio-economic development achievements of Northern Sri Lanka. The economic development of Northern Sri Lanka in the post-war context is relatively slow due to the lack of productive infrastructure facilities, new technologies/skills, and poor marketing networks. Make sure the deployment of sufficient number of teachers and the human capital development is critical to improve the quality of education. The absence of men has forced women to take a more significant share of the domestic and income generation burden. It is important to empower the women with adequate educational opportunities, psychological support, social safety nets through which enable them to engage in sustainable local economic development initiatives. The investment made for health sector development for a region recovering from the devastations of the post-war is not adequate. Whilst the province made some progress in socio-economic development in the post-war era, the socio-economic conditions of Northern Sri Lanka need significant improvement to be on par with the national and international socio-economic benchmarks.

Keywords: Northern province, Post-War, Sri Lanka, Socio-economic development

Introduction

The Northern province is one of the nine Sri Lankan provinces with its unique history. The geographical area identified as the Northern province constitutes the “Jaffna Kingdom” of the pre-colonial era and the “Vanniyar Chieftains”. Subsequently, the region was ruled by the Portuguese, Dutch, and British, up until the independence of Sri Lanka in 1948. In 1987, as per the Indo-Lanka Accords, the northern and eastern provinces were managed as a single province. However, following the landmark judgment of the supreme court of Sri Lanka in 2006 the North- East province was de-merged as northern and eastern provinces.

The Northern province is 35 Km away from South India. Palk Bay surrounds the province with the Gulf of Mannar, Palk Strait, and the Bay of Bengal and borders the North central province and Eastern province. The total area of the Northern province is 8,983.59 sq. km, which is 13.6 % of the country's geographical area. The province has a 415.15 sq. km inland water cover. There are five administrative districts in the province such as Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu, Vavuniya, and Mannar. The total population of the Northern province is 1,249,740 which is 5.51 % of the country's population and the compound population growth rate of the province is 1.02 percent. The population density of the province is 136 people per sq. km which is the lowest in the country (Chief Secretary, 2018).

In the fourteen years since the end of the war, the Northern province of Sri Lanka has made some progress toward post-war recovery. However, there is a long way to go in building the province back better. In the absence of a comprehensive post-war need assessment and strategic development plan for the province, it is important to assess the development achievements in the post-war context.

The research intends to answer the question of to what extent the socio-economic development investments made by the government and international development partners impacted improving the socio-economic indicators of the Northern province. This paper focuses on analyzing the published and unpublished socio-economic data. A review of the secondary data would give an overview of the socio-economic situation of the province in the post war context.

Even though the war came to an end in 2009 in Sri Lanka, the root causes of the conflict is not being addressed yet. “The long history of casteism and its role in denying Panchamar ownership of land; the protracted ethnic conflict accompanied by heavy militarization by the Sri Lankan state; the state’s attempts to give a Sinhala-Buddhist character to the territories in the North under the pretext of archaeological research; the multiple displacements suffered by the Tamil and Muslim communities during the war; and finally the land grabs done in the guise of preserving the ecosystem and development”(Mahendran, 2022).

In May 2009, following the war's end, the subsequent process of resettlement of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) was carried out in the districts of the Northern Province. Most of the IDPs have lost all their assets including livelihood, implements and equipment and return to their places of origin where basic infrastructure, public utilities, and public and community institutions have been destroyed. To ensure that these communities move towards self-reliance, the government of Sri Lanka and the country's international development partners provide for the immediate humanitarian needs of these resettled communities and long-term sustainable development support, thereafter (World Bank, 2018). The inadequate infrastructure and infrastructure services severely impeded the economic development in many parts of the North, which have either been destroyed or damaged in the war or fallen to neglect on account of the protracted conflict and consequent development lag over the past several decades.

Declines in the industry sector were due to damaged infrastructure, lost equipment, disruption to service delivery and production, the displacement of labor, and poor access to markets. While figures vary, some estimates indicate that around 752 industries were active in the Northern Province prior to the war (World Bank, 2018).

