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Original Paper

Blue Economy, Blue Growth, Social Equity and Small-scale Fisheries: A Global and National Level Review

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Abstract

One of the most promising economic arenas in the coming decades is the ocean and there are currently numerous initiatives to the 'blue economy' discourse that revolves around the argument that small-scale fishers' livelihoods require greater attention. To synthesize current scientific knowledge and address prevailing research gaps surrounding this discourse, I conduct a scoping review of global literature on the blue economy, blue growth, social equity, and Small-Scale Fisheries (SSF) analyse different international policy papers and national-level blue economy plans. To explore the need for further research, this review focuses on how different aspects of the blue economy risks lead to inequity in the pursuit of ocean sustainability. Based on the initial content analysis, I identify evidence for undermining social equity and justice related to the ocean and find that social equity is often overlooked in national-level blue economy and blue growth initiatives. This overlooking leads to or accelerates processes of coastal and ocean grabbing, displacement, dispossession, and exclusion which strongly impact the livelihoods of marginalized coastal communities, particularly, small-scale fishers in various parts of the world. The collected evidence suggests that there is a missing link between international policy deliberations and national-level implementation plans in the blue economy context. Numerous studies claim that critical re-thinking of policies is required to ensure the sustainability of blue economy trajectories. Unchecked economic growth in the ocean as in other realms can reinforce inequities and unjust and inequitable resource distribution patterns. To pre-empt, mitigate, and resolve likely conflicts, deeper insights are needed to address the impacts of the blue economy and blue growth on coastal livelihoods. I suggest investigating the causes of conflict and further research on how governance responds to sustain small-scale fisheries while embracing the blue economy and blue growth agendas.

Keywords

blue economy, blue growth, equity, small-scale fisheries, conflicts

1. Introduction

Coastal and marine economies provide support to millions of people worldwide (Ebarvia, 2016). Marine and coastal spaces are crowded and becoming busier and the perceptions towards the ocean have changed gradually. Once discussed as a common heritage of mankind (Pardo, 1984), the tragedy of the commons (Berkes et al., 2006), ecological frontiers (Steinberg, 2008), oceans along with coastal areas are now viewed as epistemological frontiers (Havice and Zalik, 2019) and as new economic frontiers (Bennett et al., 2021). In addition to fisheries and serving as navigational waterways, oceans are evolving into a hub for sustainable commercial activities, which could contribute positively towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the UN 2030 agenda (Golden et al., 2017).

After Pauli's (2010) coining of the Blue Economy (BE) concept and the United Nations (UN) conference on Sustainable Development Rio+20 in 2012, the BE in the wake of the green economy has emerged as a paradigm to harness development with a wide range of issues associated with the marine and coastal economy (UNCTAD, 2012; Bohler, 2018; Mostaque, 2018; Midlen, 2021). Oceans have received particular attention under the BE concept (Silver et al., 2015) and ocean governance discourses have revolved primarily around BE in the last decade (Brent et al., 2018), reinforcing linkages between ocean ecological systems and human activities in the context of ocean economies (Patil et al., 2016). The estimated global income from BE is US$ 24 trillion, which is US$ 2.5 trillion annually (OECD, 2016). These estimates are significant because the oceans are seen as crucial to post-pandemic global economic growth (Northrop et al., 2020).

The term 'blue economy' is sometimes used interchangeably with 'blue growth', 'ocean economy', 'marine economy', or 'maritime economy' (Martínez-Vázquez & Valenciano, 2021). These terms lack clear distinction in practice and principle, and are adopted by different actors based on their goals and agendas (Silver et al., 2015; Voyer et al., 2018). Moreover, the objectives and interests of different stakeholder groups compete to embrace BE due to their different value systems. For instance, the economic objectives of BE are likely to be incompatible with conservation and social equity goals (Voyer & Leeuwen, 2019). The prevailing economic objectives could lead to 'blue acceleration' (Jouffray et al., 2020) and the ocean equivalent of the great acceleration that characterizes the post-1950 global social-ecological system dynamics. To achieve the SDGs, sustainable management of ocean resources is crucial. In line with the increased attention to the oceans, many countries have incorporated and implemented the BE concept in their policies. Countries such as Seychelles and Kenya have formed or employed entire ministries and departments to address BE (Brent et al., 2018). BE could promote economic well-being, improve livelihoods, and social inclusion through judicious and sustainable management of coastal resources (EC, 2020). In addition to developing BE, coastal policy-makers need to ensure connection among societies, economies, and biosphere to reflect SDG goals in the desired future pathways (Nash et al., 2020).

