

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

Enhancing Participation of Women and Youth in Blue Economy Activities

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Abstract:

A number of countries in the world have been recording growth in their economy. Nevertheless, the speed of economic growth is not equally reflected in life of individuals in the communities. High rate of unemployment among women and youth is among critical issues to be reconsidered in order to achieve inclusive sustainable development. Statistics show that women and youth as groups represent the majority of the population of the world. While the former group represents commitment, trust, and care for members of the family, the later represents strength and confidence. This paper examines blue economy initiative as important avenue for economic emancipation of women and youth and poverty alleviation. Taking the case study of Tanzania, the authors study the position of women and youth in blue economy activities and thereafter consider awareness of blue economy, education, skills development and access to capital as important factors to achieve inclusive economic growth through wider participation of women and youth.

Keywords: *Inclusive growth, blue economy, social economic wellbeing, sustainable development*

1. Introduction

Blue economy is a term that denotes sustainable utilization of the ocean and inland water resources for social wellbeing and economic growth. Although the term has been defined and taken on board in a number of ways, blue economy as a concept can generally be interpreted as economic development approach and as environmental protection strategy. The concept has been adopted and put into practice by continentally, regional as well as individual countries. In Africa, the concept has been incorporated in the African Union 2050 African Integrated Maritime Strategy among others, and thus adopted by individual countries. Countries like Seychelles and Mauritius are good examples of blue economy strategies and roadmap for economic development.

Blue economy activities that are distributed across a number of economic sectors including fisheries, transport, tourism, mining and bio-prospecting provide opportunities for improvement of infrastructure, industrialization as well as job creation for improvement of the life of the members of the society. In order to achieve the desired purpose, it is recommended to take into account a number of things including: - establishment of required policies and institution; prioritization of blue economy activities for focus; and take on board all the stakeholders of blue economy from planning stage to the implementation and monitoring.

Participation of stakeholder of blue economy in the country include the local community, regardless of how near or far from the coast they have established their lives. So far it appears that there is a significant number of women engaged in blue economy activities but they are low paying and others are entrepreneurs with small business initiative that are not growing. On the other hand, there is another significant number of youths who are considered to be the strength of the nations, but they are mostly unskilled and unemployed. Since one of the strengths of a nation lies in its population, it is high time to empower women and youth strategically in blue economy industries to achieve sustainable economic development.

This paper looks at blue economy as a strategy for economic growth and sustainable development of the country. It further discusses the position of women and youth as strong human capital for economic growth and the challenges they face along the way. Lastly, the paper examines a number of areas that should be improved to enable a vibrant participation of women and youth to the blue economy activities for poverty eradication.

2. Blue Economy and the Potential for Sustainable Development

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development which took place in 2012 gave birth to the new beginning of the blue economy as economic concept. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) defined blue growth as:

"The sustainable growth and development emanating from economic activities in the oceans, wetlands and coastal zones that minimize environmental degradation, biodiversity loss and unsustainable use of living aquatic resources, and maximize economic and social benefits." (Barbesgaard 2016, p. 5).

The African Union endorsed the 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy (AIM) Strategy as a long-term strategy focused on responsible utilization of oceans, seas and inland waters for job creation, wealth creation and poverty eradication. Similarly, the African Union Agenda 2063, inter alia, strategically positions blue economy as a major contributor for accelerated economic growth of the continent.

Although the term blue economy has gained popularity in this decade, blue economy activities are not new to coastal and island states. The sea, ocean, rivers and lakes have been useful for economic purposes since time immemorial. Maritime transport, fishing, and tourism and recreational activities have been dominant activities in coastal and island states. Through such activities some coastal societies have been depending for their wellbeing in terms of food security and family upkeep. For the states, movement of merchandise for trade and people have been largely move through water within and outside the state boundaries. Beautiful sand beaches and distinguished marine life have been a great attraction for tourist both local and international providing economic benefits to the host countries. Also, the benefits of fishing and sea food business to the economy of states cannot be underestimated.

