

7th International Conference On Opportunities
and Challenges In **MANAGEMENT,**
ECONOMICS and **ACCOUNTING**

18–20 June, 2021

Brussels, Belgium



**Covid-19 and Blue Economy of Bangladesh:
Resilience, Opportunities, and Challenges**

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Abstract

Covid-19 has become the total destructive way of all economic sectors of almost all countries of the globe. Almost all countries are affected and mesmerized due to attack of corona virus or Covid-19. More than 54 million people are infected and more than 1.3 million people are died due to corona virus pandemic globally. Bangladesh is no exception. Already numerous number of people are infected and many of them have taken their last breathe. Like the other sectors of the economy, blue economy which is one of the most emerging sectors of the economy of Bangladesh has been severely impacted due to Covid-19 and deadlock as well as lockdown situations. There is no certainty of vaccination confirmation from the global medical experts. But this situation can not be far longer for the overall macroeconomic situation and for the sake of sustainable development and the successful completion of SDGs. Like the other economic sectors of an economy, Blue Economy activities should also be resumed and strengthened horizontally. The article has a focus on the resilience measures to adapt with the horrible nature of Covid-19 to sustain blue economy. At the same time, the study has a sanguine effort as well as sincere endeavour to address the opportunities for reshaping and redesigning of blue economy of Bangladesh from the lessons of Covid-19. The study has also an effort to detect the challenges of blue economy impacted or created by the demon Covid-19 and finally the study extracts some recommendations for the overall adaptation or development of blue economy of Bangladesh during the pandemic Covid-19 period as well as post pandemic Covid-19 proper functioning of blue economy of Bangladesh.

Key Words: Covid-19, Blue Economy, Resilience, Opportunities, Challenges, Bangladesh

Introduction

Blue economy is sea based economic activities. Bangladesh has a vast maritime territory which is 1,18,813 sq. (Hossain et.al, 2017) which is almost 81% (Islam, 2015) of total geographical land area of Bangladesh. Bangladesh blue economy is enriched with 26 sectors (Alam, 2019)

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which is really optimistic and full of opportunities and prospects. Some sectors are established, some sectors are emerging as well. Blue economy has a great potential in Bangladesh macro economy. After the final maritime sovereignty dispute settlement with India in 2014 (Hussain et. al, 2017). Bangladesh looks towards a futuristic prosperous sustainable blue economy. Bangladesh has taken already some great initiatives to functional blue economy properly. But, the ongoing global pandemic Covid-19 has been spreading globally in more than 215 countries (UNCTAD, 2020). The global various types of economic sectors has already been severely affected by Covid-19. Bangladesh is not a different state like all.

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Bangladesh's economic sectors are already heavily negatively impacted by Covid-19. Bangladesh economy is suffering like the other global economies. Even the richest and most developed economies are in a threatening situation. Bangladesh is entitled to developing economy. Blue economy of Bangladesh is a highly and promising potential economic sector. But, due to the global pandemic all sectors of blue economy is severely affected. Especially, marine fisheries and marine tourism sectors are extremely impacted due to Covid-19. These twin sectors of blue economy has huge opportunities and potential in blue economy as well as overall macro economy of Bangladesh. Not only marine fisheries and marine tourism, the other sub-sectors of blue economy like shipbuilding, shipbreaking and shiprecycling, blue energy, marine trading and shipping etc are also highly adversely affected due to Covid-19 pandemic. This is a very ominous scenario for the overall development of blue economy of Bangladesh.

Covid-19 and Blue Economy of Bangladesh

Covid-19 has become a substantial threat to all the economic and non-economic sectors of the world irrespective of any particular location and territory. Covid-19 has become pandemic already and it is a multidisciplinary phenomenon in the world. The spillover impact or effect has already been realised in the multidimensional issues and scenarios.

Global blue economy is severely affected due to Covid-19 pandemic. The blue economy heavily dependent countries like the Maldives, Indonesia, China, Australia, Norway, the Caribbean countries, the SIDS (Small Island Developing States) etc are severely impacted due to forced lockdown and shutdown of blue economy activities. Especially, the workers and employees of marine fisheries and aquaculture, marine and coastal tourism or blue tourism, marine transportation, marine shipping are extremely impacted. Most of the workers have been fired

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from their jobs. This situation creates a sudden and surprising unexpected as well as unpredictable unemployment phenomenon. Not only unemployment, this deadlock scenario creates multidimensional negative issues. Almost all littoral states coastal territories community is unthinkable affected. The unemployment and dysfunctional condition creates the poverty rate in a higher level. The contribution of blue economy sectors to national economies is already becoming neutral and to some extent it shows negative.