1.1 BG and BE

The term ‘blue growth (BG)’ revolves around the idea of the ‘blue economy’ in much of the literature (Mulazzani and Malorgio, 2017). Lillebø et al. (2017) argue that the European Commission’s (2012) BG agenda focus on maritime economic activities, while Burgess et al. (2018) consider BG to manage complex marine social-ecological systems holistically. Approximately 1 to 5 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) of many developing countries is generated by ocean-based economies (Kildow, 2010). As proposed by the European Commission (2021), a paradigm shift from ‘blue growth’ to a ‘sustainable blue economy’ is important to reduce the cumulative impacts of ocean-based economic activities. BG does not have a specified definition and varies widely depending on context, region, and priorities (Eikeset et al., 2018), it has been adopted by different regional and international institutions to develop their policies related to BE. Guerreiro (2021) claims that BE or BG is a system with overlaps between state politics, privatization, and scientific advancement and new marine industries are becoming the political agenda (van den Burg et al., 2019). I consider the working definition of a sustainable blue economy from WWF (2018) and IRP (2021): “*a Blue Economy is an ocean-based economy that provides equitably distributed social and economic benefits for current and future generations while restoring and protecting the intrinsic value and functionality of coastal and marine ecosystems and is based on clean technologies and circular material flows.”*

The concepts of BE and BG are also promising in addressing problems such as natural resource depletion and climate change by creating a new platform to minimize environmental impacts (Bowen et al., 2011; Yarkina and Natalia, 2021). Originally, the main sectors of BE or BG were coastal and marine tourism, renewable energy, aquaculture, minerals, and biotechnology (EC, 2010), and various nations added other potential sectors such as fisheries, offshore hydrocarbons, salt, water, transportation, ship and boat building, blue biotechnology, deep sea mining, and nautical tourism. (Klinger et al., 2017; EC, 2017; Guerreiro, 2021). The appetite for exploration and exploitation of oil, gas, minerals, proteins, and energy is exacerbating pressures on the oceans (Brent et al., 2018). Multiple use of marine space in the form of both synergistic (e.g., renewable energy and tourism) and antagonistic (e.g., fishing and drilling) sectors (Crona et al., 2021) require ‘spatial efficiency’ (Kyvelou, 2021). With increasing BE activities and associated challenges (Bellanger et al., 2020), researchers and policy-makers are calling for better analysis of BE (Wenhai et al., 2019). In addition, the United Nations “Decade of Ocean Science and Sustainable Development” aims to restore ocean health and provides a common platform for ocean stakeholders worldwide (Lee et al., 2020).

1.2 Equity

Social equity[1] and justice are generally concerned with how people are treated equitably with respect to the effects of an event, intervention, institution, or other factors. Equity is a growing theme in global policy deliberations, decision-making, and designing interventions for coastal and ocean conservation, management, and BE initiatives (Bennett, 2022a; UNDP Human Development Report, 2022). Concepts such as marine justice, ocean justice, ocean equity, eco-justice, and blue justice are well established in the scientific literature (Silver et al., 2015; Martin et al., 2019; Armstrong, 2020; Österblom et al., 2020; Bennett et al., 2021). 'Blue justice' is an approach adopted by researchers, communities, development partners, and research networks (e.g. TBTI[2]) to critically assess the implications of BE development initiatives for SSF (Beerwinkel, 2019; Jentoft, 2019). Inequities contribute to generating conflicts and struggles over coastal and ocean resources (Finkbeiner et al., 2017; Homer-Dixon, 1994)[3]. The mounting interest to consider social equity in international ocean governance and framework is promising (Ulloa, 2017; Österblom et al., 2020; Engen et al., 2021; Bennett, 2022a).

