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INCLUSIVE URBAN Infrastructure

A COMMUNITY PROFILE OF NAWAGAMPURA

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The CMRD Community Profiles display information about a broad range of factors from a specific location. The baseline information helps in researching, planning and analyzing material for studies that are in progress or development. The community data and illustrations are from both primary and secondary sources. Authorship is usually collective, but the principal writers are named. The papers are generally available in the English language, with some in the Sinhala and Tamil languages.

Front cover photograph: *Nawagampura street view by Abdhullah Azam (2022)*

A Community Profile of Nawagampura

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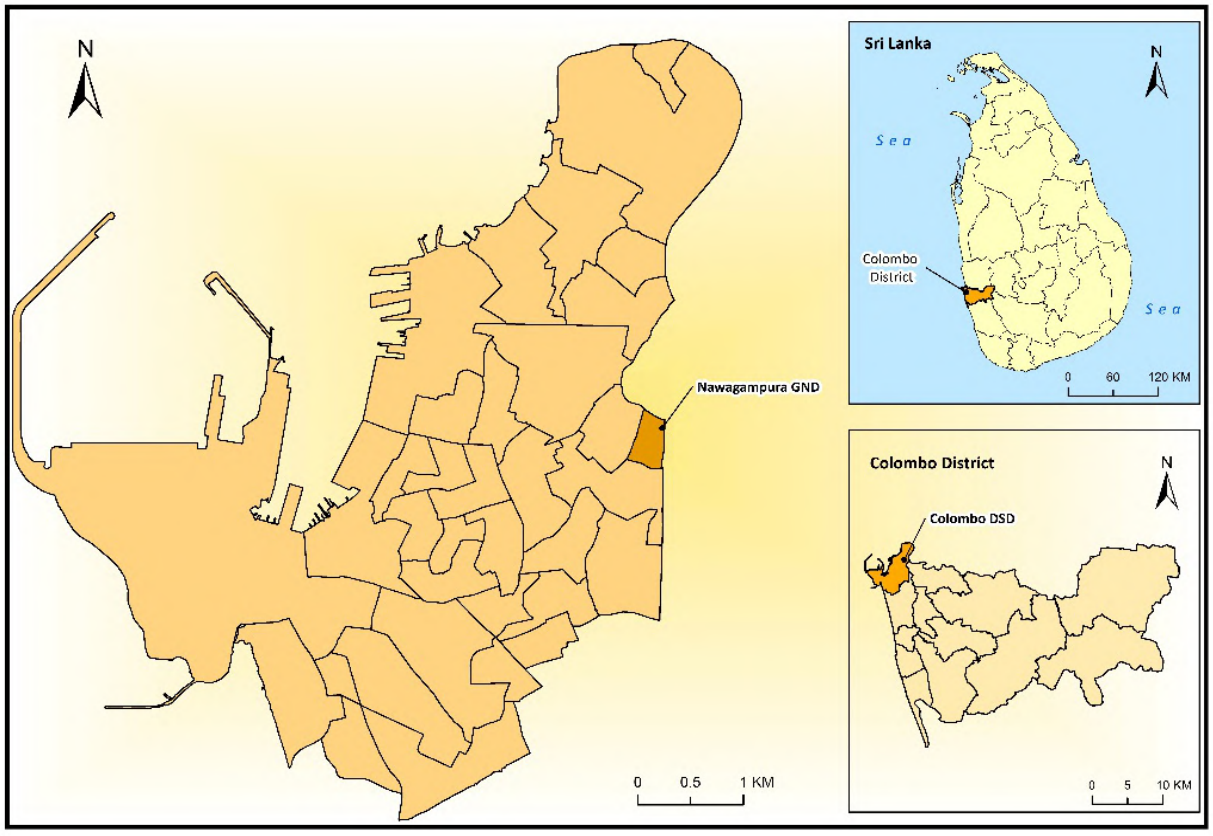

Figure 1 Nawagampura GND

Nawagampura is located at 6°56'44.93" North Latitude and 79°52'37.96" East Longitude. The Nawagampura Grama Niladhari Division (GND) is an administrative sub unit of the Colombo Divisional Secretariat Division (DSD) of the Colombo District, Sri Lanka (See figure 1). The settlement is bordered by the St. Sebastian Canal to the North and West, Baseline Road to the East and State Road to the South. (See figures 2 and 3).