The scarcity of access roads in key areas, severely limits communities' access to public services like health and education and markets beyond their immediate vicinity. Similarly, farmers without access to water are limited to harvesting only during the rainy seasons. Likewise, the dearth of proper storage facilities leaves crops susceptible to weather conditions, pests, and rodents. The lack of adequate irrigation and storage facilities compels farmers to sell their crops solely at harvest time when markets are already over-supplied, and consequently settle for relatively lower profit margins. This has happened in Mullaitivu District and brought to the attention of the district coordination committee.

The overall impact of these infrastructure challenges is that it limits the efficiency and profitability of the already limited livelihood options available to returnee communities. Therefore, support for agriculture and fisheries-based livelihood needs to be complemented through the rehabilitation of related infrastructure to ensure that communities that are engaged in these sectors are also able to access the necessary water systems, road networks, storage facilities, and markets to maintain and increase production and income levels.

While the war-affected districts of the province have benefited from relief and recovery assistance, these communities have much further to go in sustaining viable income-generating activities that are independent of external assistance. They face challenges in moving towards this end, owing to the dearth of knowledge and skills, infrastructure facilities, finance and business development services and market linkages. Persons and groups with pre-existing vulnerabilities, including women, youth, the elderly,

people with disabilities and special needs, and the economically poor, are more disadvantaged than others, when striving to improve their socio-economic well-being.

Between 2009 and 2022, in the Northern province, the Government of Sri Lanka, together with the international community, exerted much effort to uplift the socio-economic condition of the North. There has been some investment in infrastructure rehabilitation in the Northern Province, particularly in the transportation, irrigation, agriculture, energy, and rural and urban infrastructure sectors.

It is very important to evaluate how far these investments improved the province's socio-economic indicators. The research intends to answer the question of to what extent the socio-economic development investments made by the government and international development partners impacted improving the socio-economic indicators of the Northern province. The overall objective of this study is to understand how far the socio-economic development efforts in the post war Northern Sri Lanka impacted on improving the socio-economic indicators of the Northern Province through a review of the secondary data. The specific objective is to contribute to the development of strategies for post-war development planning and implementation.

This research fully relied on the secondary data related to economic recovery , health, women issues, education and level of poverty to get an initial understanding on the socioeconomic status of the war affected Northern province . However it is important to do a detailed socio economic impact analysis based on the primary and secondary data. This is a critical limitation of this study, it is hoped the future researches will focus on this area of study.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reports the literature review on post-war socio-economic development; Section 3 reports the research methods used in this study; Section 4 presents the broader socio-economic development progress of Northern Sri Lanka and the subsections of Section 4 cover the economic growth, health, women's issues, education and level of poverty. Finally, the conclusion and recommendations are provided in Section 5.

Literature review

The past war Socio-Economic assessments are carried out in the war-affected countries to gain a better understanding of the social and economic conditions and dynamics. Economic indicators like economic growth, contribution to the national economy and level of poverty played a critical role in understanding the local economic conditions of the war-affected regions. It has been noted in addition to the economic indicators special attention is paid to measuring the health condition, the status of vulnerable communities like women-headed families, education and human capital development. There are some post-conflict related studies focused on security, reconciliation, and governance as well. (Andrew,2005; Earnest,2012; Leonard, 2009 and UNDP, 2008).

“Noting Sri Lanka’s statement at the 49th Session of the Human Rights Council, the country remains engaged in advancing progress in ‘post-conflict recovery and healing’ including through ‘reconciliation, accountability, and social justice’” (United Nations, 2022). The country’s national and local development objectives are hampered by the legacies of mistrust between and across communities on account of the war, and the still few opportunities for Sri Lankans to interact with each other across identity and geographic divides.

There are some sectoral assessments carried out in the Northern Province in the post-war context mainly on economic development and assessment carried out on the key bottlenecks for private sector investments in the Northern Province in the agriculture and fisheries sector (World Bank, 2018; ILO, 2020). In the absence of a comprehensive post-war need assessment and strategic development plan for the province, it is important to assess the development achievements in the post-war context. There has been significant growth in methods and tools that can enhance understanding of post-war development achievements.

