



Essence of sustainable blue economy of the south-asian coastal states: An analytical study

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Abstract

Sea resources offer a new window of opportunities for South-Asian coastal states. In order to explore and exploit sea resources from the Bay of Bengal, Bangladesh is required to push policies in cooperation with other countries to protect the ocean from the effects of climate change, pollution and over-fishing. We need to preserve the ecosystems of the sea which are reportedly being degraded at an unprecedented rate, and this is not an issue only for Bangladesh but for the whole coastal world. It should be addressed in cooperation with other countries. This paper is intended to highlight the importance of sustainable blue economy of the South-Asian Coastal States and regional efforts to ensure the marine sustainability in compliance with the provisions of the International Conventions.

Keywords: blue economy, sustainable development, regional cooperation, UNLCOS III

Introduction

Coastal areas can be powerhouse of national Economy of South-Asian countries. A sustainable marine Economy, extending close to coast and stretching up to economic zone, can bridge up the shore and off shore in a relational binding and bond of caring, managing and use. Blue Economy is the process of bio-diversity driven economy and reaping out the benefits of management of marine ecology. The Blue Economy can generate jobs for the millions and bring about significantly tangible changes in the lives and livelihood of the millions of people living in coastline, Islands and across the South-Asia, if the resource management is governed by principles of protection of bio-diversity, conservation is community-led and efforts for care are intertwined with vision of scientific understanding ^[1]. While South Asia enjoys coastal advantages due to its geography, it is also faced with multiple challenges. Besides geopolitical difficulties, the region's countries also face serious impediments due to pollution, habitat loss, biodiversity degradation, piracy, international crime and climate change.

Concept of Blue Economy

The term 'Blue Economy' refers to a marine-based Economy. The Blue Economy approach is founded upon the assessment and incorporation of the real value of the natural (Blue) capital into all aspects of economic activity (conceptualization, planning, infrastructure development, trade, travel, renewable resource exploitation, energy production/consumption) ^[2]. The concept of a 'Blue Economy' emerged in Rio Summit, 2012 by the United Nations Environment Program as countries around the world grappled with the twin trends of accelerating growth in the ocean Economy and changes in the underlying ecosystems. Blue Economy recognizes the ocean realm as the newly inducted platform of ocean development as well as ocean governance. The concept mirrors the dragging line between socio-economic development and reckless environmental degradation. Blue Economy also encompasses an assortment of new technology oriented sectors that are capable of supporting maritime prosperity through maritime exploration and research of maritime

issues. From that view point, Blue Economy is a science intensive maritime concept. Scholars belonging to maritime domain are used to illustrate Blue Economy in inclusive manner encompassing marine environment, maritime economic and trade activities ^[3]. Development of Blue Economy has a high potential for harnessing our ocean resources sustainably whilst also meeting the social needs of the global population. It is particularly promising for developing nations rich in coastal resources and who need to strengthen food security, job opportunities and economic prosperity. Several economic activities can be included in the Blue Economy. Some of these are:

- Aquaculture and fishing (Seafood harvesting).
- Exploration and extraction of marine natural resources (oil and gas).
- Renewable energy generation (offshore windmills).
- Trade and commerce-related applications (maritime transport, tourism).
- Environment conservation (waste management, mitigating climate change through carbon sinks) ^[4].

Importance of Blue Economy for South-Asian Countries

1. Blue Economy and Bangladesh

The newly demarcated area of the Bay of Bengal has opened a new economic frontier for Bangladesh. Man-Land ratio of Bangladesh being the lowest in the world, she can no longer sustain pressures for food, shelter, energy and other necessary commodities. Hence Bangladesh is bound to show a positive response to her maritime zone of the Bay of Bengal which is rich in huge living and non-living resources ^[5]. In order to utilize its unexplored marine resources, Bangladesh is already taking initiatives to flourish its Blue Economy. Since 2015, the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) has undertaken a number of consultations and workshops on Blue Economy ^[6]. In Bangladesh the ocean Economy consists of the following broad and growing economic sectors: living resources, minerals, energy, transport and trade, tourism and recreation, carbon sequestration, and coastal protection. With the boost of population Bangladesh will gradually turn its attention to rich marine resources for food and other needs of its people.

