

Transforming Cox's Bazar Into A New Development Paradigm

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Introduction

The aspects of tourism and development are two inextricably linked concepts. Since the 1960s, academic approaches to addressing issues related to tourism have been regarded as a part of the development stream.¹ The rapid growth of tourism as an economic driver all over the world is currently being evaluated as an option for development. Tourism is not a recent phenomenon for Cox's Bazar, as successive Bangladeshi governments have taken steps to grow the sector since the 1950s, although the industry progressed steadily for decades. It is a flourishing industry in Bangladesh, and its advancements are essential to achieving the country's sustainable development goals and maintaining a GDP of 7%. Currently, Travel & Tourism contributes roughly 4.7% of Bangladesh's total GDP.² It's likely to be challenging for Bangladesh to maintain GDP growth above 7% in the coming years, but tourism alongside RMG sectors have the potential to accelerate GDP development.

On the other hand, the Blue Economy is emerging as an alternative development model that strikes a balance between the commercial use of oceans and the continued preservation of the environment. As land-based resources are depleting, countries all around the world are focusing attention on the oceans as a potential new source of economic development and expansion to development and growth. The Government of Bangladesh defines the Blue Economy concept as a sustainable pathway forward for growth of the ocean economy.³ Components of the Blue Economy are rather diverse in

¹ Rahman, Md. The Impact-Action Model of Economic and Socio-cultural Impacts of Tourism Development at Cox's Bazar. (2016): 4. 93-102.

² Pavel, Shaharia, and Vijit Supinit. "Strengthen Bangladesh Economic Growth & Employment through Travel & Tourism Capital Investment and Visitor Export." International Journal of Management and Commerce Innovations ISSN (2017): 2348-7585.

³ P.G. Patil, J. Virdin, C.S. Colgan, M.G. Hussain, P. Failler, and T. Vegh, Toward a Blue Economy: A Pathway for Bangladesh's Sustainable Growth, Washington, D.C.: The World Bank Group, 2018.

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nature, ranging from fisheries and aquaculture to oil and gas extraction and other sea-related economic activities such as tourism and transportation. In addition, actions to protect the ocean's health have been added as one of the components of the Blue Economy.⁴ The process of harnessing and harmonizing these vast and varied resources has the potential to provide us with possibilities to broaden our focus on development and could possibly lead to a paradigm shift in the way development is approached in Cox's Bazar.

In the contemporary era, where climate change constitutes a significant threat to the integrity and security of not only a single nation, but of the entire world, it is imperative to consider and implement sustainable alternatives to development. Cox's bazar is one of the largest ground zones for climate change and is also home to more than 1.1 million Rohingya refugees who fled persecution in Myanmar, placing pressure on the region's already vulnerable ecosystem.⁵ Moreover, Cox's Bazar is a city situated close to the heart of the Bay of Bengal. With the US government's continued emphasis on Indo-Pacific strategy and strategic alliances such as AUKUS, QUAD, and BRI, the Bay of Bengal has become a central focus and regained its strategic significance. It is indisputable that Cox's Bazar has become one of the most key areas in Bangladesh in light of the recent development in the region. Therefore, changing the city of Cox's Bazar into a new development paradigm through the exploitation of vast sea resources and synchronization of sustainable approaches such as blue economy, tourism and ecotourism can help us achieve both our long- and short-term objectives.

Exploring the possible development alternatives: Tourism and the Blue Economy

The agriculture sector has historically been the most important contributor to the economy in Bangladesh. This traditional sector has considerably contributed to the growth of the country's gross

⁴ Islam, Moutusi, and Lam-ya Mostaque. "Blue economy and bangladesh: lessons and policy implications." *Economics* 2, no. 2 (2016): 1-21.

⁵ Sarwar, Md Iqbal, Md Assaduzzaman Sarker, and Md Abu Bakar Shamim. "Impacts of Climate Change on Coastal Communities of Bangladesh: A Case Study of Kutubdia Para, Cox's Bazar." *Young Power in Social Action* (2016): 27.

domestic product (GDP) before other industries took its place. The increase in agricultural output has coincided with a drop in rural poverty. However, due to a number of constraints, agriculture growth has been unable to accelerate the structural transition in recent times.⁶ Similarly, it is indisputable that the export-oriented RMG sector has made crucial contributions to the transformation of the Bangladesh economy. While the traditional export sector was unable to produce the desired outcomes, the RMG sector steadily injected vitality into both the export and domestic economies through linkages both backward and forward.⁷ However, after the pandemic of Covid-19, this particular sector in Bangladesh endured a massive hit in terms of order cancellation, loss, and salary cut. Several studies have found the scenario for the total RMG export of the country which hints at the dependency of the national economy of Bangladesh on this particular industry. Therefore, alongside these land based economies and RMG industry, Bangladesh needs to put more emphasis on evaluating the development alternatives like tourism and the blue economy.