The purpose of blue economy is found on common goals: to improve the state of marine environment; to upgrade human wellbeing; and to realize sustainable economic development. The desire to improve the state of the environment is necessitated by the fact that human kind and marine ecosystem are interdependent a various way including the great role in the control of weather changes and production of oxygen. Destruction of marine environment through irresponsible harvesting and uncontrolled utilization of marine resources have had negative impact on the wellbeing of societies especially coastal ones. Therefore, it is vital to protect and preserve marine environment in order to support life ashore. Marine environment that is properly maintained tend to produce more beneficial resources for the society, being it bigger in size and number of seafood, as well as peaceful access to the ocean for economic activities. Along the way, sustainable use of the oceans provides opportunity for sustainable economic development. Ocean resources provides food, raw materials for industries and job opportunities needed for economic growth at individual levels as well as at national level. Sustainable development is achievable through blue economy.

Sustainable development is in line with blue economy as it visualizes life that is economically sustainable, socially inclusive and environmentally resilient at present and in future. Likewise, blue economy approach can be one most important and speedy way to attain Sustainable Development Goals. Matter regarding poverty eradication, economic growth, creation of decent jobs, gender equality, life bellow water, innovation, infrastructure, industry and partnership to achieve the goal are all related to blue economy. Although many countries have embraced blue economy as well as Agenda 2030 of the UN, more efforts should be made to take onboard local communities without whom the world will not wake up to see the sweet dream come true.

3. The Role and Position of Women and Youth as Stakeholders of Blue Economy

Among stakeholders of blue economy there are national governments, private sector, local communities and financial institutions. The government's major role is to provide the roadmap that shows the focus of the country with regard to blue economy. For a successful leading role, the governments must work together with other stakeholders that play various roles for successful venture. For instant, the governments should take onboard the private sector which is practically the partner in job creation, blue economy investments as well as innovations. The local communities are equally important beneficiaries of blue economy and responsible for the implementation of the programmes and projects. Concurrently, research reveals that in the areas where local communities have been made an important part of blue economy activities, success has been inevitable.

Women and Youth are among various groups in the local communities that are intended to participate fully and benefit from blue economy activities. Nevertheless, these groups among others are often underrepresented and marginalized in decision making including in matters pertaining to economic development. It is worthy to look at these groups as part of human capacity for blue economy and sustainable development.

3.1. Women

Women form half of the world's human capital but they are underutilized and their potential contribution to economic growth and development of the societies is marginalized. Despite being inadequately recognized they have exclusive capabilities that contribute directly and indirectly to the economy of the country and thus could benefit the society more if well utilized. Around the world, majority of women are employed in generally low paid jobs such as domestic service jobs and agriculture. Equally in manufacturing industries, there are many women in low wage but labour intensive sectors including processing of food products.

Taking the example of Tanzania, according to the estimations based on the last census, human population reached 52,554,628 in 2017 where female accounted for 51.1 of the population. With regard to employment, the Employment and Earnings Survey of 2016 establishes that only 2,599,311 male and female are employed either in formal or informal sectors. Only 38.7 percent of the employed persons are women.

Around blue economy sectors, it is rare to find women especially in maritime activities including seafaring and on-board fishing vessels. Only approximately one percent of seafarers onboard ships are women. In Tanzania, women seafarers and fishers are rare to find. However, one may find a good number of women in blue economy activities ashore along value addition chain. With regard to fisheries, studies reveal that women are responsible for over ninety percent of

fish processing activities in the world. Like in a number of other African Countries, in Tanzania's fish processing industry there are many women engaged in fish drying, fish smoking, and fish salting among other things. Also, marine seaweed farming in Zanzibar, women represents the majority of the producers. Such activities do not attract a good number of youth and men because of the low payment.

Women have important role to play in economic development of the country considering their charter and number. They are known to be reliable and productive labour force; but also, they are recognized as more efficient distributor of goods and they are responsible with money. It is also accounted that the level of economic returns from investments in the hands of women are better comparing with those in men.

In another perspective, women are the trusted care takers of the families. Research show that, as heads of family they spend much of their income on food, healthcare and education. All such qualities should be considered useful in promoting the participation of women in blue economy activities. Consequently, supporting women's initiatives and participation in blue economy should be a logic choice for rapid achievement of sustainable development goals.

Nevertheless, women face a number of challenges as they strive to participate in blue economy activities and contribute to the sustainable development. Among other thing, they have limited access to the tools that would make them more efficient in production and earnings. Such tools include access to finances, training, technology and markets. Administrative obstacles in creating and developing enterprises for entrepreneurs tend to give women hardship in participating in economic activities. Furthermore, poor linkage to mainstream business networks and access to useful financial information and resources tend to push women back from the development steps. The fact that financial institution demand borrower to be wage earners and property owner who can provide acceptable collateral make most women are disqualified for such services.

