

UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL; SUSTAINABLE INNOVATIONS FOR EMBRACING THE BLUE ECONOMY OF PAKISTAN

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Published in on 17 November 2023

Weblink:

Total words: 773

Keywords: *Blue Economy, Sustainable Development, Maritime Economy, BERC, Maritime Industry, Coastal Community*

The Blue Economy refers to the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods, and the preservation of the marine environment. It encompasses various sectors such as green shipping, ports & Harbour, fisheries, aquaculture, seafarer community, maritime trade and industry, ship repair and maintenance, green ship recycling, renewable energy, uplifting of coastal community and maritime tourism. Aiming to harness the potential of the seas and oceans in a responsible manner. The concept of the Blue Economy underscores the significance of oceanic resources as a vital part of global economic development while ensuring their preservation for future generations.

As per the 2023 Policy Brief on Blue Economy by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the global value of the blue economy is estimated at \$1.3 trillion, and roughly 40% of the world's population currently resides within 100 kilometers of the coast. The Blue Economy is a powerhouse in Europe, contributing annual gross added value of nearly €500 billion. In China, the marine industry has experienced a remarkable shift, with its contribution surging from 32.79% to 56.6%. Notably, the added value of China's marine tertiary industry has surpassed that of the secondary sector, emerging as the leading contributor to the maritime economy. Pakistan holds significant potential, with the capacity to unlock \$66.5 billion by exploring opportunities within the Blue Economy. The National Security Policy of Pakistan (2022-2026) also highlights the unexplored prospects for trade connectivity, natural resource exploration, and wealth generation within Pakistan's extensive Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and coastline. Pakistan ranks 74th among the 142 coastal states in terms of coastal length.

During the fiscal year 2022-23, Pakistan's annual seafood export revenue represents US \$496 million. In contrast, China and Vietnam exhibit seafood export revenues of US\$21.2 billion and US\$11 billion, respectively. Back in 2018, there were reports suggesting that Pakistan's seafood export potential could reach \$1 billion. In discussions at the World Fisheries Day seminar in 2023 and PIMEC/IMC session, organized by NIMA, Engr. Faisal Iftikhar and Dr. Hafeez Ahmed Sial emphasized the country's capability to further elevate its seafood market, aiming for a substantial increase to \$2 billion. Additionally, these sessions shed light on the coastal tourism sector,

which despite having an estimated potential worth \$4 billion, is not contributing significantly. Moreover, Pakistan's mangrove area, valued at approximately \$20 million annually, is significantly reliant on the mangrove-dependent industry. Engr. Hussain Ahmad Siddiqui wrote in his Op-Ed, Pakistan has attained the status of the third-largest shipbreaking nation globally, considering both the scrapped tonnage and the annual count of ships dismantled. In the year 2022, Pakistan played a significant role, contributing 16.6 percent of the overall global shipbreaking activity. The Gadani shipbreaking yards executed the dismantling of 43 ships, accumulating a cumulative tonnage of 1.3 million LDT in 2022. This follows a consistent pattern of activity, demonstrated by the dismantling of 119 ships with a total tonnage of 3.0 million in 2021 and 99 ships with a cumulative tonnage of 2.3 million in 2020. It can be conveniently increased by three times by adopting modern technologies for ship recycling.

In recognition of the immense opportunities and challenges presented by the Blue Economy, the National Institute of Maritime Affairs (NIMA) has taken a significant step by establishing a dedicated research center, named the Blue Economy Research Center (BERC). This initiative is rooted in the understanding that a research center specifically focused on the Blue Economy is essential to drive innovation, foster sustainable practices, and address the complexities associated with oceanic economic activities. The BERC represents a dedicated effort towards advancing knowledge, fostering collaborations among academia, industry, and government, and promoting evidence-based policymaking. This initiative aims to conduct collaborative research, uniting experts, stakeholders, and innovators to explore, innovate, and implement solutions that strike a balance between economic growth and ecological preservation. BERC's research activities will concentrate on critical aspects of the Blue Economy, spanning various essential research fields. These include Sustainable Resource Management, Green Shipping, Ports and Harbors, Ship Repair and Maintenance, Seafarer Community, Maritime Trade and Industry, Maritime Tourism, Fisheries and Mari culture, Green Ship Recycling, and the Uplift of Coastal Communities. BERC's efforts in these areas will not only contribute to scientific knowledge but will also lay the foundation for practical applications and policy recommendations.

In conclusion, the establishment of the Blue Economy Research Center (BERC) by the National Institute of Maritime Affairs is a significant step towards promoting sustainable development and responsible use of ocean resources. It will focus on multidisciplinary research, innovation, and collaboration will serve as a cornerstone in harnessing the immense potential of the Blue Economy while ensuring the preservation of our marine ecosystems for generations to come.