

BOOK REVIEW

Rethinking the oceans: Towards the Blue Economy, James Alix Michel, United States, Paragon House, 2016, 179 pp., ISBN 978-1-61083-100-0

The traditional approach to sustainable development is the Green Economy, which may be perceived as the outlook of a landlocked country. An alternative vision was given by Elisabeth Mann Borgese (founder of the International Ocean Institute) as she states “if before you saw the sea and the sea floor as a continuation of the land, you now see the land as a continuation of the sea”. The terminology of “The Blue Economy” was first introduced by Gunter Pauli in his book, *The Blue Economy: 10 Years, 100 Innovations, 100 Million Jobs* (2004)¹. The term was then picked up by the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in Rio+20 (2012). They wanted a Green Economy in a blue world and thought that this concept was most suitable for management and sustainable development of ocean resources. James Alix Michel, the President of Seychelles, took up this initiative and wrote this book. He presents many intimidating challenges faced by the island countries and why oceans should be looked upon by every country as future opportunities for promoting the sustainable development and well-being of the coastal communities. The United Nations (UN)’s active role in the development of the concept and its adoption by a few island states are major steps towards promoting the Blue Economy.

“Fearing the sea is equally important as loving it is”. The author observed that the sea is the missing link which was ignored when countries looked at sustainability. The Blue Economy includes aspects like fishing, shipping, tourism, seabed, renewable energy, marine environment and marine biodiversity. The book focusses on these aspects and how the current activities at sea can be adapted in a more sustainable way. The book describes that land is finite and so are the resources on it, and thus there is a need to reorient our perception to focus on the oceans. The Blue Economy has been described as creating wealth in a sustainable way, and thus a balance must be achieved between environment and economic goals.

According to the book, fishing is a key activity in the oceans. It is practiced in the form of artisanal fishing but illegal fishing leads to exploitation of fish stocks, which needs to be managed sustainably as fish is a major source of animal protein. Though the book advises solutions in the form of surveillance through drones, aquaculture and pressure by international and state organisations through bureaucracy, it misses out on a few more possible alternatives such as Regional Fisheries Management Organization (RFMO), Aquatic Diversity Management Areas (ADMA), and restricting fishing below biologically sustainable levels.

The economic value and the centrality of shipping are pivotal for island nations and ports are an important part of shipping as they facilitate international trade. However, maritime security needs to be enhanced to curb threats like piracy, terrorism, etc. by surveillance and regional coordination through international action. A sustainable Blue Economy can be attained if maritime neighbours can sign mutual agreements for coordination at sea.

Marine tourism is the central pillar of the Blue Economy. The book talks about the trend and purpose of tourism in earlier days and compares it to the current times describing its growth. It pulls our attention towards the current trend of rest and relaxation and the ensuing environmental damage caused by water sports, garbage dumps and pollution at sea. The book illustrates three examples to encourage visitors to find enjoyment through conservation projects, agritourism and education tourism, which can be done by using international

pressure United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) and national or regional policies as sometimes it is difficult to get support across the world. The author highlights that only with a will to cooperate will a sustainable model of tourism evolve.

The seabed is a hidden treasure which is rich in fossil fuels. The book points out the problem of oil spills on the continental shelves and explains that offshore oil drilling at sea is a high-risk activity which requires high standards of safety and management. Deep sea mining is another environment-damaging task which affects marine life, and such activities can destroy the local underwater ecosystem. To curb this, three important dimensions – ethics, technology, and entrepreneurship – are mentioned. The author states that the Blue Economy must be informed by science and the development of new technology, and will be reliant on entrepreneurial drive and ethics, and hence will ensure sustainability in the long run.

The sea is a spiritual gift and is also considered an economic treasure as it is a source of energy. The book explores why and how marine renewable energy like wind, wave, tides, currents and solar power are important, as resources like coal and petroleum found on land are limited. It talks about the existing initiatives adopted by countries like Portugal and Norway, and many others, and India's commitment towards the use of renewable energy as an inspiration for other nations. The author observes that limited means and technology are restraining countries from making full use of marine renewable resources. The book suggests that investments in education and research, and knowledge transfer, can overcome the problem.

A Blue Economy can be achieved when the waters are clean. The oceans have become the world's greatest dumping ground, as the book explains, and some parts have been converted to dead zones. The book brings our attention towards the problems of dumping plastic wastes, nuclear wastes, and toxic wastes in the oceans, and simultaneously demands an end to these practices. A creative strategy is possible if all steps mentioned in the book, are adopted in unison. Waste management, as a concept including recycling, treatment of wastes, etc., has come up in recent years and is a multi-billion dollar industry which can act as a building block to ensure clean seas.

The sea is an entity in itself as it is rich in biodiversity. A few countries have come up with marine reserves and several other regulations in order to protect marine biodiversity. There are two ways, as mentioned in the book, to protect it: first, tackling the threats and problems at their source; and, second, persuading governments and international bodies to declare specific areas for protection. The book highlights the importance of discovering biodiversity in the deeper oceans and points out two ways to do so – biotechnology, and exploration and extraction. These resources are used in vaccinations, pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, as sources of energy, etc., and thus there is a need to explore these while respecting environmental limits.

There are various questions which have emerged during the development of the Blue Economy, and the author tries to answer them in the last sections. The book clarifies that there is something new about the Blue economy and emphasises sustainability as an integral element. Another insight which the book provides is that climate change campaigns and sustainable development goals march hand in hand. Keeping the oceans pristine would represent an important contribution in itself. It clears our doubts that Blue Economy is for all nations, and not just for island nations. The Small Island Developing States took an initiative but it is equally important for landlocked counties to contribute towards a sustainable Blue Economy. It recommends that individual countries should adopt, if not the whole concept, a particular component of Blue Economy and should focus on the development of that aspect. The author says that only “committed citizens” can change the world. Such people need to have a vision and inspiration, and need to encourage technological innovation through knowledge and entrepreneurship, through supporting small- and medium-sized businesses. According to the author, only the UN has the authority to guide nations, and one such instance was the

enactment of Law of the Sea. Other ways which follow are short-term agreements with neighbouring countries for self-interest, awareness among people and their will to contribute towards the success of Blue Economy.

The author dedicates the last section of the book towards his own country, Seychelles, and its approach towards the development of the Blue Economy. He not only talks about the development, but has presented evidence about the implementation of his ideas. Politically, he has introduced economic reforms and created a separate department of Finance, Trade and Blue Economy. Seychelles provides a road map for other countries and presents itself as an inspiration. It also plans to become an important hub for research, education and policy development, as well as a tourism hub to promote the Blue Economy.

Though the book covers various aspects of Blue Economy, it ignores the importance of inland waterways, especially in transportation and tourism. Further, while the book mentions regional cooperation, it does not mention the role and importance of maritime security agencies in attaining the goal of Blue Economy. Nevertheless, the book brings together various aspects of the Blue Economy from a practitioner's perspective and would be a good model for other countries.

Note

1. P. Gunter, "The Blue Economy." 2004 <http://www.theblueeconomy.org/the-book.html> (accessed 17 Oct 2016)

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