Most maritime and related jobs are male dominant. Many women are discouraged by family and the society to be aggressive in finding job or establishing business. In some societies for a woman to directly participate in economic activities means weakness on the part of the men in the family. But the observed challenge in the society is that in most of the families where the man is the only bread winner, such families suffers the most once the man either lose his job or die. The contribution of women in the livelihood of the families cannot be ignored; and thus, they should be properly supported accordingly.

3.2. Youth

The youth should be a pride of the nations. The United Nations consider youth as torch bearers with regard to sustainable development. It is energetic resource that could harness economic development of the country. The World Youth Report reveals that the rate of youth unemployment is proportional with the increase in youth population. The world among other issues is facing the challenge of creating new jobs for the growing youth population while addressing skills mismatch among youth. With such high unemployment rate and unstable income, it is difficult to attain long term growth in societies.

In Tanzania, the population of young men and women aged between 15 and 35 who are engaged in formal employment reached approximately 841, 271 in 2017 forming about 36 percent of the population in employment. Among employed youth, very few of them are employed in posts that require high skills including professionals, legislators and management. Therefore, a robust blue economy as a means of economic diversification could create more jobs for youth in both formal and informal sectors.

Fishing, activities related to tourists, innovations in arts and crafts that are inspired by marine resources, seafaring and logistics and transport are among blue economy activities that are attract more youth. Nevertheless, such jobs they secure are mostly in low paid positions due to lack of required education, skills, and sometimes experience. Blue economy provides an avenue for innovations that could lead to entrepreneurship and create more jobs. Yet, there are infrastructure and financial challenges that hinder youth creativity.

Despite the existence of few job openings in the formal sector shows that, the largest proportion of vacancies in are for technicians, associate professionals and professionals, where most of youth do not fit due to inappropriate education. Therefore, finding decent and well-paid formal job is a challenge. Most of them are found in vulnerable, informal and low paid jobs that have rather negligible impact in economic development.

Research done in Kigamboni District in Dar es Salaam revealed that fishermen starts to engage in fishing for earning from the age of 15 or 16. A person of such age in Tanzania is expected to be a primary school education leaver, or a drop out. Some of them embarked into fishing to run away from school; some just liked the adventure; but other did it for fun and by the time they came to their senses they were already in their twenties and could not think of what else they could do thus remained in fishing. Majority of them have not received any formal training but rather they learn fishing while onboard fishing boat.

The size of boats used for fishing range from around 5 metres to 15metres, some of them being fiber boats. The boats engaged in fishing are mostly not the property of the fishermen, but they are only employed to fish. In most cases the income they receive is not sufficient for daily upkeep of the families. They agree that it is important for them to own the boats, possess good fishing gears and receive formal skills in order to earn more and thus their contribution to economic growth and poverty reduction could be more relevant.

Creation of quality human resource and access to blue economy activities, should pave way for development of sustainable blue economy. Specific focus should be put in finding the better ways to enable women and youth to participate fully in various economic sectors. Consequently, better utilization of the two groups will make a difference in the economic growth, poverty reduction and societal wellbeing.

4. Inclusive Participation in Blue Economy Activities

In order to achieve sustainable blue economy, no one should be left behind. The whole society should be moving together. Women and youth as part of the society encounter challenges that need to be addressed as discussed in this part of the paper to allow them to participate fully and have meaningful contribution to the economy of the country.

4.1. Education

Since quality human resource is basic element for successful blue economy, professional education of various blue economy sectors must be promoted at all levels. It is reported that women who are educated and healthy tend to acquire formal employment and earn higher incomes than uneducated. The fact applies to youth accordingly as statistics shows that current vacancy for formal jobs demand educated people. Also, informal education and programmes should be promoted for women and youth entrepreneurs to raise their understanding of the sectors they are serving.

Seafaring is among open opportunity for decent employment for youth. Nevertheless, for one to secure employment onboard ship must be sufficiently trained, qualified and properly certified. Thus, maritime academies and other blue institution that provide formal education and training should be adequately supported to uphold quality of education and training, while supporting youth and women to acquire such useful education and training.