1.3 Small-scale Fisheries (SSF)

The discourses around BE describe oceans as serving as *natural capital*, *good business potentials*, *integral to Pacific Small Island Developing States* and *small-scale fishers' livelihoods* (Silver et al. 2015). In this review, I focus on the livelihoods and human rights of small-scale fishers in light of BE. Small-scale fisheries (hereafter SSF) or artisanal fisheries are an integral part of this review because they are a lever for achieving the goals of the UN SDG. SSF plays a significant role in the ocean-based economy as it has the highest participation of men and women among the ocean-centric sectors (World Bank, FAO, WorldFish, 2012; OECD, 2016). About 90% of the world's fisheries workforce belongs to SSF, and it contributes to the coastal livelihoods (FAO, 2020; Smallhorn-West et al., 2022). The SSF is threatened by overfishing, improper management, governance, and a resulting lack of sustainability (Rashid et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2021). Moreover, small-scale fishing communities are vulnerable to economic and social exclusion, direct exposure to natural hazards, and a range of harmful instabilities such as pirate attacks, collisions with larger boats, and engine failure (Islam and Chuenpagdee, 2013; Rahman and Schmidlin, 2019), and a wide range of embedded social and economic injustice (Deb, 2009) requiring immediate blue justice actions (Chuenpagdee, 2020; Bennett et al., 2021). Although SSF is being studied in different contexts of the world, its adaptive capacity for transformative change is largely unexplored (Villasante et al., 2022). Less attention has been paid to marine social research focusing on fishers'

[1] Österblom et al. (2020, p. 24) state ocean equity '*as a systematic feature of the current ocean economy. It is embedded in existing political and economic systems, the result of historical legacies and prevailing norms. This has brought global environmental challenges and negative effects on human well-being*.'

[2] TBTI (Too Big To Ignore) is a global research network and knowledge mobilization partnership. See www.toobigtoignore.net

[3] Recently, Bennett (2022) categorises types of ocean equity as *Recognitional* (consideration and acknowledging local rights, cultural diversity, value practices, and knowledge systems) *Procedural* (inclusion and participation in the decision-making process, accountability, and transparency in getting information), *Distributional* (fairness and equitable distribution), *Management* (local leadership and their active engagement, ensuring policies and sustainable financial management), *Environmental* (conservation, protection of ecosystems, tangible benefits to local) and *Contextual* (broader contextual factors such as economics, governance, social structure, environment or law influence social equity).

struggles, power relations, and collective social action (Deb, 2009; Pauly, 2017; Bavinck et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2021).

By exploring the contexts of SSF in the emergence of BE and BG initiatives, this article synthesizes gaps in BE research and policy documents. Finally, this review aims to promote the inclusion of the various dimensions of social equity in BE research and policy. The next section describes the process of this review. I then explain evidence and incidents associated with social inequity generations analysing selected peer-reviewed articles and international and national policy documents. The final section of this article summarizes key gaps and calls for an explicit way forward attention to social equity in the BE initiatives.

2. Material and Methods

2.1 Scoping review

This scoping review was conducted using scholarly publications focused primarily on selected constructs (i.e., blue economy, blue growth, social equity, and small-scale fisheries). However, to comprehend the search, I used terms such as 'marine economy', 'ocean economy', 'social equity', and 'blue justice' along with other related keywords and synonyms such as inequity, equality, inequality, coastal growth, coastal megaprojects, etc. The keywords were considered to discover new lines of findings to answer the research question and guide the review. An iterative database search was conducted filtering by topics in the title, abstracts, and keywords. The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA, Figure 1) system (Moher et al., 2009; Haddaway et al., 2020) was used to identify articles from the SCOPUS (www.scopus.com) and Web of Science (WoS) (www.webofscience.com) databases. Core collections from these databases visualizing scientific output over time until April 2022 were extracted from these databases and updated in August 2022. Scopus and WoS are reliable and globally recognized databases that provide multidisciplinary scientific outputs in exclusive and reputed journals (Mongeon and Paul-Hus, 2016).