The year 1977 was a critical event in the economic history of Sri Lanka, where the country began its economic liberalization program. The introduction of open economic policy enabled the environment to open imports and exports, foreign investments, promotion of private sector and special attention was paid on the export-based growth strategies (Gamage, 2009). Some forms of discrimination, including education, political representation, economy, and ideological grievances, triggered the formulation of Tamil rebel groups in the 1970s and 1980s. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has emerged as a prominent Tamil rebel group. There were four phases of war between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the Government of Sri Lanka (1983-1987; 1990-1994; 1995-2001, and 2006-2009). Three key attempts of the peace process failed in 1987-1990, 1994-1995 and 2001-2006 (De Mel and Venugopal, 2016).

LTTE controlled around 75 percent of the territories of the Northern and Eastern Provinces, and they had their civil administration and system of the rule of law, including the justice system and police force. However, the central government and provincial councils also had their administration in the LTTE-controlled areas (Mampily, 2011). The last three decades of conflict has seriously damaged and disrupted the society and the economic development of the country. The impact has been more pronounced in the North and Eastern provinces of the country particularly in the Northern Province where the final battle was fought during the course of the history; Northern Province has experienced multiple waves of displacements and settlements until the end of the war in 2009.

Significant damages caused to infrastructure due to the war in the country, it has been estimated that 1,958.6 km of provincial roads, and 7,600 km of rural roads were adversely damaged in the Northern province. In the months after the war in 2009 it has

been reported that the education investments were extensively damaged and there was a shortage of teachers around 1650 in the government schools of the Northern province. (Provincial Planning Secretariat, 2009). The multiple waves of displacements seriously disturbed the education in the Northern province. It has been reported that maternal mortality rates and infant mortality rates of the Northern province are relatively higher than the post war period (Johnson, 2017).

According to the World bank Sri Lanka has made significant progress on post-war socio-economic development. The human development indicators of Sri Lanka supersede several lower middle-income countries around the world.

However, the regional disparities within the country is a widespread concern, and progress of the war affected North and East provinces is not adequate (World Bank, 2016). Inequality is high in the country. The wealthiest 20 percent enjoy more than half of aggregate household income, while the poorest 20 percent only have 5 percent. High rates of poverty and vulnerability persist in the North, East, and Uva Provinces (IPS, 2018).

Research Methodology

The secondary data played a critical role in this study, the periodic changes in the socio-economic data are carefully reviewed to determine the progress of post-war socio-economic development. Reliable published documents are reviewed to collect the data, most of the documents reviewed are published by government institutions and international organizations.

Using the published data of the reliable organization is a strength which provides an objective measure of the development process. Since the research was not involved in the primary data collection, the reflections and opinions of the citizens and other development stakeholders are not captured in the study which is a significant limitation of the study. Considering the cost and time to undertake the primary data collection, it has been decided to proceed with the secondary data review. This research mainly focuses on analyzing quantitative data published by the government of Sri Lanka and other international organizations like the World Bank and UN agencies on aspects of the socio-economic development climate of the post-war Northern Province. The changes in the socio-economic indicators from 2010 (The war ended in May 2009) to the recent past are critically reviewed to validate the improvement or decline based on the quantitative data.

The percentage of provincial GDP share, poverty headcount index, multidimensional poverty index, distribution of ICU facilities by province, infant mortality rate, under-5 mortality rates, number of women-headed families, student's performance of General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level (G.C.E O/L) examination, student's performance of General Certificate of Education Advanced Level (G.C.E A/L) exam are the critical socio-economic indicators used for the study.

Socio economic development

The Northern province's local economy is quite diverse in relation to the varied natural and human resources available in the province (World Bank, 2018). Traditionally, agriculture, fisheries, and small industry sectors were the primary economic activity of the province. The agriculture and fisheries sectors have tremendous potential in the Northern province and made a meaningful contribution to the national economy before the civil conflict.

The establishment of high-security zones, inadequate infrastructures, narrowly limited marketing opportunities, and the enforced financial ban on the area badly affected the province's economic development. Multiple displacements, destruction of infrastructure, and lack of options for the service sector significantly impacted the economic development of the province. The economic impact of the armed conflict in the Northern province should not be underestimated (World Bank, 2018).

