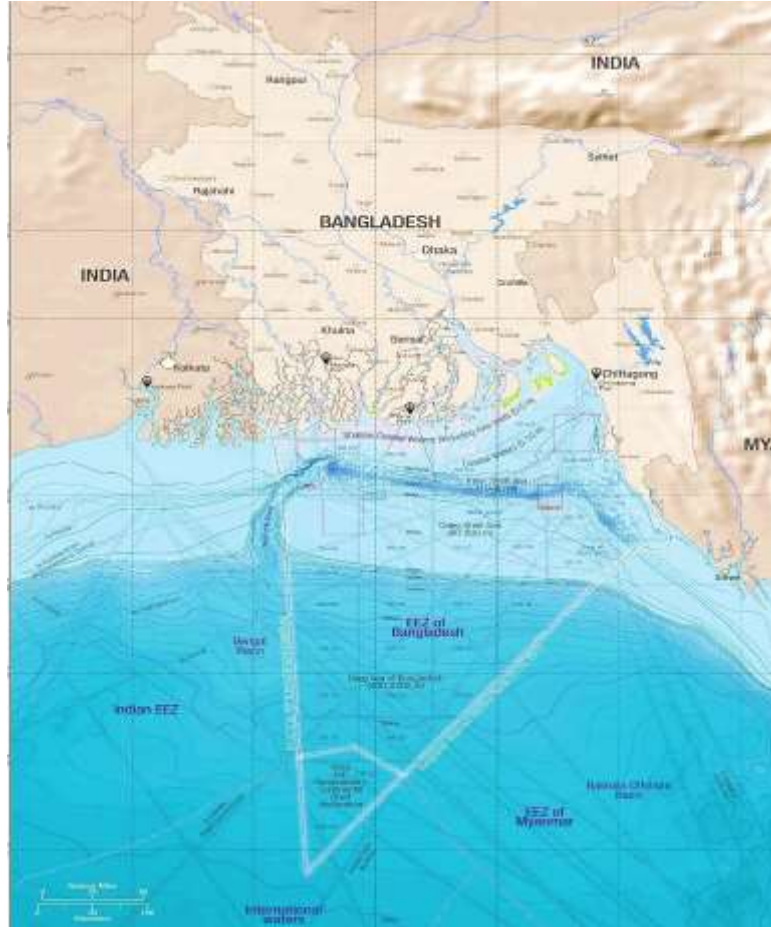


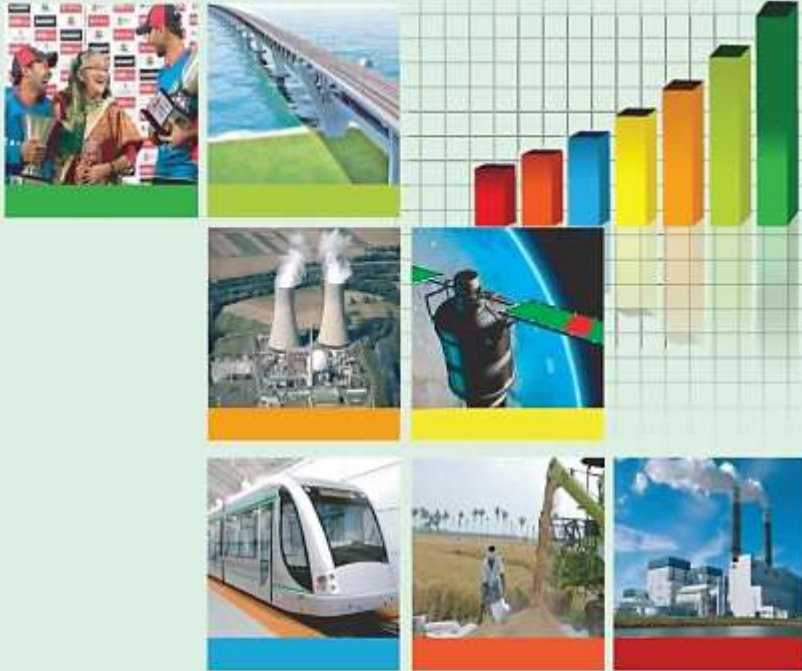
A STUDY REPORT on Implications of Blue Economy in Bangladesh [March, 2021]

COAST Bangladesh & SNEHA-India



7th FIVE YEAR PLAN FY2016 - FY2020

Accelerating Growth, Empowering Citizens



General Economics Division (GED)
Planning Commission
Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

BE Components – Bangladesh

Blue Economy is not just economic sectors, they cover the relevant maritime value chains – including backward and forward linkages. 27 **Blue Economic Functions** can be identified from among the following **6 major broad areas**, such as,

- i. Maritime Trade and Shipping,
- ii. Food and Livelihood
- iii. Energy
- iv. Tourism
- v. Coastal Protection/Artificial Islands/Greening coastal belts, and
- vi. Human resource, maritime surveillance, and spatial planning

An inter-ministry Coordination Unit for implementing the 7th year plan, **“Blue Economy Cell”** and **“Bangladesh Coast Guard”** to ensure Maritime Security and Surveillance of Economic development activities in the ocean and coast has been constituted as a Nodal Agency.



