

# Blue Economy in Bangladesh: Proposed Model and Policy Recommendations

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## Abstract

Rapid economic growth coupled with a rising population is putting immense pressure on the environment, ecology and natural resources in Bangladesh. In order to ensure the optimum opportunities for a productive and healthy life for the people while maintaining the balance in nature and ensuring sustainability for future generations, the country has to have balanced socio-economic development. Geographically Bangladesh is blessed by the Bay of Bengal and Blue Economy is very much suitable for Bangladesh by considering the maritime area and its connection with the people of Bangladesh as well as its economy. However, the aim of the paper is to look at the contemporary situation in Bangladesh in the context of the Blue Economy and its relevance for Bangladesh through some effective strategies. Effective implementation of strategies will play the major role for obtaining the sustainable economic development in Bangladesh. Moreover, the key role of the current study is that it focuses on Sustainable Blue Economy Bangladesh, as there is a vacuity in contemporary literature on this topic in the context of Bangladesh. The article concludes with an analysis of the policy recommendations to obtain Sustainable Blue Economy in Bangladesh.

**Keywords:** Blue Economy; Sustainable Blue Economy; Sustainable Development; Strategies; Bangladesh.

## Introduction:

No water, no life. No blue, no green.

—Sylvia Earle

Since the world population is projected to be more than 9 billion by 2050, countries around the world will require new resources from a finite amount of space to meet soaring demand. And as more people move to coastal regions, their minds will inevitably be drawn to the sea. After all, more than two-thirds of our planet is covered with ocean, and the seas enhance tremendous economic development, transportation corridors, sources of oil and gas, and cornucopias of seafood. Oceans also provide less-tangible benefits that are often difficult to quantify, including moderating the planet's climate by absorbing roughly 90 percent of the heat trapped by a thickening atmospheric blanket of carbon pollution (Conathan, Michael and Moore, Scott 2015). Oceans produce more than half of the existence of human being extremely depends on ocean. Hence, our climate and weather are being regulated by Ocean. Half of the oxygen is being generated by ocean that we breathe (Spalding 2016). Spalding (2016) mentioned ocean contains 80% of Earth's life and Carries more than 90% of internationally traded goods. It produces more than half of the oxygen we breathe and provides a livelihood for an estimated three billion people who depend on marine and coastal areas, including fishing, tourism, trade, transport and energy (UN Conference on Sustainable Development 2012). Moreover, ocean is the primary source of protein for more than 3.5 billion people. Simultaneously, fisheries alone contribute \$100 billion per year to the global economy (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations 2014).

So, it can't be denied that the existence of human being extremely depends on ocean. Recently, during the past few years, the term "Blue Economy" or "Blue Growth" has surged into common policy usage, all over the world. The ocean economy (also referred to as the blue economy) is a relatively new concept that has its origins in the green economy concept endorsed at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, held in Rio de Janeiro in 2012. It shares the same desired outcome: the improvement of human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities. At its core the oceans economy refers to the de-coupling of socio-economic development from environmental degradation. In this regard, efficiency and optimization of natural marine resources within ecological limits becomes paramount. This includes, the sourcing and usage of local raw materials and where feasible, the utilization of 'blue', low energy options to realize environmental benefits. The concept of ocean economy also embodies economic and trade activities that

integrate the conservation and sustainable use and management of biodiversity, including maritime ecosystems, and genetic resources.

Blue Economy means the use of sea and its resources for sustainable economic development. It refers to any economic activity in the maritime sector, whether sustainable or not. At the same time they also define Sustainable Blue Economy which ensures that the economic development of the ocean contributes to true prosperity, today and long into the future.