Figure 2 Google Image

Physical Layout

The Nawagampura GND is a rectangular area of land of approximately 11 hectares located in the heart of Colombo. About 80% of the land is used for housing, while the remaining 20% is used for amenities such as playgrounds, dispensaries, Montessori schools, day care centres, grocery stores, factories, warehouses, and religious sites (such as churches, Hindu and Buddhists temples, and a mosque). The houses are built mostly in the north, west, and south of the settlement, while factories and warehouses dominate the east (*see figure 3*). Nawagampura is divided into clusters; each cluster is named after a letter of the alphabet (from A to N, with 'I' excluded). The community has access to a well-developed road network. The main highway (Baseline Road) that adjoins it leads from Colombo to the Bandaranaike International Airport (BIA) and the central and western regions of the country.

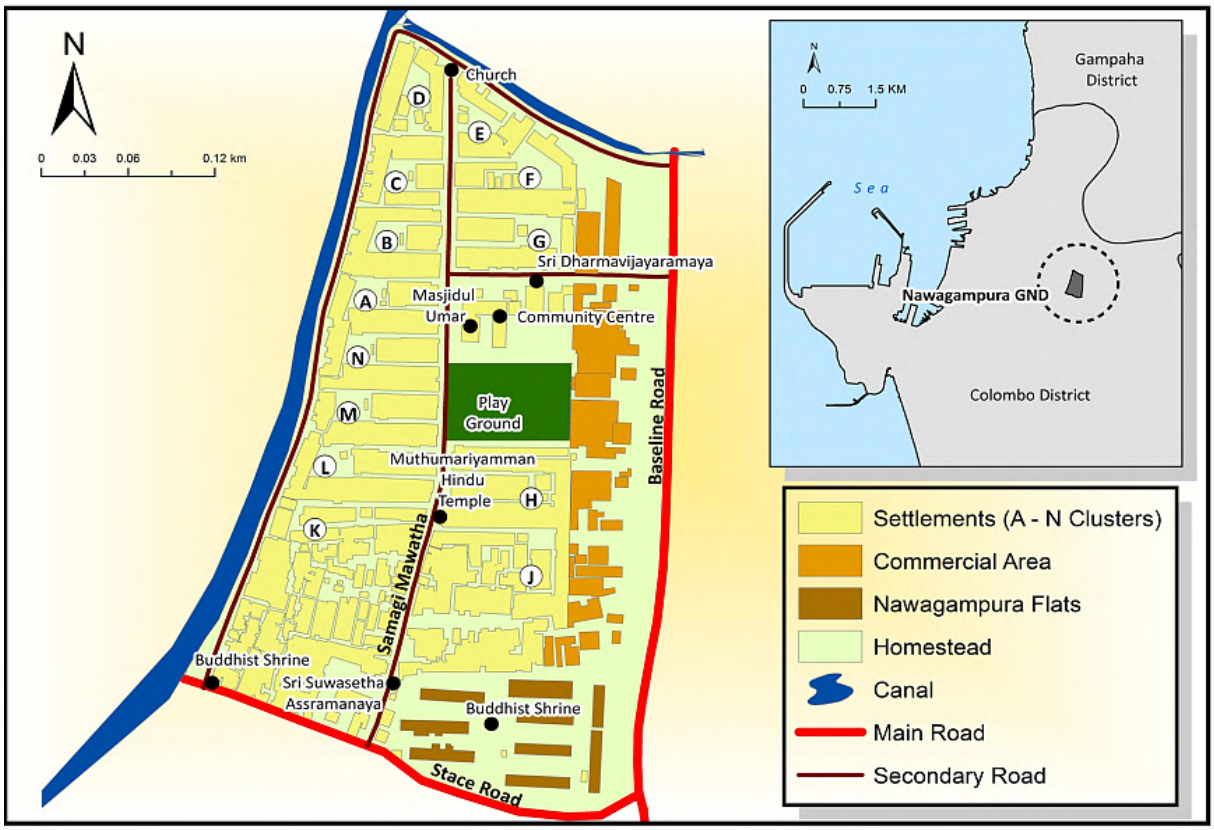

Figure 3 Nawagampura GND

Housing structure

The settlement of Nawagampura was built in 'clusters' of various sizes, of which there are 13. Each cluster has its own latrine and water supply. The number of dwellings in a cluster varies depending on its location, with clusters D and E having 24 houses each and clusters F and L having about 55 houses each (see figure 4). Each house is constructed on two perches (50 square metres) (Fernando, Gamage and Peiris, 1987). A typical housing cluster is more or less 'U'-shaped, having two rows of houses back-to-back down the centre. Each cluster has six latrines, taps, and showers for bathing, located at the end of the central row of houses, irrespective of