To ensure the completeness of the data, a WoS search was performed following the initial search from Scopus, to make the review comprehensive (Harzing and Alakangas, 2016; Martin-Martin et al., 2018). Articles were limited to the English language (Drubin and Kellogg, 2012) and peer-reviewed with due consideration to impact factors in journal citation reports (Dahl, 2015) and open access criteria. Based on previous systematic literature review research, an inclusion and exclusion criterion (following Nejad et al., 2021; Bretas and Alon, 2021) was established to select research articles from the initial search to address research questions. After the primary search in WoS and Scopus, I found 1423 articles that met my study objective. After removing duplicates from both databases, the number of articles was 1008. In the next phase, the title and abstracts of the 1008 publications were studied and 74 articles (n = 74) were found that were primarily relevant to my research question.

2.2 Backward search

A 'backward search (Horsley et al., 2011)' was conducted using the reference lists of publications from the primary records (n = 74) to avoid the underrepresentation of important and recent research articles. These sources were evaluated and selected based on the criteria of reliability, validity, accuracy, authority, timeliness, and point of view or bias (Taylor and Dalal, 2014). Based on this backward search strategy, I add 64 potential publications in the selection avoiding duplication issues and found 138 (n = 138) final records.

These articles (n = 138) were studied to align with the eligibility criteria I established for content analysis. In this study, 86 articles were found that met the criteria we established. To check the representativeness of the keywords, a word frequency analysis (Figure 2) was conducted using Vosviewer software with regard to blue economy and blue growth research articles from the initial search (n = 1008). This analysis was conducted to study the position of social equity, inequity, equality, and inequality in the scientific literature related to BE and BG. Moreover, this analysis reveals if any central terms or aspects of blue economy and blue growth were missing in the search method.

2.3 National-level blue economy policy documents and research article selection

Another part of the search strategy retrieves blue economy policy documents at the national level (Table 1), implementation plans, and strategic frameworks that have either been finalized or drafted by national governments or proposed by researchers. It is always a challenge to select national-level policy documents because different countries have different levels of institutional setup to implement BE. Few countries have finalized their BE policy documents and implementation frameworks, some countries are working on their BE plans and some countries have not yet made adequate arrangements to produce clear, publicly available BE plans or frameworks. I use another 'backward search (Horsley et al., 2011)' of selected articles to explore available national-level policy documents. A recent publication (Voyer et al., 2022) and its supplementary file also facilitate the examination of the BE status of 54 Commonwealth countries. In total, eighteen countries and one continent (Africa, Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Grenada, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritius, Myanmar, Philippines, Seychelles, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam) were selected based on their publicly available BE documents (plans, policies, draft reports, and research articles) that are represented in the research and are implementing and advancing the BE at the national level (n= 26). Since national-level policy documents are not well-established sometimes, it is unknown if any specific country designs other forms of policies which are not publicly available and not included in this study.

