

# Is Bangladesh Planning for Blue Economy?

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Back in 2018, Bangladesh for the first time met all criteria of graduating from the United Nations' least-developed country category. The country has maintained its performance in the 2021 triennial review. It now looks forward to entering into the lower-middle income country group in 2024. The on-going pandemic, however has jeopardised Bangladesh's many development achievements, like poverty alleviation. In August 2020, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics confirmed that, due to the pandemic, 29.5 percent of Bangladeshi were poor in June- the poverty rate was 20.5 percent before the pandemic.

Nevertheless, despite the corona crisis, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Bangladesh had 3.8 percent GDP growth in 2020. Although in April 2020, the IMF predicted only 2% GDP growth for Bangladesh, the country surprised the world by achieving the third highest GDP growth in the world, only behind Guyana and South Sudan. As the

world was passing through the second pandemic wave in April 2021, the IMF predicted 5% GDP growth for Bangladesh this year.

In March 2020, as the pandemic was about to unsettle the world, the Government of Bangladesh published the Making Vision 2041 a Reality: Perspective Plan of Bangladesh 2021 - 2041 (PP2041). It is a follow up plan of the Perspective Plan of Bangladesh 2010-2021: Making Vision 2021 a Reality, which aimed at materialising the 'Vision 2021' - the vision of transforming Bangladesh into a middle-income country. As we are on track to achieve that goal, the government has prepared its second perspective plan to make Bangladesh a high-income country by 2041.

The final chapter of the PP2041 talks about sustainable environment, climate resilience, and blue economy. To explore and unlock the potentials of blue economy in Bangladesh-owned 118,813 sq km of the Bay of Bengal,

the Plan envisages appropriate policies and investments in a number of areas. I summarise below the major strategies proposed in the PP2041.

**Policies and Strategies:** Bangladesh will develop a policy framework to harness the potential of blue economy. Based on that, appropriate incentive and regulatory policies for encouraging private investment in blue economy will be adopted. A strategy will be developed to address the lack of knowledge and assessment of marine resource constraints by building national capacity and expertise as well as by seeking international technical assistance.

**Fisheries:** A monitoring, surveillance and control regime will be established for artisanal fishing boats. Institutional coordination between Department of Fisheries and Mercantile Marine Department will be improved for easier registration and licensing. In addition to ensuring small-scale artisanal fishers' full access to marine resources, small-scale artisanal fishing cooperatives will be motivated and facilitated for deep-sea fishing. A science-based management plan will also be prepared for sustainable marine fisheries.

**Regional and International Cooperation:** Bangladesh will continue its on-going initiatives with India, China, and the European Union for research and joint investments in blue economy.

**Conservation:** Degraded marine and coastal ecosystems will be restored and sustainably managed; sustainable and commercial farming, harvesting, processing, and export of seaweeds (marine algae) will be promoted; more marine protected areas (MPAs) will be established; fishing ban will be enforced for conservation and sustainable use of fisheries resources;

and institutional capacity and infrastructure will be built to survey, monitor, and mitigate wide range of marine pollution.

**Employment:** To meet the increasing needs and opportunities for coastal and off-shore jobs, skilled workforce, like engineers, navigators, merchant mariners, fisheries technologists, biotechnologists, and marine resource surveyors, will be trained through private and public marine academies, research institutions and universities.

**Tourism:** Coastal tourism will be promoted through, for example, tourism campaigns, establishing joint coastal tourism programmes with neighbouring countries, providing investments and tax incentives to tour promoters and operators, and developing year-round tourism boat fleet.

**Energy Exploration:** Bangladesh also aims to explore energy sources through off-shore drilling and exploration.

In addition to the PP2041, Bangladesh's Eight Five Year Plan (July 2020-June 2025) (8FYP) also considers blue economy. The sectors directly related to coastal and marine ecosystems and resources, such as fisheries, shipping, environment, forest, energy, and mineral resources, have strategised exploration and management of specific marine resources in the 8FYP. This Plan also discusses and strategises 'blue economy' as a concept on several occasions.

During the 8FYP period, for example, the Bangladesh Coast Guard aims at implementing its Coast Guard Goal 2030, which would ensure the protection of our marine resources an integral part of blue economy. One of the 8FYP strategic objectives of the fisheries sub-sector is to harness the

potentials of blue economy, along with stock assessment of marine fisheries and promoting sustainable use of it. In the telecom sector of Bangladesh, satellite technology is expected to support blue economy, especially in aquaculture, fisheries, coastal tourism, maritime transport and research. Under the local government sector of the 8FYP, the importance of supportive policies to strengthen fishing activities, including harnessing the potentials of blue economy is mentioned.

Under the environment and climate change sector of the 8FYP, blue economy is discussed as a specific activity to improve green growth in Bangladesh. Given the potentials of the Bay of Bengal as a source of untapped valuable resources and its position in international trade and commerce, the 8FYP envisages that "the Government will explore the potential of the Blue Economy through a sustainable mechanism and identify adequate policies which will help formulate an optimal investment plan which can contribute to sustainable and inclusive economic growth, employment, and well-being while preserving the health of the ocean." The 8FYP also notes that the Bangladesh Climate Change Trust (BCCT) developed long-term, medium-term, and short-term plans under blue economy. From the funding window of the BCCT, two projects were being taken for capacity building, awareness raising and socio-economic development under the banner of blue economy.