While the war-affected Northern province has benefited from relief, recovery, and development assistance from the government of Sri Lanka and international organizations, the province has still yet to further forge ahead in sustaining viable economic activities independent of external assistance. It faces numerous challenges in moving forward towards this goal, owing to the dearth of knowledge and skills, infrastructure facilities, finance and business development services and market linkages. Persons and groups with pre-existing vulnerabilities are attempting to improve their socio-economic well-being. Since the end of the war, the government of Sri Lanka and their development partners have undertaken recovery efforts aimed at addressing the urgent needs of Internally Displaced Persons, and improving basic economic infrastructure; especially in terms of the movement of goods and the strengthening of local economies (UNDP and UNOPS, 2010). The development policy framework of the central government of Sri Lanka and the Northern Provincial Council of Sri Lanka endeavored to reposition the province towards enhanced economic growth and promotion of economic opportunities.

Economic growth

Soon after the armed conflict in 2009, the Northern Province appeared to demonstrate fast-track economic growth. However, economic growth has been insignificant in recent years. The contribution of the Northern province to the national economy is very minimal.

The provincial GDP growth of the province was impressive between 2013 and 2016. The provincial growth rate during this period was much faster than the country's economic growth. However, it was drastically reduced in 2017 (ILO, 2020). The Industrial and service sectors have been growing in recent years. In recent years, the service sector is dominating, the service sector dominates the economy of the Northern

province.; The contribution of the service sector is 54.8 percent. The respective contributions of the industrial and agriculture sectors are 21.4 percent and 15.5 per cent (ILO, 2020). As summarized in table -1, the Northern Province contributed 3.4 per cent to the national GDP in 2010, immediately after the armed war conflict ended, and it is gradually increasing 4.8 per cent and 4.6 per cent in 2019 and 2020 respectively. Considering the natural resources available in the Northern province and the post-war recovery and development investment made in the province, the economic growth and the contribution of the Northern province to the national economy is not significant (Central Bank ,2010-2021).

It has been noted that several factors influence the slow economic development of the post-war Northern province. Many people are engaged in traditional livelihood activities, and are not productive due to a lack of required skills, knowledge, and competencies. Lack of economic infrastructures, technologies, access to market, and business development services further impede the province's productivity. Even though there is substantial investment made for infrastructure development, less attention is paid to productive infrastructure development. The development of micro, small and medium enterprises is not impressive due to the limited business development opportunities and lack of entrepreneurial skills (World Bank, 2018).

The development-oriented investments created some short-term employment and income generation opportunities. In the absence of long-run structural productivity infrastructure development and the productivity enhancement system, economic growth could be steadier. Inappropriate income generation assistance in the form of grants and loans to the vulnerable community in the province affects household finances management. Microfinance activities in the rural areas and leasing facilities in the province enabled the environment for the out-flow of rural income instead of reinvestment in the province.

Most of the post-war development projects in the Northern province are implemented through a piecemeal and reactive approach. There was no integrated approach in post-war development planning with a macroeconomic vision and overall coordination to avoid duplication and complementarity through a result- oriented approach (Central Bank, 2018). It has been noted that the development planning process of the province is not participatory and inclusive.

Health

The basic health facilities are being improved in the Northern province in the post-war backdrop. The basic health infrastructures developed, most hospitals are well equipped compared to the past, and the number of doctors, nurses and other health staff is gradually increasing. Intensive care unit (ICU) facilities in the province are improved compared to the past; the ICU beds / 100,000 people in Northern province is 2.7;

however, this ratio is less than the national ratio. ICU beds / 100,000 people in Sri Lanka are 3.8, it is summarized in table-2 (WHO, 2021).

Table 1: GDP share percentage of Northern Province

Year	GDP
2010	3.4
2011	3.7
2012	3.7
2013	3.5
2014	3.6
2015	3.5
2016	4.1
2017	4.1
2018	4.2
2019	4.8
2020	4.6

Source: Central Bank Reports 2010-2021

There is a significant improvement in the healthcare facilities in the Northern province. The Northern Province has one teaching hospital, four district general hospitals, 57 divisional hospitals, and 39 primary health care units which are fully functional. However, this is not adequate and needs improvement. There are several health professional vacancies to be filled and several health infrastructures should be developed (Chief Secretary, 2018).