Like the other coastal countries of the world, Bangladesh is facing its ever-toughest time in blue economy sector. The marine fisheries and marine tourism sectors are highly affected due to the long and uncertain staying duration of Covid-19 in Bangladesh. Not only top potential sectors like blue fisheries and blue tourism of blue economy but also another topmost potential sector like shipbuilding and ship breaking sectors are also highly impacted. The workers and employees are going to be jobless because the deadlock and lockdown conditions in the industries. The foreign export orders of different marine vessels and ships have been cancelled by the buyers. This cancellation of orders is discouraging the owners, investors and entrepreneurs of the shipping factories. this discouragement insists them towards shutdown of the shipbuilding, ship breaking and ship recycling factories. This is really a substantive negative signal and landscape of the industries.

Resilience Measures Between Covid-19 and Blue Economy of Bangladesh

The indomitable approach or speed of Covid-19 is uncertain when it will stop its devastation. So, Blue economy has to adjust with the potential existence and blue economy has to continue its activities and functioning. Bangladesh blue economy has to find out the resilience measures to combat Covid-19 impact like the climate change resilience compatibility. The resilience measures can be as follows.

- 1) Redesigning the blue economy approach or functioning regarding the adaptation with Covid-19 setting.
- 2) Ministerial and Govt. initiatives to combat with C-19 to protect blue economy.
- 3) Maritime workers of different blue economy sectors safety at sea and till the ports or anchorage.
- 4) Daily sanitisation of the working touchable and visible machinery and equipments for blue economy activities at sea and on land.



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- 5) Scientific training on the horrible infection and contagiousness of Covid-19 among grass-root to top-level blue workers, actors and stakeholders.
- 6) Making bluer the blue tourism and other sectors in an authentically natural approach and paradigm.
- 7) Strengthening the reduction of shipping emissions which would be very much helpful to protect the ocean environment and ocean biodiversity.
- 8) Developing the environment of maritime economy.
- 9) Systemise all the associated sectors of blue economy which are highly impacted by Covid-19.
- 10) Strengthening coordination among blue economy associated govt. agencies, ministries and departments like Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock, Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Blue Economy Cell, Department of Fisheries, Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation etc.

These are the measures so far for the resilience against the Covid-19 presences and impacts on the blue economy of Bangladesh. Except the mentioned measures, Bangladesh has to take more additional and relevant resiliency measures to combat Covid-19 to protect her huge potential blue economy sectors.

Opportunities from Covid-19 Pandemic for Blue Economy of Bangladesh

Covid-19 has brought panic, disease, freak and pandemic. This demon has brought many mostly negative and passive approaches for all the economic sectors of the world. But, at the same time this Covid-19 has brought some opportunities implicitly, because every issue and agenda has both positive and negative aspects. The opportunities that Covid-19 has brought for blue economy of Bangladesh are listed accordingly.

- 1) Rethinking about the blue economy functioning and designing of Bangladesh.
- 2) More and dynamic attention from public sector or Govt. towards blue economy of Bangladesh.
- 3) Reallocation or re-budgeting for blue economy of Bangladesh.
- 4) New maritime policy or blue economy roadmap regarding the consideration of the existence of Covid-19 or pandemic-resistant blue economy master policy.

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- 5) More consciousness among the grass-root level blue workers and blue economy related industrial owners or proprietors about their employment having freak of being unemployed or jobless due to Covid-19 pandemic.
- 6) Rethinking about the strength of blue diplomacy and international blue economy connectivity of Bangladesh.
- 7) Rethinking about the involvement of NGOs with mainstream blue economy activities of Bangladesh.
- 8) Re-setup the blue economy mechanism about the adjustment or adaptation with the unpredictable or sudden pandemic situations.
- 9) More academic and institutional research potentials and emphasis on pandemic associated blue economy resilience and proper functioning.
- 10) Rethinking about the blue governance of blue economy of Bangladesh for the overall administrative activities of blue economy affairs in Bangladesh
- 11) Reanalysis about the SWOT analysis of blue economy of Bangladesh etc.

The above mentioned mentions are so far the opportunities that can be derived from the existence of Covid-19 in the blue economy arena of Bangladesh. Covid-19 is not only just a threat or challenge rather it can be adopted as an opportunity for rebuilding and redesigning of blue economy horizon of Bangladesh.

Challenges of Covid-19 for Blue Economy in Bangladesh

The challenges are enormous of blue economy due to the long-run existence of Covid-19 in Bangladesh. The losses and loopholes in the blue economy of Bangladesh are countless and huge due to the Covid-19 pandemic. There are lots of challenges, some are stated below.