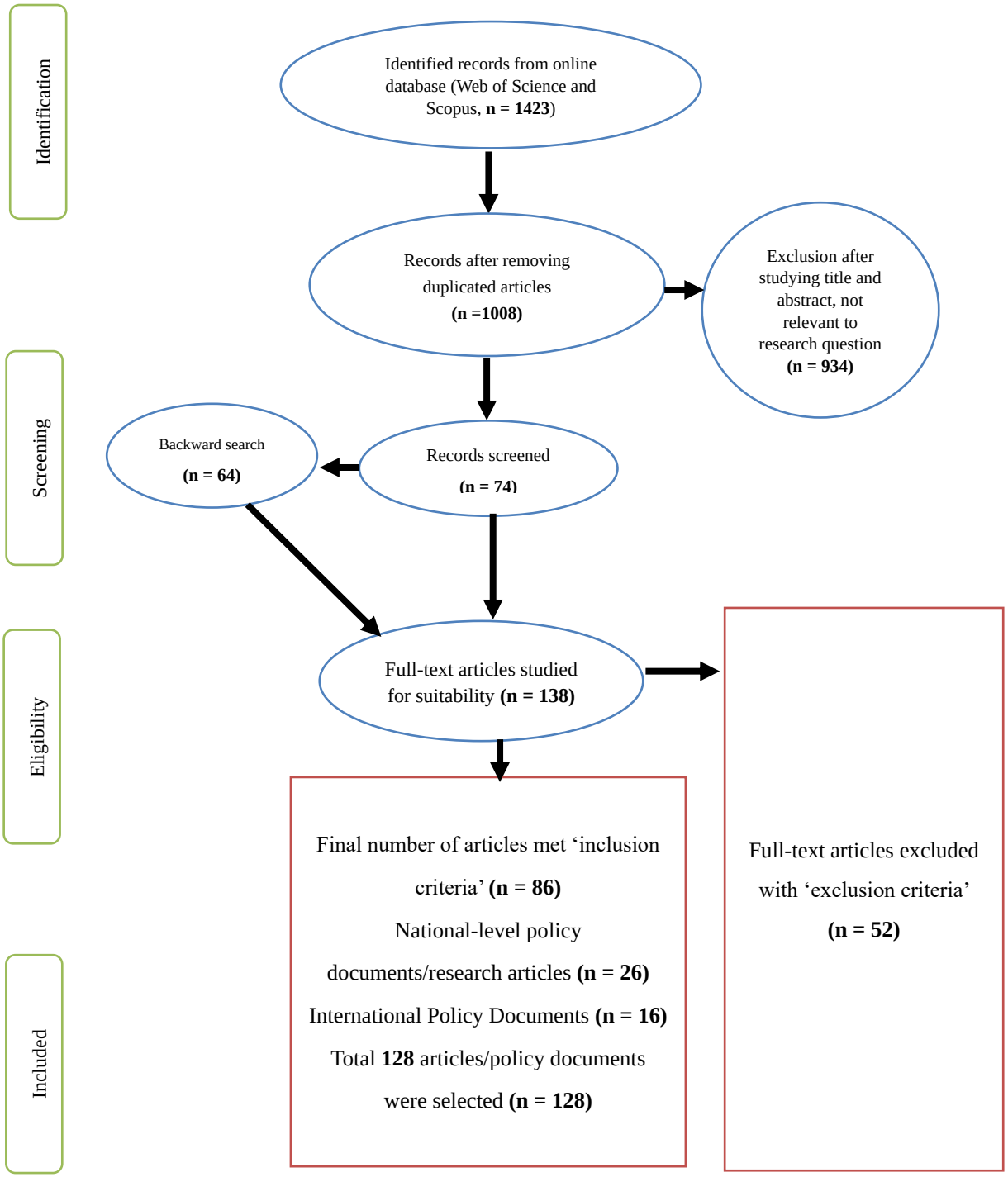

Figure 1. PRISMA searching and screening process including backward search

Table 1. Selected national-level BE strategies, frameworks, and research articles

Country	Sources
Africa[4]	Failler et al., 2020
Bangladesh	Hossain et al., 2017; Patil et al., 2018; Sarker et al., 2018; Islam et al., 2020
Cambodia	www.pemsea.org (PEMSEA and Ministry of Environment, Cambodia), 2019
China	Fabinyi et al., 2021
Grenada	Blue Growth Coastal Master Plan, 2016
India	Economic Advisory Council, 2020; Mitra et al., 2021
Indonesia	World Bank, 2021
Japan	Chansoria, 2020
Malaysia	Kaur, 2016
Maldives	Blue economy insights, 2021
Mauritius	World Bank, 2017
Myanmar	Oo, 2020
Philippines	Mendoza & Valenzuela, 2018; Satizábal, 2019
Seychelles	Marine spatial plan, 2020
Singapore	Quirapas-Franco, 2021
Sri Lanka	Madara and Perera, 2020; Premarathna, 2021
Thailand	www.pemsea.org; Kondee et al., 2022
Timor-Leste	Voyer et al., 2020
Vietnam	www.pemsea.org

2.4 International BE and BG policy document selection

The final selection of the search includes international BE and BG policy documents that address important global BE and BG agendas. Sixteen (n =16) multilateral and international BE and BG policy documents were selected to comprehend the review. A recent review article on BE and SSF by Ayilu et al. (2022) inspired and guided the inclusion of established international policy documents in this review. Finally, a total of 128 selected (n = 128) articles and policy documents were examined and analysed. A qualitative content analysis was conducted to identify current trends and gaps related to the blue economy, blue growth, social equity, and SSF research. This review is not purposive to be systematic, nor does it address inclusive coverage of the entire themes. The objective was to glean a recent set of research findings, policies, case studies, and trends while providing profundity through BE research addressing SSF, social equity and examples focused on the coastal and ocean environment. However, confining my search to English-language works results in limiting access to the broader local knowledge domain.

