

Blue Economy Governance: Marine Spatial Planning

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Blue economy promotes inclusive and environmentally sound economic development without depleting natural resources. It entails balancing the economic, social, and environmental aspects of ocean activities, preventing overexploitation, and emphasizing integrated ocean resource management for economic benefit and marine ecosystem protection (Hassan & Alam, 2019). However, the blue economy sector is vast, presenting a challenge to the proper management and governance of this sector.

The success of blue economy largely relies on its governance. Blue economy governance is multifaceted; as various economic activities are intertwined with it. As a result, the management of marine resources and marine economic activities is crucial for maximizing our blue economy potential. Sustainable blue economy governance needs a holistic and integrated approach. There are several methods and frameworks for sustainable management of oceans-related sectors and activities, one of which is Marine Spatial Planning (MSP). According to the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC), MSP is

the process of “allocating the spatial and temporal distribution of human activities in marine areas to achieve ecological, economic, and social objectives that have been specified through a political process” (para. 1). MSP prioritizes balancing development activities with environmental protection in a planned way to achieve optimal social and economic outcomes, which aligns with the theoretical and philosophical foundations of blue economy. MSP takes an integrated approach, which means that planners can consider different uses of the oceans and their effects on the ecosystem simultaneously, which is a big change from the sector-by-sector management approach (Hassan & Alam, 2019).

Many countries around the world have successfully designed and implemented MSP, resulting in sustainable BE governance. Frazão Santos et al. (2020) state that 25 countries have implemented or approved an MSP, and 70 countries in total are in the process of developing and/or implementing MSP. Australia, Belgium, China, Germany, Netherlands, Norway, and the United States have revised their MSP

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and currently have the second or third version of their MSP in place.

Unfortunately, Bangladesh has no MSP as of yet, which is preventing the country from advancing its blue economy sector. There are four requisites for an MSP (Shuva & Uddin, 2021), namely: i) Maritime boundary, ii) Policy and legislation, iii) Coordination and integration, and iv) Data and information.

Bangladesh fulfills the first requisite; the country has secured 12 nautical miles of territorial waters and 200 nautical miles of Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). However, the other three requisites are yet to be addressed. MSP entails policy and legal bases as well as coordination between governmental, non-governmental, private, and research organizations. Although a few policies and legislations exist, they are scattered and sectoral (Alam, 2018; Shuva & Uddin, 2021). Moreover, there is a lack of smooth coordination between governmental bodies and different organizations (Alam, 2018) and limited data regarding marine resources, leading to the non-existence of MSP in Bangladesh (Shuva & Uddin, 2021).

The 7th Five-Year Plan expressed the desire to establish an MSP, and the 8th Five-Year Plan of Bangladesh briefly mentions increasing the professional expertise of judges in the field of MSP. However, no notable progress has been made in these regards.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to MSP. Countries that have successfully implemented MSP have differing economic activities with differing marine ecosystems. Nonetheless, Collie et al. (2013, p.10) identified some common characteristics of successful MSP, which are:

- a legal mandate and the political will to put the plan into action
- concentration on specific, practical objectives instead of broad, conceptual objectives
- inclusion of relevant stakeholders
- alignment of MSPs' standards and expectations with available financial and human resources
- receptivity to feedback and adaptive learning, along with regular monitoring

The current sectoral approach to BE governance is a huge obstacle that must be overcome. The government of Bangladesh should first take the initiative to ensure coordination among relevant ministries, institutions, and private organizations.

This article proposes three ideas for increasing coordination- i) creating an umbrella agency for BE governance, ii) enhancing inter-ministry and intra-ministry communication, and iii) establishing a government agency dedicated to ensuring coordination. Although the Blue Economy Cell was established in 2017 to manage the blue economy sector of Bangladesh, it has not yet proposed any comprehensive strategies regarding MSP. In addition, public-private partnerships must be strengthened, and the bureaucratic red tape should be eliminated. The country should prioritize blue economy sectors and set objectives according to its financial capacities. Furthermore, Bangladesh must bring all stakeholders together and lay the groundwork for blue economy policy and legislation. More research is necessary to gain accurate information and formulate contextual solutions to existing challenges.

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