Geographically, Bangladesh has total area 148,460 square kilometers, water 18,290 square kilometers (12% of total area). Bangladesh has the 12 nautical miles territorial sea area, 18 nautical miles contiguous zone and 200 nautical miles of exclusive economic zone (Central Intelligence Agency World Factbook). Bangladesh is blessed by the Bay of Bengal and we are using sea for local and international trading and transportation from very past, but still we have many things to explore from the maritime area and utilize properly. The extreme use of the oceans and seas in several economic sectors, combined with the impacts of climate change, has added to the pressure on the oceanic environment. Moreover, a large part of the Bangladeshi population lives in coastal areas, and urbanization, coastward migration, and associated socioeconomic growth, country is experiencing dramatic coastal change, with increased pressure on marine resources. This situation, in combination with advanced technological possibilities, has raised the potentials of the Blue Economy.

However, Blue Economy is very much suitable for Bangladesh by considering the maritime area and its connection with the people of Bangladesh as well as its economy. So, we need some strategic arrangements and efficient policies to grab the benefits of blue economy to implement sustainable development in our country.

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) annual report 2015 identified some countries such as Seychelles, Norway, Barbados, Madagascar, Gambia as success story makers regarding the use of blue resources. The Blue Economy represents a relatively new manner of describing ocean economic development that began to emerge first among many island nations, including small developing countries such as the Republic of Seychelles, as well as the archipelagic giant Indonesia, the fourth-most-populous country in the world. It's now gaining recognition in some of the world's biggest and most powerful nations, including China and the United States, which have increasingly begun to turn to the concept of the Blue Economy to promote development of their ample ocean and coastal resources. Honing the Blue Economy's focus could ultimately pay dividends by allowing economic growth to blossom alongside environmental sustainability (Conathan, Michael and Moore, Scott 2015). So, Bangladesh can also follow any of those countries to avail Blue Economy.

### **Objectives of the Study:**

The objectives of this paper are followings:

- To identify the existing situation of Blue Economy in Bangladesh
- To identify a conceptual framework to implement Sustainable Blue Economy in Bangladesh
- To identify the challenges ahead of Bangladesh in successful implementation of Blue Economy and to suggest some policy initiatives to address those challenges