[4] Though Africa is not a country, there is a comprehensive policy document named 'Africa Blue Economy Strategy' (AU-IBAR, 2019. Africa Blue Economy Strategy. Nairobi, Kenya) which has been considered in this review as it talks about 38 African coastal states and tailors the needs of the continent.

3. Results

In addition to the two selected keywords ‘blue economy’ and ‘blue growth’, the word cloud analysis (Figure 2) provides several other key terms: sustainability, spatial planning, fisheries, marine environment, aquaculture, climate change, and economics. Terms that are in some way associated with social equity are sustainability, sustainable development goal, humans, nonhumans, economic and social effects, economic growth, governance, maritime security, risk assessment, and policy that emerged in the analysis. Comparing the word clouds in the scientific literature (n = 1008), I find through selected keyword (i.e. blue economy and blue growth) searches, social equity is clearly absent. In fact, not a single term appears that deals with social equity. This stands in contrast to a substantive emphasis on BE and BG-related terminologies. The word cloud also shows that BE sectors have received much more attention in the academic literature in the context of the clear pursuit of economic growth. The word clouds show the intent of BE and BG and their links to other thematic areas such as economic growth, aquaculture, resource development, fisheries, exploitation, investment, innovation, etc. The colours of the nodes show the thematic concepts that are generally used together in the original selected articles.

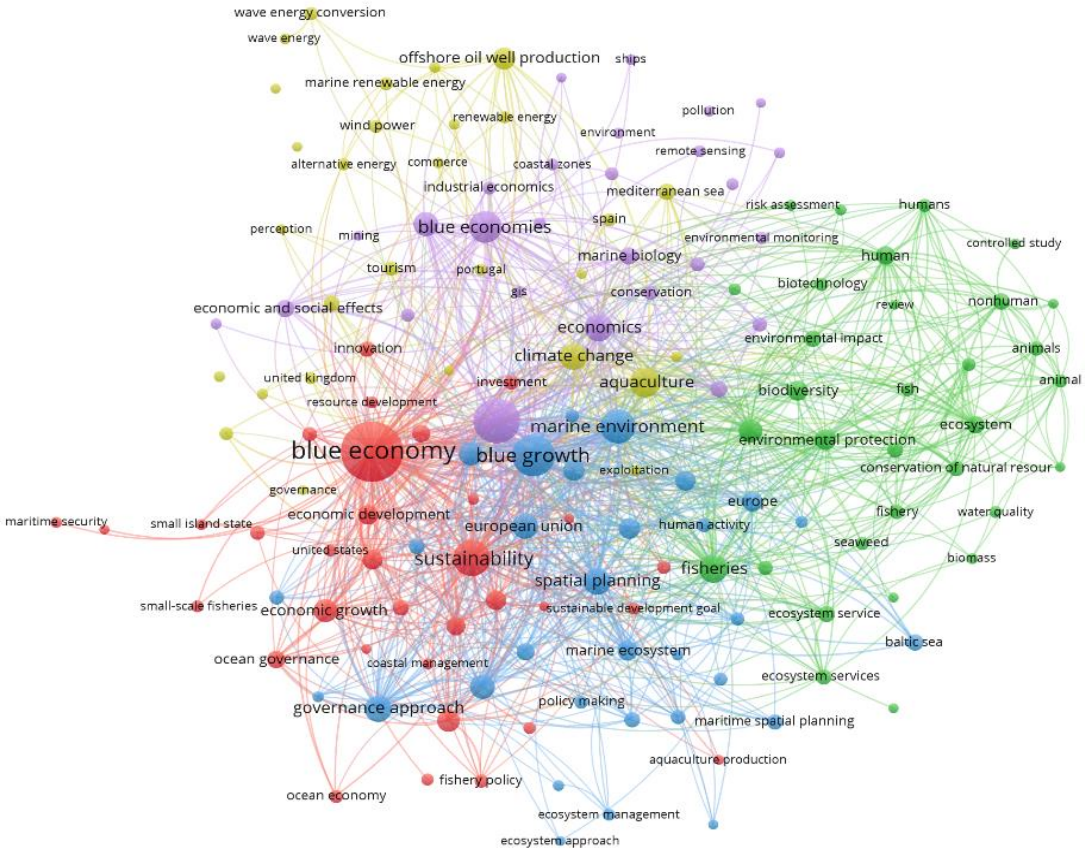

Figure 2. Word cloud generated by Vosviewer from the primary search of the literature (n = 1008). Each word size represents the percentage of all occurrences compared to the other Words