cluster size. There is an open area adjacent to the baths for drying clothes. A common drain separates one cluster from another. However, the settlement layout has been altered as a result of extended families encroaching on public spaces. For example, the canal reservation sections are now concentrated with encroacher dwellings. According to the 2012 Census of Population and Housing, the settlement constitutes, in total, 1442 housing units, with 1253 permanent housing units, 182 semi-permanent housing units, one improvised housing unit, and six unclassified housing units (Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka, 2012).

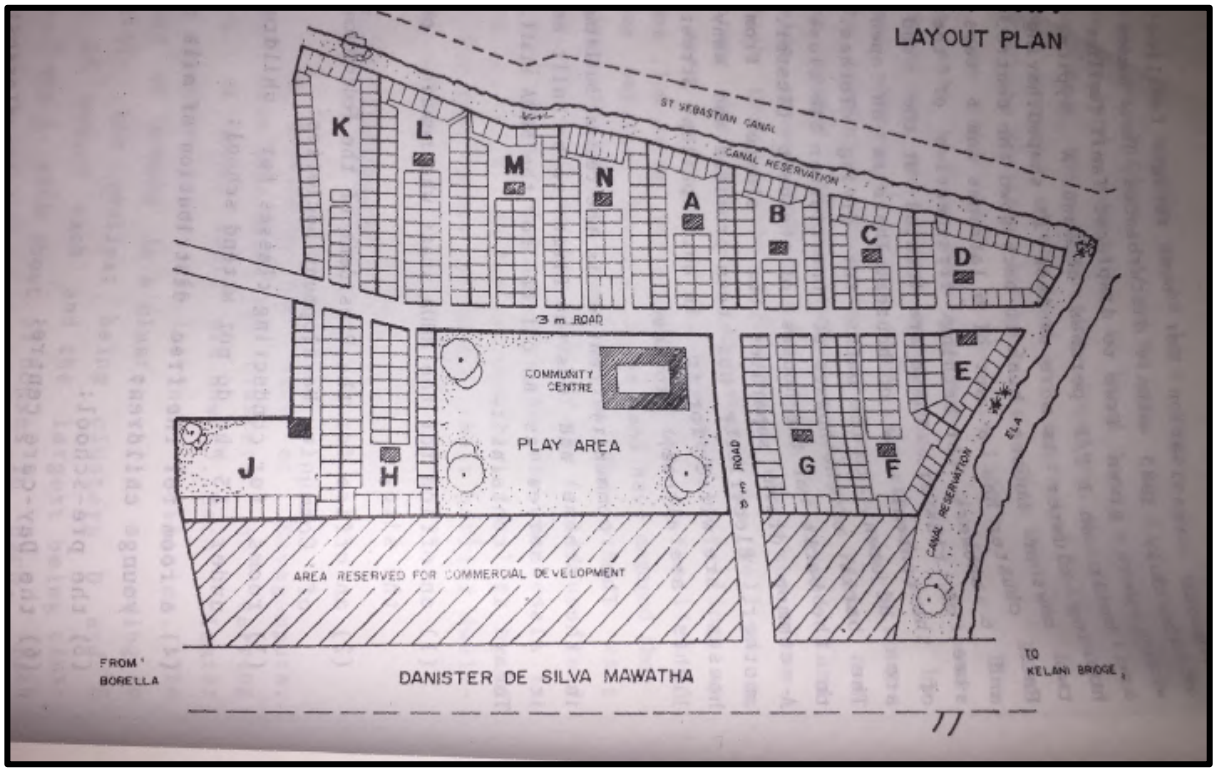

Figure 4 Nawagampura's initial layout plan

Source: (Fernando, Gamage and Peiris, 1987, p. 28)

2

HISTORY OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

2.1 Evolution of the area

Nawagampura, which means "new town", is a completely new construction site with a "Sites and Services" approach, which is the provision of plots of land, either on ownership or land lease tenure, with the minimum essential infrastructure needed for habitation. The property was once a marshland where “greens” (keera) were grown in plots referred to as “keera kotuwas”. Many families in Nawagampura lived off the proceeds of the earlier keera kotuwas, which were usually leased out by a man who had control over the marshy land. After the land reform of 1972 by the state to reduce wealth inequalities, much of this land was acquired by the state as excess land that could be redistributed. The aerial photographs (*see figures 5 and 6*) illustrate the settlement’s evolution in the Nawagampura area.