### **Rationale of the Study:**

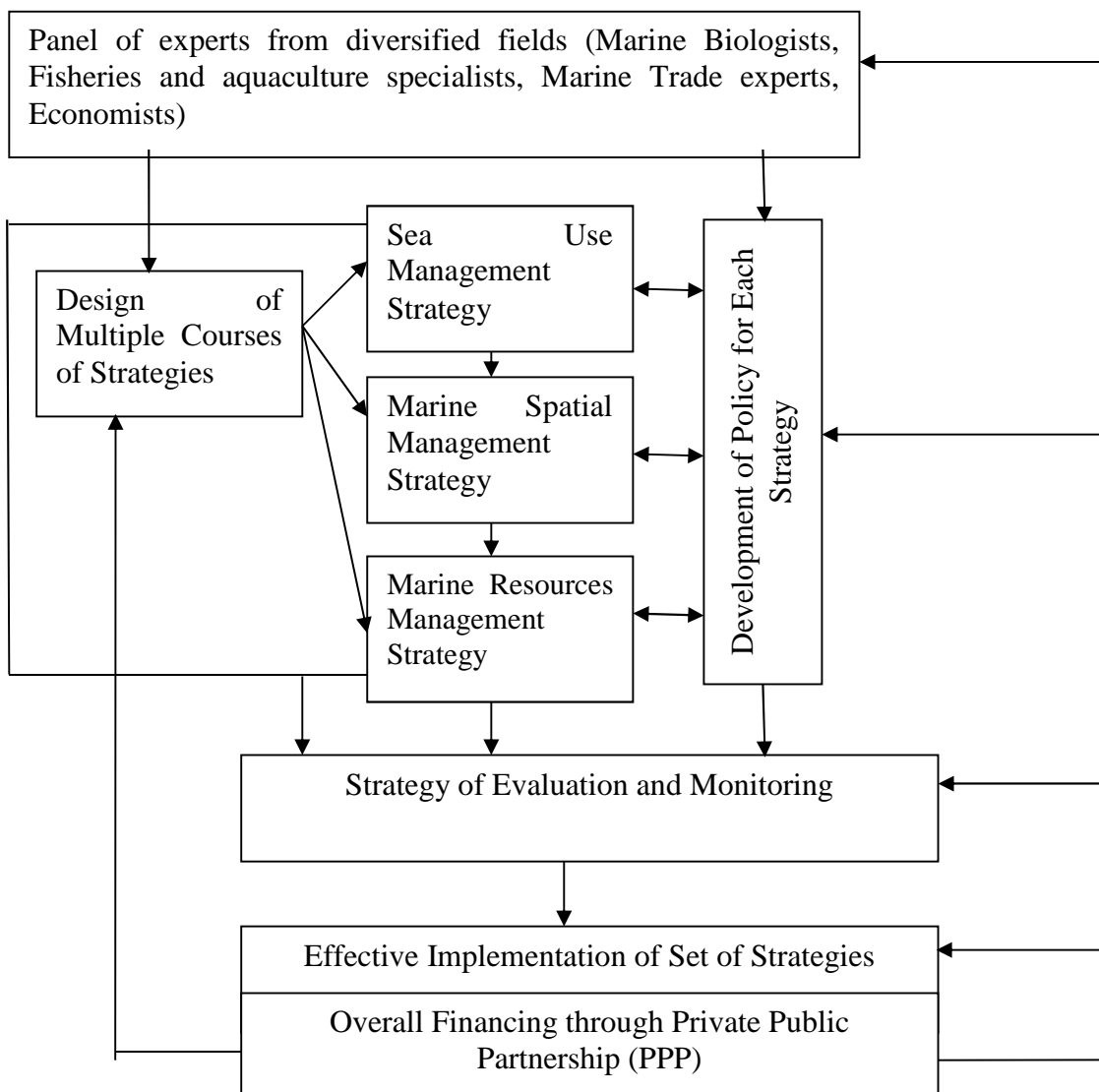
In this era of globalization no country can only depend on its land resources. So, sourcing of alternative resources is obligatory especially for the developing country like Bangladesh. This sourcing of resources from sea area available for Bangladesh is a great opportunity. It will help minimize the sole dependency on natural land resources for Bangladesh. In fact, Bangladesh is blessed with the vast edge of the Bay of Bengal, the largest bay in the world. Hence, sectors like transport (shipbuilding, shipping), energy (oil, gas, and renewable energy), food (fisheries, aquaculture), marine ICT, and coastal tourism can be appropriate means of economic development based on the bay area obtainable for Bangladesh. Moreover, Bangladesh will have to look forward to maintain this economic breakthrough for ensuring Sustainable Blue Economy (SBE). To do so, some policy initiatives at strategic level should be taken by the government of Bangladesh in order to get privileged with SBE.

### **Conceptual Framework:**

This paper attempts to look into some of the prominent strategies to implement sustainable blue economy in Bangladesh by a panel of experts from diversified fields. A customized conceptual framework of the

sustainable blue economy is shown in Figure 1 which applies for our country. A panel of experts from diversified fields such as Marine Biologists, Fisheries and aquaculture specialists, Marine Trade experts, Economists needs to be formed in order to move toward sustainable blue economy. The panel of experts will design multiple courses of strategies like Sea Use Management Strategy, Marine Spatial Management Strategy, and Marine Resources Management Strategy. For each of those strategies policy should be formulated subsequently. The designed strategies along with the policies will be evaluated and monitored thoroughly. After the strategy appraisal process, the intended and selected strategy/strategies will be implemented. The phases of the intended model will be financed through Private Public Partnership (PPP) for sustainable growth and development in Bangladesh. It is palpable that integration and coordination across the national borders though PPP will bring more efficient use of the existing research infrastructures and development of the new things as well as more competition which leading to enhanced quality and smart specialization and a joint market place for growing and optimal management of the human capacity. At the same time, there are a number of obstacles that will slow the progress of our development path. Hence, we need to overcome the challenges to implement Sustainable Blue Economy.