As our land-resources are being exhausted, it will be necessary for Bangladesh to depend increasingly on sea resources ^[7]. The Bangladesh government has recently emphasized on enhancing Blue growth and achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs), where ocean-based resources will play a key role ^[8]. Bangladesh has also been working to shape the Blue Economy discourse within the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) region for improving regional security and peace. The success of achieving most of the Millennium Development Goals in time prompted the government to start activities of achieving SDGs also by 2030 ^[9]. It's estimated that there are over 500 varieties of fish and other marine life such as snails, shellfish, crabs, octopuses etc. Besides life, there is also considerable speculation on the presence of oil fields which could potentially provide an additional \$1.2 bn worth of resources to the country. According to experts, there are also 13 heavy mineral-rich silts in adjacent sea areas which are more valuable than gold and have the potential to contribute revenue in the billions ^[10]. The country also has over 75 islands that could be used for tourism. The ocean contributes more than \$6 billion annually to the Bangladesh Economy and has the potential to generate more income, with a large portion of the opportunity in developing the Blue Economy lying in post-harvest processing. Besides this though, there is ample potential in fisheries, mineral resources, shipping, and energy industries. At the moment, boats and trawlers are only able to reach as far as 70 km of the 660 km distance freely available for fishing, leaving more than 80% of total waters unexplored ^[11].

2. Blue Economy and India

With its vast maritime interests, the blue economy occupies a vital potential position in India's economic growth. It could well be the next multiplier of GDP and well-being, provided sustainability and socio-economic welfare are kept centre-stage. India is strategically located between two important plug points called Strait of Hormuz and Strait of Malacca, through which most of trade in commercial shipping moves in the Indian Ocean. It is a subset of the national economy comprising the entire ocean resources system and human-made economic infrastructure in marine, maritime, and onshore coastal zones within the country's legal jurisdiction. With some 7,500 kilometres, India has a unique maritime position. Nine of its 29 states are coastal, and its geography includes 1,382 islands. There are nearly 199 ports, including 12 major ports that handle approximately 1,400 million tons of cargo each year. Besides, India's Exclusive Economic Zone of over 2 million square kilometres has a bounty of living and non-living resources with significant recoverable resources such as crude oil and natural gas. The coastal economy sustains over 4 million fisherfolk and coastal communities ^[12].

3. Blue Economy and Myanmar

Myanmar possesses more than 2,800 kilometres long coast and one-fifth of the Bay of Bengal ecosystem. Myanmar's coast is endowed with sandy beaches, mangrove ecosystems, coral reef ecosystems, sea lawn ecosystems and other coastal and marine ecosystems ^[13].

4. Blue Economy and Pakistan

Pakistan has a long coastline of approximately 1,046 kilometers, which presents immense potential for blue economy development. The country's coastal areas are rich in marine resources, including fish, shrimp, crab, lobsters, and other seafood, which can be exploited sustainably for economic growth and job creation. Pakistan's fisheries sector is one of the main contributors to the country's economy, providing livelihoods to millions of people. The sector can be further developed by introducing modern fishing techniques, improving the quality of seafood, and promoting export-oriented fisheries. Pakistan also has significant potential for the development of mariculture, which involves the cultivation of marine organisms such as seaweed, shellfish, and finfish. The country's warm waters and favorable climatic conditions provide ideal conditions for mariculture, which can help diversify the economy and reduce pressure on wild fish stocks. In addition, Pakistan's coastal areas are rich in mineral resources, including oil and gas, which can be extracted sustainably to contribute to the country's energy needs and economic growth. Furthermore, Pakistan has significant potential for developing the tourism sector along its coastal areas, including beaches, historical sites, and marine parks. This can attract both domestic and international tourists, creating job opportunities and generating revenue. Moreover, Pakistan has great potential for developing its blue economy, and it is important to ensure that this is done in a sustainable and responsible manner to protect the marine environment and ensure long-term benefits for the country's economy and people ^[14].

5. Blue Economy and Sri-Lanka

Sri Lanka has territorial waters of 21,500 km² and an exclusive economic zone of 517,000 km², almost eight times the country's land area. This coastal and marine environment harbours a variety of natural resources and ecosystems, such as coral reefs, seagrass beds, mangrove forests, lagoons, beaches, salt marshes, or estuaries. For Sri Lanka, there is a variety of feasible, low-cost or cost-efficient options and opportunities to build a blue economy. It is possible to enhance livelihoods and boost economic growth in Sri Lanka's coastal belt without harming the environment. The fisheries sector, for example, could be optimized and expanded in many ways. Currently, 50-60% of the overall harvest is discarded every year as trash fish, fishery waste, crab shells, or shrimp and shellfish waste, with fishers dumping it into lagoons, estuaries, or the ocean ^[15].