Even though the health facilities in the province have improved considerably, the progress of the health indicators in the province is not impressive. The investment made for health sector development for a region recovering from the devastations of the post-war is not adequate. As illustrated in the figure-1, the infant mortality rate is a critical indicator to assess the level of healthcare service delivery.

In 2011, the infant mortality rate of the Northern province was 8.4 per 1,000 live births and in 2014 it was 8.8, whereas the national ratio 2014 was 7.6. The infant mortality rate of the province is always higher than the national average (DCS, 2020).

Table: 2 Distribution of ICU facilities by province

Province	Number of ICUs	ICU beds	ICU beds/100000 Population
Western	51	344	5.6
Central	21	103	3.7
Southern	17	127	4.8
Northern	07	30	2.7
Eastern	14	78	4.6
North Central	08	39	2.9
North Western	07	37	1.5
Uva	08	42	3.1
Sabaragamuwa	08	31	1.5
Total national	141	831	3.8

Source: Sri Lanka Health System Review- 2021, WHO

Under 5 mortality rates (deaths per 1000 live births) of the Northern province is 13.3, which is the highest in the country; all other provinces are less than the Northern Province. This indicates poor child healthcare service delivery in the province (WHO, 2021).

Women's Issues

The war has had a deeply differentiated impact on women, which has had significant implications for their livelihood, as well. The absence of men, many of whom were killed or detained following the conflict, has forced women to take a greater share of both the domestic and income generation burden. Many of the economic rehabilitation activities implemented in the north and the east have women at the center. It has been reported that over 40,000 females were widowed in the Northern province due to the war. These families have very limited economic means to support their loved ones (Rose, 2011).

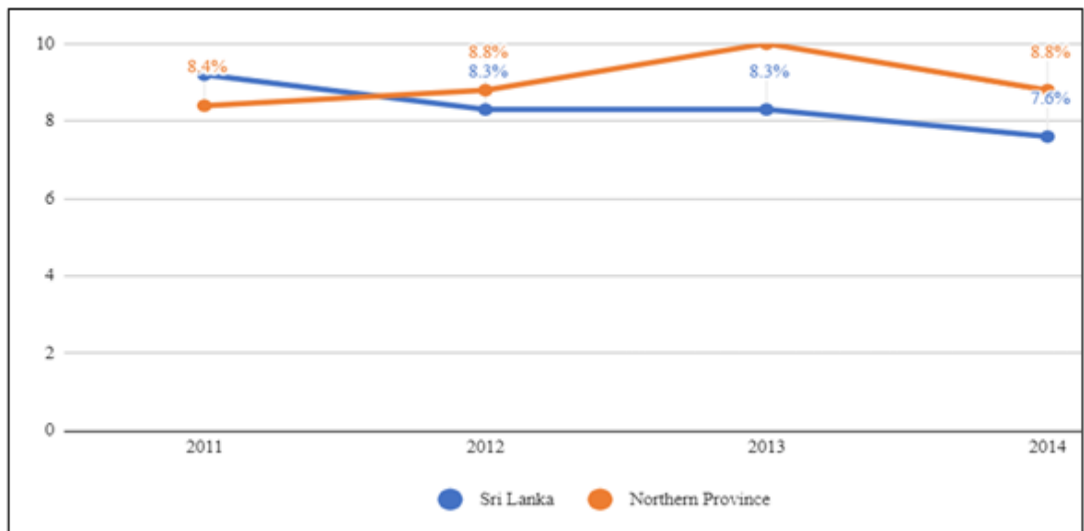


Figure 1- Infant Mortality Rate of Sri Lanka and Northern Province (Per 1,000 live births) Source; WHO, 2021

The absence of men in the situation has forced women to take a greater share of both the domestic and income generation obligations, so women empowerment needs to be much more focused (UNDP and UNOPS, 2010). There exists a large number of women-headed families in the Northern province. Most of these families are relatively vulnerable (UNFPA 2015). Minimal attention was paid to addressing the specific needs of the war-affected women in the Northern province. It has been reported that vulnerable women in the province face gender-based violence. Empower the women with adequate educational opportunities, psychological support, social safety nets through which enable them to engage in sustainable local economic development initiatives. The number and percentage of women-headed families of the Northern Province is summarized in the table-3.

