

HOME ([HTTP://WWW.FT.LK/](http://www.ft.lk/)) / COLUMNISTS ([HTTP://WWW.FT.LK/COLUMNS/](http://www.ft.lk/columns/)) / OCEANS AND SRI LANKA'S FUTURE: TOWARDS A BLUE ECONOMY

Oceans and Sri Lanka's future: Towards a blue economy

0

Comments /  **1074** Views / Wednesday, 7 June 2017 00:00

0

4

All nations around the globe are celebrating World Oceans Day on 8 June under the theme of 'Our Oceans, Our Future'. While the



The theme of this year's Ocean Day is Our Oceans, Our Future - AFP

action focus of this year's Ocean Day is the prevention of plastic ocean pollution through events organised in several countries, it is more opportune in the Sri Lankan context to take a broad look at the overall theme in light of the growing interest in the Blue Economy as a prospective agenda for exploring our future opportunities in oceans.

Oceans cover two-thirds of the earth's surface and over three billion people are estimated to depend on marine and coastal systems for their livelihoods, directly and indirectly. Important maritime activities such as fishing, sea transportation, tourism, offshore mining and energy generation play a significant role in the national economies of many countries, including Sri Lanka. The expansion of marine economic activities can be considered as one frontier of globalisation. Unfortunately, growing human activities in the oceans, while helping to increase prosperity all over the world, are also responsible for the degradation of marine ecosystems.

Marine ecosystems fulfil environmental functions that are essential for the survival of humans and other living beings. The oceans absorb a major share of carbon dioxide emissions that humans produce, play an important role in the stability of global climate systems and accommodate and protect a major part of global biodiversity, making the world habitable for all of us.

These global ecosystem services of the oceans have come under threat as a result of human activities such as the over exploitation of resources, illegal-unreported-unregulated (IUU) fishing activities, marine and coastal pollution, habitat destruction and anthropogenic climate change. The impacts of such actions have become increasingly visible.

It has been estimated that over 30% of global fish stocks are being overfished beyond their sustainable limits. The ocean acidity has increased by about 25% compared to the pre-industrial era.

Marine pollution has reached alarming levels, making oceans the largest waste dumping site globally. In this backdrop, the emerging concept of the Blue Economy provides a way for balancing competing demands and lays the foundation for the sustainable future of the oceans.

Blue Economy

The origin of the concept of the Blue Economy is often traced to a book titled 'The Blue Economy: 10 years – 100 innovations – 100 million jobs', written by Gunter Pauli, first published in 2010. However, Pauli's concept refers to a business model aimed at transforming society from scarcity to abundance, with the help of locally available

resources through adopting innovative measures to address environmental and related problems. It does not essentially imply ocean-based economic prospects.

Despite Pauli being credited with coining the term, the concept of a Blue Economy is now being widely used to refer to human activities based on oceans, taking them as one entity. Unfortunately, it carries many meanings and interpretations, creating doubts in the minds of the interested public on the subject.

It appears that some parties are trying to emphasise the ecological perspectives, while others are considering it merely an umbrella term for all economic activities in the maritime sector, carried out using ocean resources, without any reference to sustainability aspects.

To avoid such misconceptions some international agencies have come forward with interpretations that are aimed at introducing a balanced view on the concept, emphasising its economic, social and environmental dimensions.

The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) has defined a 'sustainable' Blue Economy as a marine-based economy that provides social and economic benefits for current and future generations while restoring, protecting and maintaining the diversity, productivity, resilience, core functions and the intrinsic value of marine ecosystems being based on clean technologies, renewable energy and circular material flows keeping within the limits of one planet.

The United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) promoted the idea that a Blue Economy is a marine and coastal analogue to the Green Economy (GE). In essence, it implies that the Blue Economy is applying the concepts of the Green Economy to the unique and irreplaceable role of marine and coastal ecosystems.

These definitions help to dispel misunderstandings, emphasising the sustainability dimension. In the final count, a Blue Economy should essentially be a Green Economy. The legitimacy of the concept was further enhanced due to the adoption of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) by world leaders at the UN General Assembly in 2015.

Goal Number 14 of the SDGs, 'Life below Water', is aimed at enhancing conservation and the sustainable use of ocean-based resources through the wise management of resources and the protection of marine and coastal ecosystems from pollution, including the impacts of ocean acidification.

Prospects for Blue Economy in Sri Lanka

Being an island nation located in a central position of the Indian Ocean, adopting a Blue Economy strategy is not optional but mandatory for Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka has advantages, but also faces challenges due to its position. The major advantages for a Blue Economy include a unique geographical position, high accessibility to ocean resources from a lengthy coastline around the country, closeness to major sea lanes, sovereignty over a significant area of sea compared with the country's land resources, a diverse range of coastal and marine ecosystems and a high potential for tourism and recreation industries.

However, these opportunities also have challenges attached to them. The oceans around the country are highly contested by global powers and being a small player in a global political arena, Sri Lanka has to take a cautious path.

The Government of Sri Lanka has promoted a Blue Economy initiative under the 'Sri Lanka NEXT' program in October 2016. This can be considered a timely effort. In addition, the country aspires to become a maritime hub in the region, taking the advantage of its central geographical position and the closeness to major sea lanes. There were some steps taken in this direction, with mixed results. The country has been promoting its image as a tourism destination, with unique marine and coastal attraction, with some success. Despite these ad hoc efforts, however, Sri Lanka is yet to come up with a viable Blue Economy strategy that combines the strength of these efforts.

(The writer is a Research Fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka (IPS). To view this article online and to share your comments, visit the IPS Blog 'Talking Economics' <http://www.ips.lk/talkingeconomics/>)

Share This Article

COMMENTS