FIELD SITES- MAHESHKHALI ISLAND

This Island has been promoted as one of the prosperous regions under Special Economic Zone [SEZ].

It is loaded with many industrial and infrastructural projects where the existing dependent communities on the coastal economy including fisherfolk are facing eviction.

The Upazilla (sub-district) Nirbahi Officer, Maheshkahli shared about the SEZ where **18 Mega Development projects** [3 Thermal Power Projects, Land Based LNG Terminal, and other infrastructural projects] are under construction.

EIA and other clearance procedures were carried out the participation of people



The Fisheries Development Policies largely focus on Culture fisheries. But, in Maheshkhali due to having a good market for salt production, during the rainy season, the pans act as shrimp farms, and in summer, farms are converted into Saltpans by the private players which have a potential risk of increasing salinity in the soil for long-term and contaminate drinking water.



It needs to be mentioned here that they follow non-traditional intensive methods for the harvest of salt and shrimp.



The BSCM Project aims at monitoring and regulating IUU fishing in Bangladesh EEZ. But the mechanised multi-day fishing boat workers of Maheshkhali belong to the Hindu Joldas community and are employed as Contract Labourers for deep-sea fishing [Semi Bonded labourers] and are highly exploited.

So, it is evident from the fact that policies were framed to comply with the global convention regarding fisheries regulation and management, leaving the welfare and social security of the mechanised fishers at stake.

FIELD SITES- COX'S BAZAR DEVELOPMENT

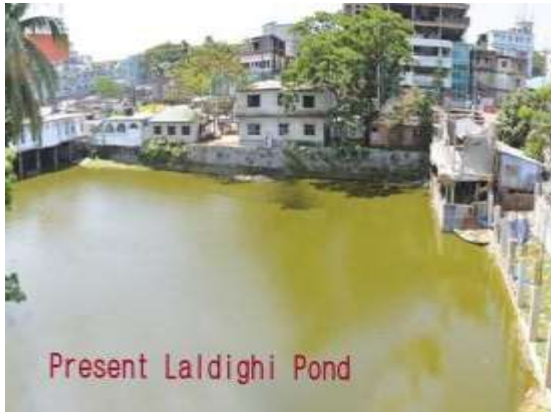
The *Mega Tourism Infrastructure initiatives* were implemented by Cox's Bazar Development Authority (CoxDA).

The Pond Beautification projects have been initiated in Laldighi, Golghighi and Bazarghata traditional ponds in Cox's Bazar city.

The department claimed that the beauty of the traditional ponds was lost due to 'illegal occupants' along the banks of the ponds. The poor households surrounding the pond have been served eviction notices already. However, they have not been promised alternate sites.

The *Cox's Bazar Airport Development Project* had been planned to transform the existing Domestic Airport into an International Airport with a runway of 9000 feet length and 350 feet width.

But this project will occupy long stretch of the Dryfish Yard which is contributing to the national GDP.





The Dry-Fish Producers occupied an interior long stretch of coastline on a lease basis in Cox's Bazar city.

The Dryfish yard workers are distressed migrants from different parts of Cox's Bazar and nearby districts. The entire family members work as daily wage labourers on a contract basis in the dryfish yards.

They are mostly poor and dependent on daily wages. They need to be compensated, rehabilitate and relocate to multi-storied buildings being constructed in alternate sites.

The fact is that their own properties are appropriated by the government for the public cause. In lieu of their tile deeds, they will be conferred with Assignee Pattas for the alternate site, with a condition that they can be evicted again by the Government for any similar development activity under BE.



Dry Fish Yards Cox Bazar



- The farm owners practiced Shrimp Culture. However, during 1996 -2000, most of the shrimp farms were closed due to the attack of the white spot virus. In 2002, these farms were converted to raising freshwater species.
- Currently, they practice Integrated Fisheries and Shrimp Culture, which yields good profits with low risk. These farms are constructed along the banks of estuaries and backwaters to ensure zero discharge of effluents.
- But it was noticed that effluents were directly discharged into the estuary.
- The farm owners also shared that they don't receive any subsidy contrary to the claim of the government and all investments are taken care of by them.