Education

In the Northern province, the armed conflict adversely affected both the remaining reserves of human capital and additions to that capital through the education system. First, it reduced the stock of those with formal education and productive skills due to injury, death, and migration. While the conflict has induced some professional skills among combatants, whereby they lost some of their previously acquired professional skills during years spent fighting. Second, it affects the conditions of human capital formation through reduced access to education and training. Northern society places a high value on education. Viewed through the prism of culture, education is viewed not only as a means for acquiring skills but also as cultural capital. This

preoccupation is also reflected in the level of interest families demonstrate in ensuring their children's attendance at school (UNDP and UNOPS, 2010).

Table 3-Number of Women Headed Families

District / Country	Total number of families	Women headed families	%
Jaffna	139,078	32,755	23.6
Mannar	22,743	4,561	20.1
Vavuniya	41,961	9,723	23.2
Mullaitivu	24,740	5,333	21.2
Kilinochchi	27,511	5,749	20.9

Source: UNFPA 2015

The main concerns in the post-war setting are the restoring education infrastructure, securing of the necessary equipment, and regularizing education service delivery. Significant attention is paid to the education infrastructure development and provision of necessary equipment.

The number of functional schools in the Northern province is 1,080, it was 1,009 earlier (Chief Secretary's Secretariat, 2018). Government schools have 17,189 teachers enrolled. The total number of students in the government schools in the province is 255,725 and the students' school attendance rate is 73% (Chief Secretary's Secretariat, 2018).

Even though the education facilities in the Northern province have significantly increased, the students' performance in the ordinary level (O/L) and advanced level (A/L) have not improved significantly. As indicated in table-4, the percentage of students qualified to study advanced level as per the ordinary level exam result in 2010 in the Northern province is 56.93 % and in 2019 it was 67.74 %, which is 73.84 % countrywide. The student's performance in the Northern province in the ordinary level exam is below the national average from the year 2010- 2019 (Department of Examination,2020).

The percentage of students who passed in all three subjects at the GCE advanced level examination in 2012, in the Northern province is 62.84 at present and in 2020 which is 64. 60 presents which are illustrated in figure 2.

Table 4: Result analysis of G.C.E (O.L) Exam- Year 2010-2019

Year	Northern Province			Sri Lanka		
	No. of students sat for exam	No. of students qualified for AL	% of qualified students for AL	No. of students sat for exam	No. of students qualified for AL	% of qualified students for AL
2010	16435	9357	56.93	271644	164512	60.57
2011	18021	9778	54.26	270032	164191	60.8
2012	15720	9430	59.99	268995	174160	64.74
2013	15280	9982	65.33	264772	176534	66.67
2014	15266	9800	64.19	257322	177612	69.02
2015	17752	10719	60.38	273224	189428	69.33
2016	17413	10562	60.66	286251	200208	69.94
2017	17999	11901	66.12	296812	216815	73.05
2018	16659	11660	69.99	296029	222281	75.09
2019	16622	11259	67.74	305427	225539	73.84

Source: Department of Examination, Sri Lanka

The students' performance of the Northern province in the advanced level exam is higher than the national average in most of the years in the post war settings (Department of Examination, 2021). Northern province has the lowest number of teachers next to North central province in 2020. Schools with less than 10 teachers are 42% in Northern province which is the highest among all other provinces. Make sure the deployment of sufficient numbers of teachers and the human capital development is critical to improve the quality education. (Ministry of Education, 2021).

