

The Bridge Tank and the French Development Agency launched the online inaugural workshop of a series of 3 on blue economy in the Bay of Bengal in November 26th 2021

Context and objectives:

The Bridge Tank is in charge of organizing three workshops to understand the way in which Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka organize their blue economy strategies, adapt to the physical impacts of climate change of the fishery resource and to identify the priorities, opportunities and needs for action. By identifying contacts within marine, coastal and fisheries resource management bodies and influential national or regional think tanks for the research and operational departments of the French Development Agency (AFD), these workshops aim to open discussion with any stakeholders engaged in this topic. The spirit of the three workshops is a non-official, practical and intellectual exercise, which could have a translation into programs or projects.

On November 26th 2021, The Bridge Tank and the AFD launched the online inaugural workshop on blue economy in webinar mode in order to cast a first stone of a strategic thinking by bridging research and operational approach for oceans and marine resources protection, beforehand developing growing interaction between speakers for the following workshops plan in January and February 2022.

This first workshop aimed at earmarking new blue economy priorities for various actors and nations in the Bay of Bengal, bringing shared understandings and diagnostics, identifying opportunities and needs in socio-economic projects. It aimed to identify the regional context and issues related to the blue economy, in particular the improvement of living standards of coastal communities and resource users through sustainable management of fisheries and integrated coastal management to adapt to climate change, through two panels:

- Panel 1: a global vision of the **economic stakes** of the whole value chain of marine activities in the Bay of Bengal
 - o **Resilient coastal ecosystems as a crucial prerequisite for sustainable economic value chains**
- Panel 2: an introduction to the most pressing **social needs and challenges** of public policies for the Blue Economy in the Bay of Bengal related to food security, job security and adaptation to climate change in fisheries activities.
 - o **Sustainable fisheries and enhanced livelihood – interlinking of fisheries, food security, job access and climate change adaptation in the region**

Minutes report:

This virtual event brought together 12 speakers from 10 key structures working on the blue economy in the region, garnering over 100 subscriptions. Opening remarks were given by representatives from the host organizations:

Joël Ruet, President of The Bridge Tank, highlighted that this first workshop brought to the fore a sense of richness and diversity of the speakers in terms of country representation: from Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka, gender balance, themes, experiences and types of structures (e.g., think tanks, associations, university, officials, international and regional organizations)?

Jacky Amprou, South Asia Director of the AFD and H el ene Djoufelkit, Research Director of the AFD stressed the importance of oceans’ protection and marine resources, one of the AFD’s prioritized operations sectors. The AFD’s board has recently approved an Ocean Strategy with 3 objectives: improve the governance of maritime and coastal areas and resources; promote competitive, sustainable and inclusive ocean sectors and preserve coastal and marine ecosystems. The AFD has already committed 5 million euros towards oceans since 2018 with both social and environmental co-benefits. In South Asia, the AFD supports regional multi country projects for sustainable oceans, economic growth, improve livelihood and create jobs. To finetune operational activities of the AFD, a better understanding of the challenges is required. There is a need for more research and to know more actors and experts to back up the AFD’s activities. By organizing these three workshops, process is the most important to build dialogue between research and operation and between experts and policymakers.

Panel 1: Resilient coastal ecosystems as a crucial prerequisite for sustainable economic value chains?

Context & objectives of the panel:

Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka, rely heavily on coastal and marine resources. Their degradation will most likely have a profound impact on people’s quality of life and on economic growth.

The first panel aims to shed light on operational projects focusing on marine and coastal ecosystems’ conservation through **economic valuation**. This will help identify threats arising from a non-sustainable blue economy vs opportunities in a sustainable one. Three main challenges may notably be discussed:

- **conservation of marine ecosystem facing increasing pressure** (critical marine habitats & biodiversity; overexploitation of resources; illegal/unreported/unregulated -IUU- fishing),
- **risk disaster management in climate-vulnerable conditions** (environmental degradation, pollution/water quality, early warning, disaster response and recovery, cost-efficient approach of coastal resources and infrastructures)
- and **marine activities** (tourism & fisheries) **in a context of growing fishery stocks demand**.