FINDINGS - Socio-Economic Implications

The BE initiatives such as Coastal Special Economic Zone Projects and other industrial infrastructural projects paved way for more private investments at national and provisional level in the coastal zones resulting in alienation of small-scale fishers from fishing, particularly women.

In Maheshkhali, the SSF were existing as a self-employed class with subsistence living. Due to the construction of SEZ zone, they became economic migrants and moved to the current sites.

Once again, they are facing the same threat of forced eviction due to the conversion of Maheshkhali into the Seaboard Economic Zone (FGDs).

Apart, the socially oppressed identity as Hindu Dalits status has added to their vulnerability. They were neither given alternate sites during the first displacement nor any disclosure of the reparation package during the proposed second eviction.

FINDINGS - Socio-Economic Implications

The Informal Labourers [farming communities, handicraft, and aquaculture] of Maheshkhali were displaced to Cox's Bazar and now employed as Dryfish Labourers.

The Policy documents and WB project were supposed to be ensured for better income living standards for women.

But during field observations, it was found that coastal women are living in the most vulnerable conditions as the coast and ocean resources are exploited for the establishment of development projects under BE.

An ongoing dispossession of resources and habitats was also found.

FINDINGS - Ecological Implications



The WB BSCMP project has encouraged and initiated public-private partnership model where all existing and available freshwater ponds and estuaries are leased out for large-scale coastal aquaculture and expansion of commercial culture fisheries. As a result, marginalized fishers of Maheshkhali had curtailed access to freshwater ponds and denied access to estuaries and creeks for fish catch.



The increasing economic scope of salt harvesting transformed many aquaculture farms into saltpans and caused a gradual increase in the groundwater & Soil salinity, heavy borewells extraction of groundwater for saltpans, and leaves Island with drinking water scarcity.



The entire Maheshkhali and Cox's Bazar City are being restructured with different industrial projects. But these coastal investment projects are likely to degrade the coastal environment and ecology. Further research is needed as they are still in the construction stage.



FINDINGS - **Political** **Implications**

Bangladesh's special investment package from China, Japan, and India to invest in SEZs can be inferred as a shift from State governance to global governance where the GoB doesn't have any regulatory/prohibitory powers against human rights violations, environmental degradation, loss of resources, and denial of usufructuary rights with the investors like global powers/imperial nations like China, Japan, and India.

In other words, the state is not accountable to protect and promote the rights of people. From the discussions with academicians and experts, it can be said that Bangladesh is moving towards more and more accumulation of power at the Centre, losing the democratic principles enshrined in its Constitution.



ASSUMPTIONS- From the Study Report

Ecological Externalities such as loss of biodiversity as an inevitable consequence of exploitation of coastal and marine resources.

Exclusion of Marine and Coastal Communities from their habitats, governance and user rights on marine and coastal commons, and resulting in loss of livelihoods by allowing oceans and coasts as open access systems.

Enforcement of Maritime Security as a deliberate strategy of blue economy towards increasing global governance.

CONCLUSION

- ➔ The empirical narratives of the communities, government officials, local government representatives, and the Civil Society Forum substantiate the fact that people's voices were silenced, and development-induced massive relocation of marginalised communities were increasing in Maheshkhali Island and Cox's Bazar District.
- ➔ Therefore, we would like to conclude that **Blue Economy adoption may be prosperous for corporate investors and global players. But the externalisation of marginalised communities especially the resource (Ocean and Coastal Commons) dependent communities is inevitable and inclusive growth of the policy is a distant reality.**

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ➔ The WB BSCMP project should be revisited from the socio-economic and political perspectives and should take immediate measures to regulate the existing culture fisheries and stop commercial leasing out of different water resources for culture fisheries to stop larger implications on the coastal biodiversity and violation of the rights of coastal communities over resources.
- ➔ The BE maritime cooperation Agreements between Bangladesh and India in the Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean region should be withdrawn. Because it is against the interests of the fishers of both countries. Moreover, they were not consulted while entering into these bilateral agreements.
- ➔ The Government of Bangladesh should stop forced relocation of coastal communities in the name of development projects as it is against provisions 63,64,65 of UNCLOS.
- ➔ The government should conduct impact assessment studies to ensure the protection of marine biodiversity and ecology and rights of the resource-dependent coastal communities. As there is no official research available to understand the implications of the cumulative impact of the development projects and the carrying capacity of the coasts and oceans.



Thank You!