Level of Poverty

The overall level of poverty in Sri Lanka in the post-war context is reduced. However, some districts of the Northern province are still the poorest in the country. The poverty headcount index of the country was 8.9 per cent in 2009/ 2010 after the end of the conflict it is 4.1 percent as per the latest assessment in 2016/2017. As indicated in the table-5 The poverty headcount index of the Northern province of Sri Lanka was 12.8

percent in 2009/2010, it is 7.7 per cent in 2016/ 2017 and 8 per cent in 2018/2019. The poverty headcount index of the province is reduced from 12.8 per cent to 8 percent which is a remarkable improvement.

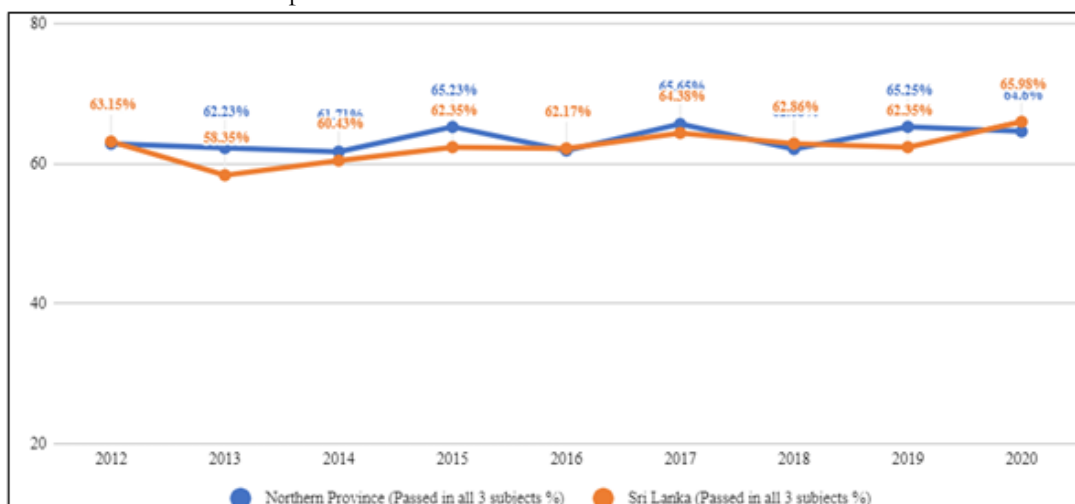


Figure 2- Percentage of qualified candidates for Advance Level (A/L)

However, the poverty headcount index of the province is higher than the national average and higher than all other provinces in the country, which is alarming.

Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu districts of Northern province are identified as the country's poorest districts, according to the poverty headcount index. The poverty headcount index of the Kilinochchi district is 18.2 percent and the Mullaitivu district is 12.7 per cent (DCS, 2020).

As illustrated in the figure-3, the multidimensional poverty index also reflects the extreme poverty in the Northern districts of Sri Lanka. According to the multidimensional poverty index of 2019, a considerable number of Northern districts were identified as the district with high poverty level (i.e. Manner and Vavuniya) (DCS, 2020).

Table 5: Poverty Headcount Index

Description/Year	Sri Lanka	North
2009/2010	8.9	12.8
2012/2013	6.7	10.9
2016/2017	4.1	7.7
2018/2019	3.2	8.0