The panel 1 was moderated by Jo el Ruet, President of The Bridge Tank and five organisations intervened:

- **Dr. Arnab Das, Maritime Research Centre, India**

Dr. Arnab Das is the Founder and Executive Director of the [Maritime Research Center](https://maritimeresearchcenter.org/) (MRC) based in India, a non-for-profit organization describing itself as a think tank, tech tank and skill tank and serving as a platform for the Underwater Domain Awareness (UDA) framework.

Dr. Das developed his intervention in four parts. First, he introduced the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) from strategical space and activities to issues, such as shipping noise, impacting marine species and resources. He explained that there is growing maritime domain awareness, observed by the multiplication of stakeholders working on how regulation and monitoring are important aspect for blue economy across sectors. Secondly, he presented the vision and the objectives of the UDA framework as an opportunity and an inclusive solution for stakeholders and policymakers towards sustainability, security and safety for all for the tropical littoral waters in the Indo-Pacific region. By sharing diagnoses, ideas & proposal points of action throughout the UDA framework, he thirdly presented several opportunities for coastal communities and livelihood and

partnerships were conceivable in the region. The UDA framework is replicable and serves to optimize resources, technological and political intervention for better actions. Finally, he presented project examples and solutions that can contribute to enhancing solutions to protect maritime ecosystem and livelihood, and increase knowledge for all on the topics, such as the snapping shrimp mapping project or the organizations of UDA Summer School to train experts across the region.

Highlighting the importance of fresh water and the integration between fresh water, rivers and maritime ecosystems, Dr. Das concluded his intervention with an emphasis on the importance of nature-based solutions as well as technology-based solutions.

- **Dr .Srinivas Kumar, Director, Indian Center for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS), India**

Dr. Srinivas Kumar is the Director of the [Indian Center for Ocean Information Services](#) (INCOIS) in India, an autonomous body under the Ministry of Earth Sciences of India and is a unit of the Earth System Science Organization. One of the main activities of the INCOIS is the observation of oceans to provide as much as possible information and advisory services to governments, mainly.

The importance of monitoring and information gathering to better address ocean issues was the main theme of Dr. Kumar's presentation. Even if there are different aspects defining the blue value chain and blue economy, there is one consensus: the need to observe, monitor, make measurement and manage data and use it for actions. He presented several methods and tools for ocean observations used within INCOIS for coastal communities, economic and environmental benefits, including the vast observation network in India, various services and data sharing to IGOs such as WMO or IODE, ocean prediction systems through modelling, ecosystem services for marine fishery advisory, coral bleaching alerts or water quality services or ocean state forecasts etc.

Among technical and scientific elements, which should be developed and translated into action for the communities and the regional environment, Dr. Kumar stressed that collaboration is key and required to better protect the coasts, the lands, the rivers and the seas, more particularly in the Bay of Bengal. By presenting the main issues such as the maritime pollution, the interaction between all and collaboration between the most are keys.

- **Ms. Hasamini Sweenie Thilakarathne, Project coordinator and international affairs officer, Marine Environment Conservation Society of Sri Lanka (MECS), Sri Lanka**

The [Marine Environment Conservation Society of Sri Lanka](#) (MECS) was represented by Ms. Hasamini Sweenie Thilakarathne, who is a project coordinator and international affairs officer. A young association, the MECS was created a year ago and is the only society in Sri Lanka to focus on marine conservation. In the short time since its creation, the MECS has already organized numbers of activities, such as launching educational and research programs, field works and many seminars. The core of their activity is to focus on engagements.

Intervening in this workshop was an occasion for the MECS to introduce their society and their activities and their understanding of the issues and problems related to marine coastal ecosystems' conservation, as well as giving their diagnoses of the issues related to the value chain of fisheries resources. Ms. Hasamini focused her speech on ecosystem issues and socio challenges related to mangroves, seagrass beds and coral reefs by sharing the MECS points of view from Sri Lanka. She emphasized the general lack of information and knowledge on the topics - something the MECS is trying to address.

As a new but growing structure, the MECS plans to concentrate in a second phase of development in establishing connections and partnerships, conducting awareness programs in coastal communities and continuing research projects.