6. Blue Economy of Maldives

As an archipelago of 1,192 low-lying coral islands, the Republic of the Maldives is a recognized marine hotspot, welcoming 1.6 million tourists annually to enjoy its natural beauty. In the Maldives, coral reefs, beaches, and marine life are some of its most valuable natural assets, providing economic benefits through fisheries, tourism and shoreline protection ^[16]. The Government of the Maldives are looking to improve the health of these "natural assets" through natural capital accounting to ensure the long-term economic, social, and environmental viability of the Maldives' blue economy. The Maldives' Enhancing National Development through Environmentally Resilient Islands project aims to strengthen the management of Maldives' coastal and marine

ecosystems, build resilience to climate change, and promote sustainable livelihoods for coastal communities ^[17].

UNLCOS and Blue Economy

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, 1982(UNCLOS III) lays down a comprehensive regime of law and order relating to sea ^[18]. It lays down rules governing all uses of the oceans and their resources. Navigational rights, territorial sea limits, economic jurisdiction, passage of ships through narrow straits, conservation and management of living marine resources, protection of the marine environment, marine research regime- these are among the important features of the treaty. Articles 55 to 75 of the UNCLOS III deal with economic rights of the coastal states over 200 nautical miles exclusive economic zone (EEZ). In the EEZ, the coastal State has sovereign rights for the purpose of exploring and exploiting, conserving and managing the natural resources, whether living or non-living, of the waters superjacent to the seabed and of the seabed and subsoil, and with regard to other activities for the economic exploitation and exploration of the zone, such as the production of energy from the water, currents and winds. Exclusive right to construct and to authorize and regulate the construction and use of (a) artificial islands (b) Installations and structures for the purpose of exercising its allowable rights and economic purposes as well. The Coastal State may establish the outer limits of its juridical continental shelf wherever the continental margin extends beyond 200 nautical miles ^[19]. UNLOS III requires that the coastal State, taking into account the best scientific evidence available to it, shall ensure through proper conservation and management measures that the maintenance of the living resources in the exclusive economic zone is not endangered by over-exploitation ^[20]. States shall adopt laws and regulations to prevent, reduce and control pollution of the marine environment from land-based sources, including rivers, estuaries, pipelines and outfall structures, taking into account internationally agreed rules, standards and recommended practices and procedures ^[21]. It is also the responsibility of the Coastal States to adopt laws and regulations to prevent, reduce and control pollution of the marine environment arising from or in connection with seabed activities subject to their jurisdiction and from artificial islands, installations and structures under their jurisdiction ^[22].

Recommendations

Undoubtedly, blue economy can play a significant role in the development of livelihood of the people of the South-Asian Coastal States and eliminate poverty. But, the States in the South-Asian coastal region must work together in order to ensure sustainable blue economy for long term development. Following steps can be taken in this regard:

Implementation of the regulations: South-Asian coastal states should adopt and enforce strong laws and regulations to ensure sustainable use of marine resources, protect the marine environment, and promote responsible business practices. This can include measures such as catch limits, gear restrictions, and protected areas in conformity with the provisions of the UNCLOS III.

Establishment of marine research center: Collective research and monitoring of the marine activities are important for sustainable management and conservation of the marine

resources. Thus, South-Asian coastal states should establish a marine research center under the umbrella of the SAARC and initiate monitoring programs to better understand the marine resources and the impacts of human activities.

Innovation and transfer of technology: Innovative technologies can help reduce the impact of human activities on the marine environment and improve resource management. South-Asian coastal states can share technology on fair terms and conditions among themselves.

Encouragement of public-private partnerships: Public-private partnerships can play a crucial role in developing sustainable blue economy practices. SAARC countries should encourage collaboration between government, businesses, and civil society to promote sustainable practices and ensure that economic development is balanced with environmental protection.

Conclusion

The Blue Economy can be blessing for the South-Asian states to achieve sustainable development goals and can bring about significantly tangible changes in the lives and livelihood of the millions of people living in coastline, Islands and across South-Asia, if the resource management is governed by principles of protection of bio-diversity, conservation is community-led and efforts for care are intertwined with vision of scientific understanding. Human activities negatively affect the marine ecosystems and oceans by polluting and overexploiting its resources, which all impact on the marine food web and could lead to largely unknown consequences for the biodiversity and survival of marine life forms. The main reason for loss of marine biodiversity is largely the result of human activity either from land based activities or sea based activities by oil, chemicals, and harmful substances in packaged form, sewage, and garbage. Marine ecosystems are subject to increasing pressures and competing usages, resulting from resources over-exploitation and pollution. Overall, ensuring the sustainable development of the blue economy in South-Asian coastal states will require a collaborative effort from all stakeholders, including government, businesses, civil society, and local communities. By taking a holistic approach and prioritizing sustainable practices, South-Asian coastal states can unlock the economic potential of its marine resources while safeguarding the health and well-being of its people and the environment.

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