Figure 6 Nawagampura – 1972

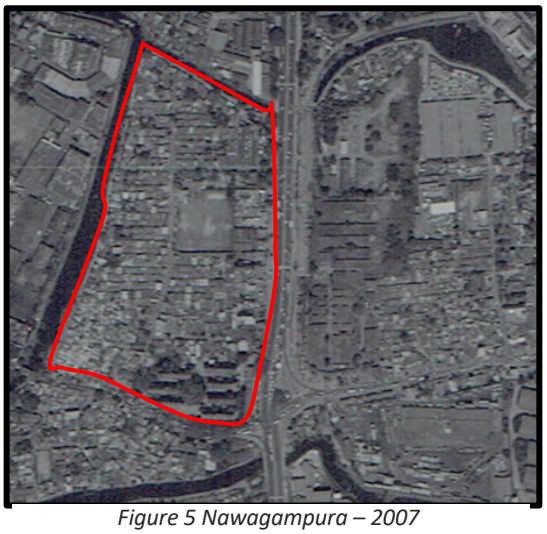

Figure 5 Nawagampura – 2007

Nawagampura was taken over by the National Housing Department (NHDA) sometime before 1977 and filled up. The physical design for the new human settlement was prepared in 1982 at a training workshop for government planners conducted by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and sponsored by the National Housing Development Authority (NHDA) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). After the process, allottees were provided with a building plot of 2 perches and a loan of Rs. 15,000 for building the house. The loan was issued in several instalments after the completion of certain stages of the building process. Households could make their house plans or select one from several types of plans available at the site office (see figure 7) (Fernando, Gamage and Peiris, 1987).

2.2 Origin of the allottees

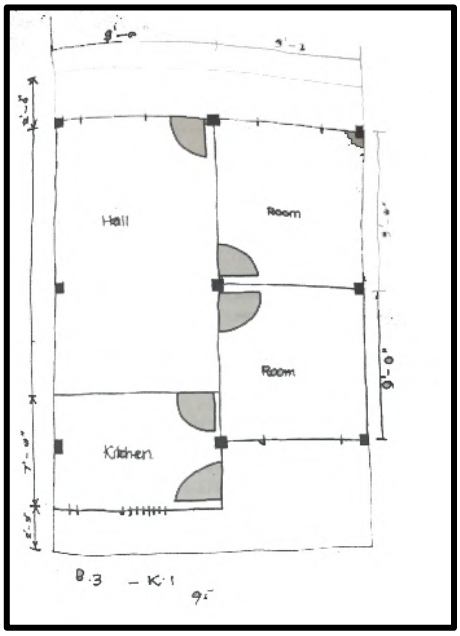

Figure 7 Typical house plan

Source: (Fernando, Gamage and Peiris, 1987, p. 95)

In 1985, the settler families arrived from various regions of Colombo's unauthorized settlements. Families from Abeysinharam Road, off Pachikawatta Road, settled in clusters E and F, with a few at cluster N. Many of these Tamil people worked as small traders or as street vendors. Families that lived along the railway line at the Sedawatta, also known as “The Bund”, generally built their residences in Clusters G and K. They were mostly impoverished, and many of them worked in keera cultivation and other low-paying jobs. Families from Bloemendhal Road who had to relocate due to the expansion of the Sugathadasa Stadium primarily settled in Cluster F, G, and H. Relatively better-off businessmen, such as pavement traders and small contractors, were among them.

Houses were built in clusters M and N by a few families from Siridhamma Mawatha in Dematagoda. A number of displaced Tamil families, who were housed in camps by the Rehabilitation of Affected Property and Industries Authority (REPIA) after the ethnic disturbances of July 1983, were mixed with other families in clusters A, B, H, I and M. REPIA was a government organization set up to rehabilitate displaced persons after the July 1983 ethnic disturbances (Fernando, Gamage and Peiris, 1987).