- **Dr. Chime Youdon & Dr. Saurabh Thakur, Associate Fellows, National Maritime Foundation, India**

The [National Maritime Foundation](#) (NMF) was the first maritime non-governmental and non-political think tank in India to conduct independent research on maritime domains. The NMF was represented by Dr. Saurabh Thakur and Dr. Chime Youdon, associate fellows.

A short introduction was first given by Dr. Thakur, who presented the NMF, who they are and their maritime research-interest, notably on the incorporation of infrastructure, sustainable maritime infrastructure for climate change and how to plan these projects on policy documents, with the example of India' Blue Economy. Dr. Thakur emphasized four elements for the blue economy: the economy value and imperative, the geopolitical imperative, the sustainability imperative and the positive evolution of policies in 10 years. The second part of the presentation was developed by Dr. Youdon to explain their understanding of the issues and problems related to India's blue economy, its major policy challenges, understanding the role of Mangrove forests in the Blue Economy, the contemporary threats facing them and assessing key policy recommendations notably general public awareness regarding the vital role, community training programmes organization and increasing protected areas.

The two associate fellows contributed to explaining the integration across policy and coordination across policy as a key component for enhancing maritime domain governance.

- **Mr. Mashiur Rahman, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock, Bangladesh**

Mr. Rahman developed a thinking progress presentation divided into three parts: from challenges, action plan and national and international framework's presentation to structuring projects in coastal preservation's overview.

Mr. Rahman presented marine and coastal issues in Bangladesh and how Bangladesh has laid down initiatives according to the Sustainable Development Goal 14 "Life Below Water" with respect to existing international mechanisms and tools. The Joint Secretary shared that the blue economy is key for sustainable economic growth and value in Bangladesh. Having identified this economic potential, the country has invested into policy planning for blue economy, Mr. Rahman then presented the current time-based action plan developed by the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock. He subsequently indicated several initiatives and projects taken for exploring blue economy, notably for coastal shrimp farming, strengthening mariculture and a pilot project of oyster cultivation.

Panel 2: Inter-linkages in Sustainable fisheries and enhanced livelihood: actions on fisheries for food security, job access and climate change adaptation in the region

Context & objectives of the panel:

In the Bay of Bengal, fishing is one of the main economic resources, with three outstanding **social challenges**:

- **food security** (fish is the main protein source in the Bay of Bengal, with more than 50% of people's daily diet),
- **job access** (it is estimated that 70% of people are involved in subsistence fisheries; the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown have shaken the fishery activities)

- and **climate change adaptation** (the increase in extreme weather events, such as flash floods, heavy rains, tsunami etc. impact fishery activities). Throughout these three challenges, discussions focused on small-scale fisheries' projects in each country and projects related to inland and marine fisheries and aquaculture.

The panel 2 was moderated by Pranjal Sharma, Board Member of The Bridge Tank and five structures intervened:

- **Ms. Afifat Khanam Ritika, Research Officer of the Bangladesh Institute of Maritime Research and Development (BIMRAD)**

The [Bangladesh Institute of Maritime and Development](#) (BIMRAD) is a maritime research think tank, describing itself as "Home of Maritime Think Tank". To increase maritime awareness within policymakers and civil society, the BIMRAD carries out research on multiple maritime domains for the development of policy option, to enhance public awareness through seminar, conference, workshops, training and symposium and to put forward recommendations for the decision makers. The BIMRAD was represented by Ms. Afifat Khanam Ritika, Research Officer for the institute.

Ms. Ritika began her speech by presenting a regional focus on the marine environment and coastal community in the Bay of Bengal, as the think tank is well established and conducts regular research in the area. Ms Ritika embedded her presentation in the current international climate context related to the COP26, recently organized in Glasgow and on how the COP26 addressed credibility gap and future of climate change on Bangladesh and regional impact on food security. She then explained the interlinkage among climate change, marine fisheries and livelihood. Finally, Ms. Ritika developed challenges for sustainable fisheries management in Bangladesh, a livelihood adoption option to combat climate vulnerabilities by identifying several issues, notably expansion of fishing horizon and stopping overfishing or fishing gear to avoid biodiversity loss and secure livelihood. Lastly she exposed proposed solutions by the BIMRAD notably their ongoing and future action plan.