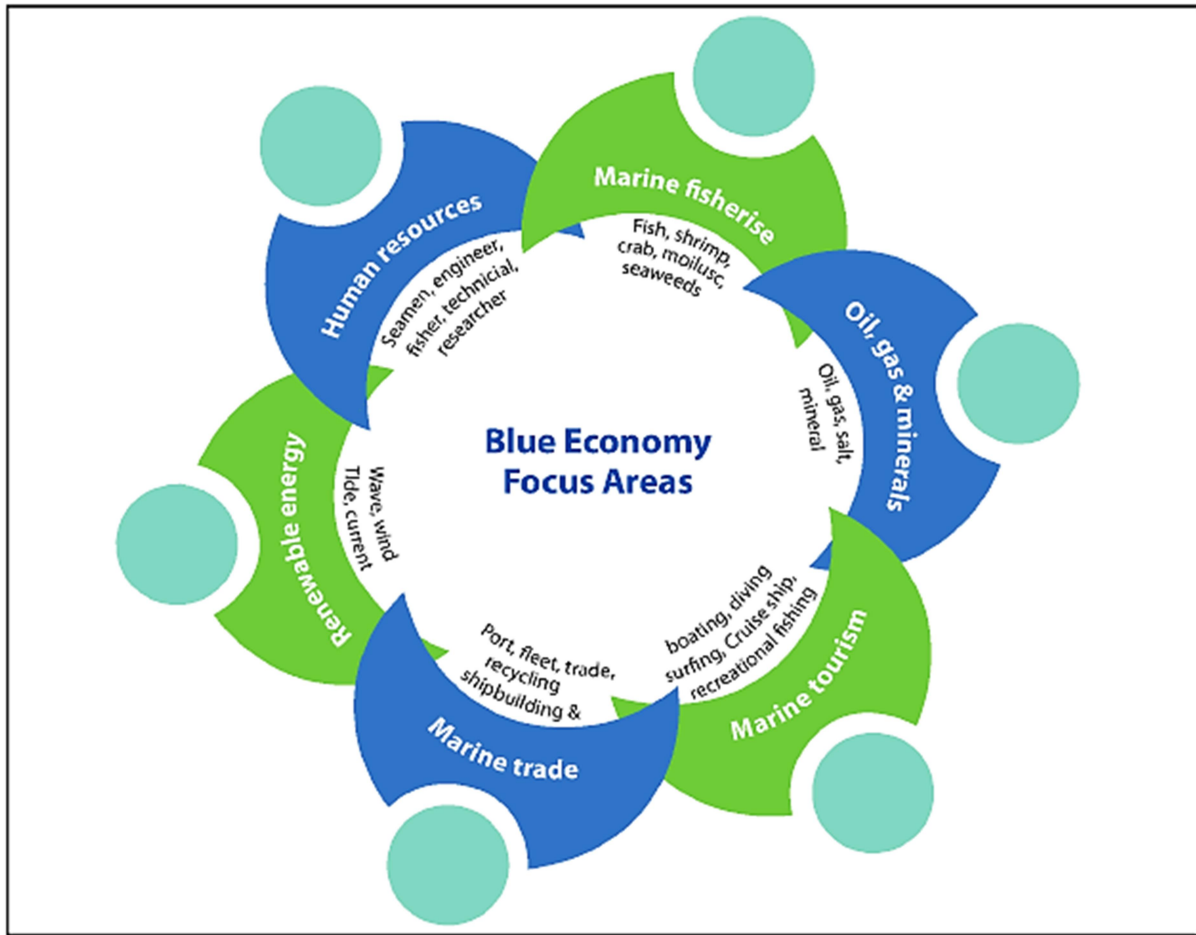
In 2018, the Government of Bangladesh completed the formulation of Bangladesh Delta Plan 2100 (BDP2100). Since Bangladesh neither developed blue economy nor substantially invest in it, the BDP2100 outlines blue economy strategies and

measures in the water resource management chapter of the Strategy (Volume 1).

To have focused actions, the BDP2100 identified several high priority sectors, with possible actions, namely i) shipping, ship building, and ship recycling; ii) marine fish stock survey, shallow- and deep-sea fishing, fishing in international waters, marine aquaculture and mariculture and maintaining biodiversity to ensure long-term fish availability iii) coastal tourism iv) renewable energy v) land reclamation vi) manpower and capacity development; vii) science and research and viii) governance.

In the last decade, several new institutions were established, such as Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Maritime University, Dhaka (established in 2013), Bangladesh Oceanographic Research Institute (BORI), Cox's Bazar (in 2015) and Bangladesh Institute of Maritime Research and Development (BIMRAD), Dhaka (in 2018), along with oceanography or related departments at several general and specialised universities. The resolution of maritime boundaries of Bangladesh with India and Myanmar, prompted the government to launch the Blue Economy Cell in January 2017, under the Energy and Mineral Resources Division. Recent media reports suggested little progress by the Cell over the last four years to take Bangladesh's blue economy agenda forward. In some government documents, for example, in Bangladesh National Report on Istanbul Programme of Action (IPOA) 2011-2020, the formulation of Blue Economy Action Plan is mentioned, but details on it are limited.

This article has shown how 'blue economy' is recently being addressed in three complementary short, medium



and long-term development plans of Bangladesh. The wide range of opportunities within blue economy touches upon many major as well as cross-cutting sectors fisheries, conventional and renewable energy, shipping, trade and commerce, tourism, coastal ecosystems, marine biodiversity conservation, regional and international cooperation, climate change, science and research, security and law enforcement. Blue economy is therefore a concern of many ministries, divisions and departments of the Government of Bangladesh as well as many private

entities, academic institutions and NGOs.

To take concerted and collaborative efforts in blue economy and translate our development plans into action, we need a strong, autonomous, well-resourced coordinating government agency to lead the way. Only then our Bay of Bengal would be able to accelerate our voyage to the 'Vision 2041.

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