I. Tourism:

Foreign trade, international relations, and business travel are propelled by travel and tourism, making significant contributions to the economies of both developed and developing nations by facilitating the pursuit of economies of scale, concentrating resources on areas of comparative advantage, and fostering connections between potential customers and suppliers in distant locales.⁸ This specific sector promotes a wide range of economic development opportunities in terms of infrastructure improvements, reduction of the rate of unemployment, and improving the quality of life for local residents by expanding the choices available to them in their local

⁶ Miah, Mohammad Dulal, Rashedul Hasan, and Helal Uddin. "Agricultural development and the rural economy: The case of Bangladesh." In *Bangladesh's Economic and Social Progress*, pp. 237-266. Palgrave Macmillan, Singapore, 2020.

⁷ Bhattacharya, Debapriya, Mustafizur Rahman, and Ananya Raihan. "Contribution of the RMG Sector to the Bangladesh Economy." *CPD Occasional Paper Series* 50, no. 6 (2002): 1-26.

⁸ Pavel, Shaharia, and Vijit Supinit. "Strengthen Bangladesh Economic Growth & Employment through Travel & Tourism Capital Investment and Visitor Export." *International Journal of Management and Commerce Innovations* ISSN (2017): 2348-7585.

community.⁹ It has also become a means for countries to differentiate themselves in the tourism industry by promoting their cultural heritage. Travel & Tourism is also advantageous to local economies since it increases labor mobility. Bangladesh can benefit more by accelerating this sector. In addition to obtaining these advantages, a greater emphasis must be placed on our tourism and travel industry in order to transform Cox's Bazar into an international tourist destination. Cox's Bazar, a strategically significant location in South Asia, has been ignored since independence despite its enormous tourism and investment potential. Coastal district residents were destined to exist by fending off natural disasters. In order to tackle these situations and make the region one of the biggest economic hubs in South Asia in the next five to six years, the government of Bangladesh has already taken several initiatives and accelerated megaprojects like the Matarbari port, the country's first-ever deep-sea port at Maheshkhali in Cox's Bazar and the Cox's Bazar international airport which is almost near completion.¹⁰ The government is also establishing island-based ecotourism parks along with a modern international airport and economic zones and a power generation hub in the district. Consequently, these ongoing initiatives to modify Cox's bazaar may prove extremely valuable in the near future, as they provide alternatives to our conventional development strategies.

II. Blue Economy:

Recently, in several workshops and seminars it has been urged to form a new ministry for utilizing the enormous resources buried in Bangladesh's Bay-based blue economy, stating that the untapped potential of the ocean-based economy can present a significant opportunity for Bangladesh. Foreign investments and exports in several industries that can be constructed employing marine resources in the 19,467 square kilometer resource-rich bay area and Cox's Bazar is a prominent location for this

⁹ Ibid. page: 593

¹⁰ Kashem, A. "Cox's Bazar: An economic game-changer in the making" The Business Standard. 02 July (2021) <https://www.tbsnews.net/economy/coxs-bazar-economic-game-changer-making-269590>


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purpose.¹¹ A significant portion of the economy of Bangladesh relies on the Bay of Bengal (BoB) and the coastal regions. By tackling the difficulties posed by climate change in coastal areas, the blue economy can potentially open up enormous opportunities for accomplishing the goal of transforming Cox's Bazar into a new development paradigm. Marine Fisheries and Aquaculture; Oil, Gas and Minerals, Marine Renewable Energy through Solar, wave and wind energy limited use, Marine Trade, Shipping and Transport tourism are few of the several sectors of the blue economy that offer potential for development to achieve food security and economic development objectives. The blue economy-related economic activities can generate jobs and bring about significant tangible benefits to change the lives and livelihoods of millions of people living in the coastal areas.¹² However, this can only be achieved with a government strategy in line with United Nations Environment Programme blue economy objectives.

The Cox's Bazar Development Authority can play a crucial role in assuring and harmonizing the goals of transforming Cox's Bazar into a new development paradigm in terms of tourist destination for both domestic and foreign travelers as well as facilitating the pursuit of harnessing the resources of the blue economy . In addition to carrying out those objectives in an extensive setting, this organization can also establish a comprehensive framework that may incorporate planning, decision making, management, and monitoring the strategies for tourism and blue economy development. This in turn will not only accelerate the development of the tourism industry and blue economy sectors such as marine renewable energy but also it will create job possibilities and maintain sustainable efficient uses of vast resources which will eventually offer up new economic prospects.

¹¹ FE REPORT, "Experts suggest creating a separate ministry on blue economy" The Financial Express, (2022) <https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/trade/experts-suggest-creating-a-separate-ministry-on-blue-economy-1658465514>

¹² Hussain, M. Gulam, Pierre Failler, A. Al Karim, and M. Khurshed Alam. "Major opportunities of blue economy development in Bangladesh." Journal of the Indian Ocean Region 14, no. 1 (2018): 88-99.



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