To conclude, her speech was aimed to draw past experiences that were harmful to the environment and communities in South Asia and more widely Asia must develop its own standards adapted to local realities.

- **Mrs. Runa Khan, Founder & Executive Director of the Friendship NGO**

Mrs. Runa Khan is the Founder and Executive Director of the [Friendship NGO](#), an international Social Purpose Organization committed to saving lives, poverty alleviation, climate adaptation and empowerment, created in Bangladesh. With 20 years of activities, Friendship NGO focuses its efforts with the communities and for the communities.

Mrs. Khan extensively explained in her presentation the local realities for the environment and communities, particularly the fishermen communities. Her understanding and prospective of human system related to blue economy in fisheries was illustrated by the immensity of the Bangladeshi rivers landscape and challenges, so big that the city of Paris could fit into it. Mrs. Khan explained that fishery is the main economic activity in Bangladesh. However, some fishermen communities have difficulties in finding fish, leaving them in poverty and to living in a vicious circle.

Mrs. Khan then showed a short video which presented Friendship NGO and its activities, emphasizing that Friendship NGO does not develop projects, but works with and for communities. It is human lives behind actions. Understanding the spirit of our workshop, Mrs Runa Khan proposed solutions and advised to the AFD to better invest in the region.

- **Dr. Fairoz, Dean of the Fisheries and Marine Science Faculty, Ocean University of Sri Lanka**

The [Ocean University of Sri Lanka](#) (OUSL) was represented by Dr. Fairoz, Dean of the Fisheries and Marine Science Faculty. The OUSL is a young university in Sri Lanka, which provides innovative solutions for marine, maritime and fisheries sectors and being the center of excellence in marine and fisheries education in Sri Lanka and in the region.

Based on his research experience on fisheries, Dr. Fairoz intervened on sustainable fisheries and enhanced livelihood by explaining marine ecosystem-based management. His presentation was developed in way to understand of the issues in the regional situation related to environmental, livelihood and socio-economic impacts of fisheries and marine ecosystems, such as coral reefs and on the importance of ecosystem-based management for oceans.

In conclusion, Dr Fairoz highlighted what have been done in Sri Lanka and in the region, what have to be shared in terms of technology and new process in this part of the world.

- **Dr. Md. Abdul Wahab, WorldFish, EcoFish Team Leader, Bangladesh wing**

With more than 30 years experiences on fisheries in the Bay of Bengal, Dr Abdul Wahab represented the [WorldFish](#) Bangladesh wing.

Starting with a short introduction of WorldFish objectives, mission and vision focused on food security, livelihoods and nutrition, Dr. Wahab presented marine fisheries resources of Bangladesh, blue economy challenged across sectors. In order to draw major issues in the regional situation related to environmental, livelihoods and socio-economic impacts of fisheries and aquacultures, Dr. Wahab focused his speech on the hilsa fishery revival in the Bay of Bengal, which is an emblematic fish in Bangladesh and constitute the most caught fish in the region by explaining how this fish found ecological and social-economic well-being outcomes and resilience.

To conclude his presentation, Dr. Wahab identified a series of action research questions for filling social and environmental challenged related to fisheries

- **Dr. Md. Sharif Uddin, Director (Marine), Marine Fisheries Office, Department of Fisheries, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh**

Dr. Md. Sharif Uddin is the Director of Marine Fisheries Office of the Department of Fisheries of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.

His presentation highlighted the fisheries situation in Bangladesh from an official perspective developed into three parts. First, he explained that there are two different fisheries activities in Bangladesh: industrial and mechanized/artisanal. Artisanal fisheries represent 85% of the total production and remain largely unmanaged, which raised economic, regulatory, statutory-and social issues. Secondly, Dr. Uddin presented three developments projects launched in the Department of Fisheries: sustainable coastal and marine fisheries project, Hilsa development and management project and a pilot project on tuna and similar pelagic fishing in deep sea. And finally, Dr. Uddin raised challenged and issues and way forward solutions for Bangladesh.