4.2. Skills Development

Skills are essential especially in specialized services, manufacturing and processing industries which are commonly found among blue economy activities. Properly skilled women and youth will be more efficient and confident.

Currently, there is recorded a huge skills gap in the sector due to mismatch between formal education and practical demands of the sector, among other things. Training providers and other stakeholders of blue economy should work closely together to ensure that the end product is industry pleasant. Not only that but also, they should work together to ensure necessary training opportunities are accessible to women and youth. This method should be strategically employed to prepare more young men and women to take active part in diverse sectors of blue economy.

Life skills is another area that demand the attention of all stakeholders. Women and youth require financial skills, managerial skills and entrepreneurship skill necessary for decision making and strengthen their capabilities. Tertiary and higher learning institution should be well equipped to provide skills that will allow women and youth entrepreneurs to access employment in blue economy sector activities.

4.3. Private Sector Participation

Public sector alone cannot absorb all economically active persons in the society. Besides, statistics show that private sector takes on board a higher percent of the population of employees. Therefore, in order to enable growth of blue economy activities for job creation and innovations, private sector should be encouraged to invest generously. Legal and institutional frameworks should be established in a manner that attracts investments in blue economy activities. Blue economy priority areas should also be properly communicated to allow for decision making in where and to what extent one should invest. Both local and foreign investors could be useful so long as legal and institutional frameworks are well articulated.

4.4. Access to Capital

Most women and youth are engaged in small business with very low returns. In this regard, it is difficult for most women and youth to access large capital to develop their business. Financial institutions demand a certain kind of credentials including bankable project reports in order to lend financial assistance to businesses. Most of women and youth lack skills and exposure to such matters. They lack means to guarantee their capability to return the loans.

Special and innovative financial arrangements could be made to rescue women and youth from poverty and unemployment. Government initiatives to extend loans in easy terms and grants are useful but not sufficient. There must be established collaboration between public sector and private sector to enable high level financing for blue economy activities.

4.5. Awareness Creation

Although economic activities related to the ocean and inland water are common to coastal communities, blue economy as a concept could sound like a new phenomenon to many people. Survey conducted in 2017 shows that a number of Tanzanians including professionals were not aware of the concept of blue economy. Therefore, a need to create awareness not only on the concept but more importantly the opportunities availed by blue economy sectors for the local communities so that they may fully benefit from blue economy.

Blue economy awareness programmes should not only be limited to coastal communities, but also to other local community groups especially women and youth. Consequently, more women and youth will embark into blue economy activities for economic growth.

4.6. Infrastructure to Support Blue Economy Entrepreneurs

Strategies must be established to incorporate Small and medium scale enterprises into the large investments. There must also be well established connectivity between the ocean and interior parts of the countries and beyond, as well as blue economy activities and related industries. Furthermore, all places near and far from the sea and other navigational

waters, should have infrastructure to enable women and youth to establish industries that will add value to blue economy resources and services.

4.7. Involvement in decision making

Active involvement of women and youth in blue economy projects is necessary in the process of inclusive development. SDG's pledge for inclusion of all members of the society to be taken onboard development boat. There must be established effective means of representation of women and youth from planning to execution process regarding blue economy.

Building competency in blue economy activities will open doors for competitiveness and thus capture the market for blue economy activities and produce. With improved environment in all aspects of participation of women and youth, blue economy should be able to support industrialization, achieve SDG's and ultimately sustainable economy.

5. Conclusions

As among important part of local community, women and youth should be given a special attention with regard to blue economy. Some of them have been active in blue economy activities though in small scale and with minimal benefit. Others are not fully aware of the benefits of blue economy. Formal training, informal education, and unfettered access to finance will strengthen the position of women and youth in their contribution to national economy and accelerate the speed of realizing Sustainable Development in the country. Awareness of blue economy opportunities, availability of required infrastructure and vibrant private sector participation to support blue economy activities is also key to increase job opportunities and reduce unemployment rate among women and youth.

Blue economy is a special purpose vehicle to achieve sustainable economic development. It is equally a driver of industrialization. It is an opportunity for expansion of economic opportunities which can be accessed by the largest population. With absolute commitment to the empowerment of women and youth in blue economy activities, prosperity is in the hands of the societies.

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