**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for Sustainable Blue Economy in Bangladesh**



**Source: Authors**

### **Policy Recommendations:**

- Based on our in-depth-analysis regarding policy making on SBE Bangladesh should adopt some key initiatives in this context. The policy makers should put into action the following strategies which are necessary for our overall socio-economic development.
- At initial stage a 3-5 year plan for Blue Economy Project, by integration of Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Shipping, Ministry of Water Resources, Ministry of Planning and Ministry of ICT for technological support.
- A panel of experts from diversified fields (Marine Biologists, Fisheries and aquaculture specialists, Marine Trade experts, Economists (Nature and Resources economist, Macroeconomist) can be introduced for monitoring and evaluating the SBE project. No policy/action should not be taken without the approval of the expert panel.
- For technical and other assistance Bangladesh can take guidance or suggestions from one of the Blue Economy success stories reported Countries by UNEP (2015). We can go for some technical knowledge exchange and experts exchange collaboration.
- For Sustainable Blue Economy we have to take some measures to lessen the pollution of sea/ocean water and other environmental degradation.
- Sea Economic zone like EPZ can be an excellent way to promote Blue Economy. Especially the Tourism, we have divine coastal and maritime tourism spots in Sundarbans, Potuakhli, Kuakata, St. Martins, Moheskhali, etc. By proper management for Ocean tourism we can generate significant revenue. In the SEZ we can build the arrangements through PPP for that tourism like: Hotels, motels, Health care complex, premises for special security forces, and premises for Life-guards Dock for Cruises etc. If the project gets successful then the tourism sector will be benefitted as well as local economy, moreover, national economy.
- Inclusion of habitant of coastal belt for sea health conservation, economic activities of Blue Economy through employing the locals, engagement of locals. New economic arrangements of Blue Economy should not deprive the costal belts' local people; they know the sea much better than any other part's people of the country.
- Like land economy we should give importance to the Blue Economy since it has the highest potential for obtaining new natural gas source, minerals, employment opportunities, foreign currency from coastal and maritime tourism.
- Adequate infrastructural development initiatives are needed to promote coastal and maritime tourism since tourism industry has become an emerging source of national income.
- Government, businesses and community partnership (public-private partnership), should be developed through business connectivity and integrated infrastructure.
- We must introduce waste disposal techniques such as waste recycling, incineration process, gasification, bioreactor landfills, composting, and anaerobic digestion etc. Moreover, we will have to implement an Integrated Waste Management (IWM) system for this particular purpose.

## **Conclusion:**

Sustainable Blue Economy can give us the optimal benefits of our marine resources as we also concern about the conservation of our marine resources and coastal area. We are using the sea and its resources but yet to utilize it more and yet to explore the possibilities for our economy and the people of Bangladesh. Based on the scenarios of other countries about Blue Economy, in our paper we suggest some policies to exploit Blue Economy concept in sustainable manner which is otherwise called as Sustainable Blue Economy. Bangladesh is standing at a very appropriate position to take the advantage of the Blue Economy, but the Blue Economy should be approached as Sustainable Blue Economy, as we want to achieve the SDG Goal-14. The economy of Bangladesh is innately affected by natural, cultural, and other societal factors. So, the possibility of transitioning from unsustainable growth approaches to sustainable approaches can be made through blue economy in our country. To help achieve such a transition, countries have access to a range of pioneering strategies. By taking only strategic policies we have to implement the Blue Economy, we don't have the luxury to lose the opportunity due to mismanagements and improper planning; we strongly suggest adopting effective policies for the Sustainable Blue Economy (SBE). The Blue Economy will improve the mean and implementation of processes that integrate science, awareness, cultural and social change and lead to real improvement in economic, environmental and ecological health and social well-being. Moving into more collaborative and inclusive patterns of work by harnessing the full potential of all actors becomes essential. Bangladesh can be a successful benchmark of Blue Economy for the developing world. We consider Blue Economy not only the means of using ocean and marine resources, but also a path of providing secured life for coastal people of Bangladesh.

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