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### Is the Blue Economy Just Another Framework?

The challenges and opportunities with the Blue Economy; evaluation through case studies in Bangladesh and China.

Nowadays, it seems like we have so many sustainable frameworks and ideas to make this world more sustainable; yet we still see rising global temperatures and sea levels, islands disappearing, and increased flooding. The Blue Economy is a framework introduced by Gunter Pauli, that's meant to promote sustainable, nature inspired solutions to the polluting and wasteful nature of different ocean resource uses. Sound familiar? This reminded me of the UN SDG's; go figure, the Blue Economy is a framework meant to specifically focus on SDG 14, "Life Below Water". But what is the benefit of having another sustainable framework, like the Blue Economy?

The UN broadly defined the Blue Economy concept as, "to understand and better manage the many aspects of oceanic sustainability, ranging from sustainable fisheries to ecosystem health to preventing pollution" (United Nations). The Blue Economy has so many different definitions depending on the organization, and this fluidity is part of a larger issue. But, comprehensively it recognizes the value in marine and freshwater ecosystems as a whole through the different ecosystem services it provides such as carbon sequestration, recreation, tourism, and fishing. But, it also uses it to develop the economy in a sustainable way, supporting jobs in the fishing, tourism, and other related industries (Bari, 2017). Abdullahel Bari believes that Bangladesh and other South Asian countries have an extreme amount of potential within the Blue Economy because of the Bay of Bengal, as it is the largest bay in the world. Coupled with the relatively low GDP per capita, these countries have a, governmentally recognized, opportunity to sustainably advance their economy (Ocean Centres, 2025). Bari thinks that focusing on fisheries, aquaculture, maritime transportation, ship breaking industries, coastal tourism, marine based energy, and deep sea minerals could heavily develop their Blue Economies. Now, Bangladesh is a global leader in aquaculture, providing vast employment opportunities. Yet, they still have much to do with fully encompassing the Blue Economy, such as utilizing the entirety of their EEZ and limiting the amount of activities that deplete stocks like overfishing and illegal fishing. However, the implementation of the Joint Monitoring Cell has been recent actions to combat this. As for Bari's findings, some of the components he stated are easily recognized as sustainable such as marine based energy, however there are some controversial ones, such as mining for deep sea minerals. With the basis of the Blue Economy being sustainable development, it is hard to recognize how these more controversial components fall under the Blue Economy.

This argument is what researchers Lee, Noh, and Khim also explore. They argue that the Blue Economy contradicts itself because of an inherent conflict between economic development and ocean protection (Lee et al., 2020). The Blue Economy should be a balance between economic activity and long-term capacity of ocean ecosystems. They believe that the link between the Blue Economy and the UN SDGs are vague because of differing opinions on the SDGs that apply directly to the Blue Economy such as SDG 12 Responsible Consumption and Production & 13 Climate Action, and what SDGs stakeholders believe apply SDG 3 Good Health and Well-Being & 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth. Additionally, they see the involvement of different stakeholders as challenging because their roles are not clearly defined while working toward an already indistinct goal. The stakeholders include Government Agencies, NGOs, Researchers, Industries, and local communities, and the order is respective to their frequency of involvement. These priority differences between what the Blue Economy is supposed to achieve and what different stakeholders perceive it to achieve, leads to uncertainty and misunderstandings of the scope and boundaries of the goals trying to be created. The researchers believe that better alignment between expectations for each goal, realistic timelines, and improved communication, will help facilitate clearer outcomes to solve the world's most pressing issues. Communication is always key in a multi-stakeholder approach, especially considering that the ocean is an interconnected system that affects every single person and organization, so one decision cannot be made without international cooperation.

This idea is furthered by Lu Wenhai and 22 other researchers that believe the Blue Economy is very promising but needs better data, monitoring, and governmental and international cooperation (Wenhai et al., 2019). This is shown through the success that countries like Europe and Indonesia have had with incorporating the Blue Economy into their countries, but especially China. According to the World Economic Forum, China has been shifting from land based resources to sustainable maritime ones, in order to further develop the economy in a high quality manner (2025). In measurable Blue Economy advancements, China has achieved 80% of their production coming from aquaculture, becoming the largest aquaculture producer (Cheney, 2022). They also significantly reduced their fleet size from over 1 million vessels in 2013 to almost half in 2022, created summer fishing moratoriums, gear bans, specific area bans, and reporting requirements. Granted China is still in a transitional phase, but implementing these sustainable fishery management strategies is absolutely a step in the right direction. Additionally, they built a modern marine industry system of research and development for new innovations and technologies. Ultimately, these Bangladesh and China case studies show that proper implementation could have extreme benefits, but requires multistakeholder participation, regulated monitoring requirements, willingness, and cooperation. Imagine this ten-fold with not just national cooperation in respective countries, but international cooperation and communication. The Blue Economy has so much potential, but without international stakeholder buy-in, support from the local communities, and economic willingness, ocean resources will become unstable and the Blue Economy sustainable practices will forever stay a framework.