3

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

3.1 Demographic profile

According to the Ministry of Home Affairs, Nawagampura's total population in 2021 was 7205 persons, with male and female representation of 50.7% and 49.3% respectively (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2021). The Sri Lankan Tamils, who make up 51% of the population, constitute the majority. The Sinhalese share 26% and Sri Lankan Moors share 21% of the GND (WFP and UNOCHA, 2016). Young dependents (0-14 years) account for 26.0%, youth and adults (15-59 years) 64.7%, and senior dependents (age 60 and above) 9.3%. The majority of the population aged five and above (48.7%) received a secondary education. While 25.8% of people acquired primary education, 6.2% are classified as having "no schooling" (Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka, 2012). The community's key income source is the informal sector.

4

SERVICE DELIVERY

4.1 Water

The primary source of water for the Nawagampura community for about 1067 households is the tap line within their premises. About 289 households, on the other hand, have tap lines outside their homes (Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka, 2012). The National Water Supply and Drainage Board (NWSDB) provides this service. To minimize their monthly utility expense, most families in Nawagampura use two tap lines (their own tap line and the public tap line). The bill is split among the families that share a common water line. There is no shortage of water in the neighbourhood. The water velocity, however, is low due to the lower pressure. As a result, there are times when very little water reaches the first floor of the upstairs houses.

4.2 Sanitation: Toilet

In the initial plan of the settlement, there were six public toilets for each cluster – three for men and three for women (see figure 8) (Fernando, Gamage and Peiris, 1987). According to census data (2012), all households have toilet facilities. Among them, 60% of the households use water seal that is connected to a piped sewer system, and 30% of households use water seal that is connected to a septic tank. In March 2013, individual families constructed their toilets and connected them to a new sewerage line with the help of the SEVANATHA Urban Resource Centre, with funding provided by the Asian Development Bank (ADB). This improved sanitary condition benefited 93 families in the F cluster of the settlement.

> ***"The drainage problem is the main problem in this area. That is, the people who live here dump all kinds of wastes into the drain to some extent. As a consequence, the drains become overflowing and clogged. As a result, the drains emit a foul odour, and mosquitoes thrive in the drain."***
>
> (FGD – Nawagampura)

4.3 Hygienic conditions

The drainage system, for the most part, was built during the earlier period (1985s) (see figure 9). There were minor renovations done from time to time. The water stagnates and does not drain during the rainy season, resulting in flooding in the area. Flooding is also a problem in the north and west of the area, near the St. Sebastian Canal. Solid and liquid waste accumulates in the drains outside homes, causing a terrible odour and mosquito breeding grounds. As a result, there is a slew of health issues in the area, including a high prevalence of dengue. In this situation, living with children is very difficult. Because of the drainage problem, the region is unfit for living according to residents.

Figure 8 Public toilets

Figure 9 The water drain tunnel

4.4 Energy

Electricity is the principal source of lighting. About 94% of the houses use electricity from the Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB), while 5.9% use kerosene lamps to light their homes (Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka, 2012). Because the settlement is located in the city of Colombo, power outages are uncommon (though the situation is now different due to the national power outages). Furthermore, about 55.4% of households use kerosene as the primary source of cooking fuel. Also, 39.9% have gas and some households use both gas and kerosene to limit their gas usage. Around 4% of households use firewood for their cooking (ibid).

4.5 Transportation

Two main highways run adjoining the settlement, one in the east and one in the south (Baseline Road and Stace Road). As a result, there are no transportation issues for the community. People can easily travel using public transportation, which is very convenient. They access public amenities such as schools, markets, hospitals and administrative offices without much inconvenience.

4.6 Communication

The majority of the residents in the neighbourhood rely on mobile phones as their primary source of contact with others. Among them, the majority choose to use a normal non-android phone rather than a smartphone. Because of its location, the community in the neighbourhood has no signal coverage issues. Overall, services such as transportation, electricity, water and communication can be accessed without any interruptions.

5

SOCIAL AND INSTITUTIONAL NETWORKS

5.1 Community Development Council

There was a place for a community centre in the initial layout plan of the Nawagampura settlement. Currently, the Community Development Council (CDC) is still active. In 2013, it was involved in a project with the SEVANATHA Urban Resource Centre to carry out the sewerage system construction activity under the Community Contract method. The CDC was in charge of providing skilled and unskilled labour for the sewerage system building work in the project. It also necessitated the CDC's direct involvement in construction activities under the supervision of the Colombo Municipal Council (CMC). Under the terms of agreement, engineers, SEVANATHA technical officers and the CDC leaders had taken on considerable duties supervising all the building work as needed (SEVANATHA, 2013).

6

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