Source: Source: Department of Census and Statistics-2018-2020

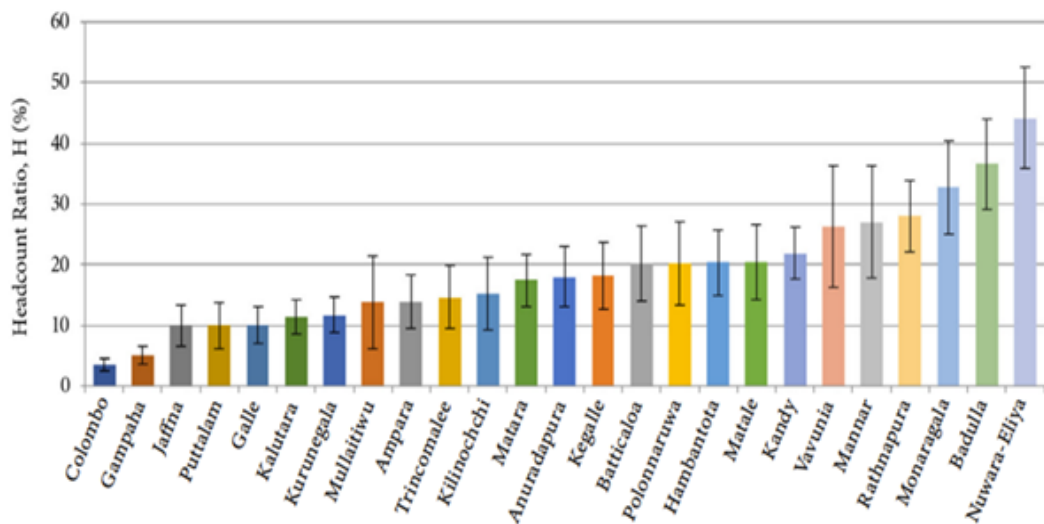


Figure 3: Percentage contributed by indicator to multidimensional poverty index (MPI)
Source: Department of Census and Statistics-2020

Conclusion and recommendations

The armed conflict has adversely affected the socio-economic environment in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka. There has been extensive damage to public and private properties, and as a result, a large number of families lost their productive assets. Sri Lanka's war caused significant damage to infrastructure and service delivery.

The Northern Province estimates that of its 1,958.6 km of provincial roads, and 7,600 km of rural roads, only 20-25 percent were in good condition after the conflict. The war also impacted the education sector. The Northern Province estimated that in 2009, there was a shortage of around 1,650 teachers in the province. In addition, the conflict had led to displacement and educational disruption in the province, especially in the Vanni districts. The conflict had destroyed schools, roads and hospitals, as well as laboratories, libraries, administrative blocks and teacher's quarters (World Bank, 2018). Apart from the damages to tangible assets, one of the most crucial aspects that must be regarded is the collapse of social structures, the loss of lives, and the increase in the number of women breadwinners.

The Government of Sri Lanka, together with the international community, put a lot of effort into uplifting the socio-economic conditions of the Northern province. The country's national and local development objectives are hampered by the legacies of mistrust between and across communities on account of the war, and the still few opportunities for Sri Lankans to interact with each other across identity and geographic divides. The province has to travel extra miles to achieve meaningful reconciliation and

restoration of peace and stability. However, such development initiatives inadequately contributed to the province's socio-economic development in the absence of evidence-based socio-economic policies, lack of macroeconomic impetus, and proactive and non-corrupt leadership. The GDP contribution of the Northern province to the national economy is insignificant. The overall poverty level in the province in the post-war context has reduced from 12.8 percent to 8 percent. According to the multidimensional poverty index of 2019, a considerable number of Northern districts were identified as the district with high poverty level (i.e. Mannar and Vavuniya). Although health infrastructures are extensively developed, it has not considerably impacted the province's health indicators.

In the absence of men, the situation has forced women to take a more significant share of both the domestic management and income generation burden, hence women empowerment needs to be much more focused not Only with economic empowerment initiatives but also with psycho-social support.

Education facilities are developed comparatively in post-war context in terms of rehabilitation and development of school building; however, student performance in the ordinary level examinations are below the national average, and closer to the national average in the GCE advanced level exams.

An integrated approach is essential to plan and achieve the development objectives of the province. Developing a strategic development framework focusing on regional socio-economic development is important. Making the environment attractive is also essential to attract private sector investment, foreign direct investment in particular, to generate employment and optimum utilization of natural resources.

The provincial council system was introduced through the 13th Amendment to the constitution with the strategic objectives of ensuring balanced regional development and addressing the ethnic conflict in the country. However, it has been noted that the power needs to be adequately decentralized to provide efficient public service delivery and meaningfully contribute to regional development. Targeted interventions should be implemented to improve community resilience, human capital development, food security, healthcare facilities, and empowerment of women. Political will and a solid proactive sub-national leadership are vital to drive the development agenda of the province. The Northern province is the largest in the country with five districts, each district has characteristics and unique human and natural resources. Careful attention should be paid to district-specific development planning and implementation.

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