- 1) Unemployment and loss of livelihoods of maritime ground-level to top-level workers, actors and stakeholders.
- 2) Increased poverty and unemployment rate in the coastal communities of Bangladesh.
- 3) Chances of displacement and migration of coastal people for the sake of searching new jobs.
- 4) Increased maritime piracy, terrorism, trafficking and smuggling.
- 5) Deadlock situation in the multi-sectoral blue economy activities.
- 6) Chances of being infected due to dangerous spreading tendency of Covid-19 who works at sea or onshore workers and employees and who works at ports or offshore stations.

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- 7) Hugely disturbed of blue economy sectoral exports like marine fisheries and aquaculture products, shipbuilding orders, tourism products etc.
- 8) Heavily impact or loss for blue tourism sector and sector related workers, employees and stakeholders.
- 9) Chances of increased criminal activities in the coastal districts of Bangladesh due to loss of maritime jobs and engagements.
- 10) Disturbance of foreign investment in the blue economy sectors of Bangladesh.
- 11) Negative impacts on productivity of blue economy sectors of Bangladesh.
- 12) Chances of significant decline of blue economy sectors contribution to GDP of Bangladesh.
- 13) Multidimensional social, economic, psychological and environmental challenges due to Covid-19 in the blue economy arena of Bangladesh etc.

The above mentioned statements are so far the challenges of Covid-19 for blue economy of Bangladesh. Not only the stated challenges but there are also lots of challenges for blue economy of Bangladesh brought by Covid-19. The challenges are both implicit as well as explicit. In fact, Covid-19 has some spillover impacts overall in the blue economy of Bangladesh as Covid-19 is a multidisciplinary phenomenon.

Recommendations

Blue economy is heavily impacted by Covid-19 in Bangladesh. It is truly and scientifically uncertain whether Covid-19 will be removed from our all kinds of lives or not. Global medical researchers and scientists have declared that the vaccine of Covid-19 is not a further issue. Rather, it will take time to invent the vaccine of Covid-19. So, adaptation and resilience are the unique measures to cope with the threat. Blue economy of Bangladesh will also be capable of adapted and resilient against Covid-19. Regarding the purpose, some meaningful recommendations can be drawn.

- 1) Proper and adequate Covid-19 protective measures in all the sectors of blue economy in Bangladesh.
- 2) Health, safety and risk insurance coverage for maritime offshore workers and employees.
- 3) Adequate govt. financial budget and incentives for adaptation and resilience measures in the blue economy sectors of Bangladesh.

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- 4) Awareness and motivational programmes among the grass-root level workers and stakeholders.
- 5) Formation of contemporary Covid-19 resilient blue economy policy and guidelines from the respective ministries and departments.
- 6) Adequate research and provision of funding for Covid-19 resilient blue economy in Bangladesh.
- 7) Effective, strong, sustainable step from Blue Economy Cell of Bangladesh.
- 8) Strengthening Blue Economy Cell for more functional and sustainable activities and initiatives.
- 9) Strengthening blue diplomacy of Bangladesh.
- 10) Innovation of Covid-19 or Covid-19 like pandemic-resilient blue economy technology for smooth functioning of blue economy in Bangladesh
- 11) Designing the implementation of rescue policy packages for vulnerable populations in blue economy sectors and actors of Bangladesh.
- 12) Extension of fishing seasons, when below total allowable catch according scientific evidence and without disturbing reproduction periods, so fishers can compensate lack of activity during confinement periods.
- 13) More strict monitoring and surveillance initiatives against IUU fishing, illegal maritime trafficking of all kinds in the maritime horizon of Bangladesh.
- 14) Strengthening Maritime Affairs Unit of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh with more logistic and financial allocations for carrying on blue diplomacy interventions successfully and sustainably etc.

These are the so far the recommendations and suggestions during the pandemic and post-pandemic recovery and resilience measures of blue economy of Bangladesh. The measures are multidimensional and multidisciplinary indeed because Covid-19 agenda is not only about medical science but also about technology, policy affairs and international as well as diplomatic agenda. So, Bangladesh has to find out the ways and measures regarding the associated issues strategically and of course sustainably.

Conclusion

The endpoint and concluding timeframe of Covid-19 is still unknown to the world. Like the other global multidimensional sectors, economic sectors are also under multidimensional threats. Like the other global blue economy sectors, the sectors of blue economy of Bangladesh are extremely

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impacted by Covid-19. Especially, the blue economies of SIDS (Small Island Developing States) and developing countries are severely affected. The functioning of blue economy sectors has to be continued and has to be adapted with Covid-19 resiliency measures. The sub-sectors of blue economy of Bangladesh must be in operation with the maintenance of reality of the pandemic. The resilience and adaptation measures have to be taken by the respective authorities of GoB. Especially, the safety and security measures have to be maintained strictly in the case of all sub-sectors of blue economy of Bangladesh and this is how, Bangladesh can achieve a durable and sustainable blue economy as well.

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