2.1 'Social Equity' or 'Ocean Equity and Justice' missing in BE or BG initiatives

Explicit prioritization of social benefits and equity is a concern of the ocean economics discussion (Cisneros-Montemayor et al., 2019; Österblom et al., 2020; Haward and Haas, 2021). Bennett (2022a) focuses on equity and justice in the oceans categorizing six types in his study as recognitional, procedural, distributional, management, environmental, and contextual. Most coastal states embrace BE to promote industrial economic growth. This review reveals that this is likely to generate inequity, injustice, and conflicts in the coasts and oceans. Moreover, for SSF, the TBTI network finds that injustice may be generated in ways such as – social, market, infrastructure/wellbeing, procedural, and justice in the wake of unexpected events or crises (e.g. COVID-19), with environmental, regulatory, economic and distributional dimensions[5].

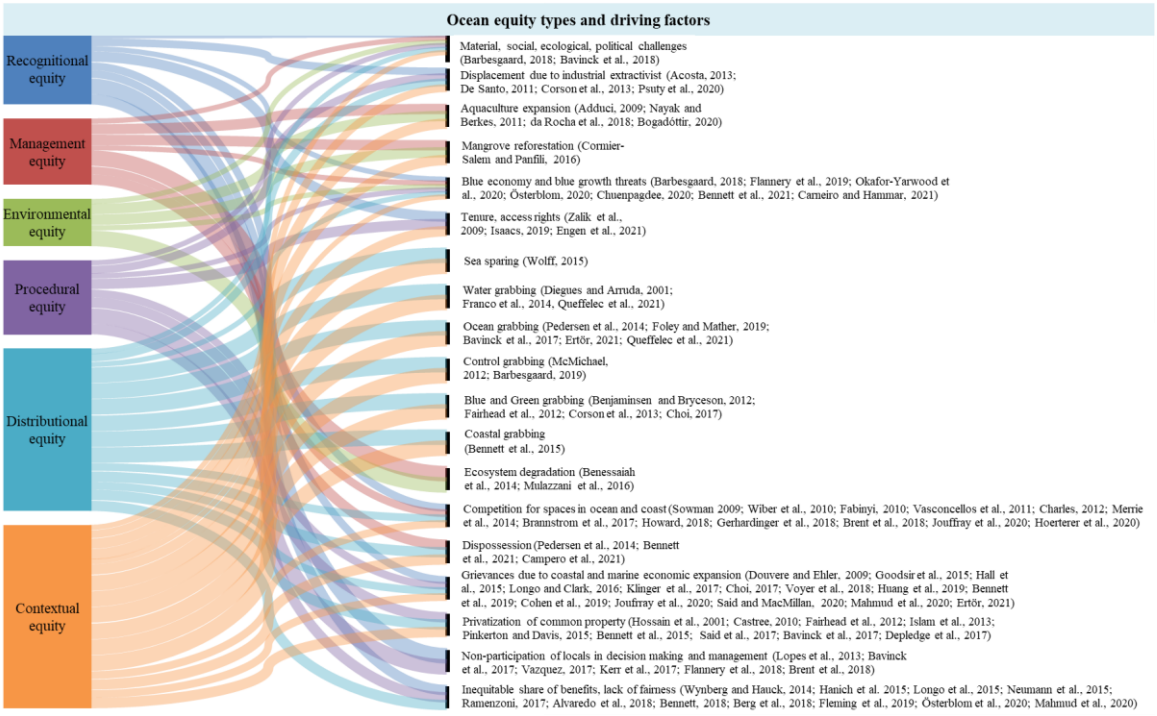

Figure 3. Evidence from scientific literature that are responsible to reinforce social inequities in the coasts and oceans (ocean equity types adopted from Bennett, 2022a)

Bennett et al. (2021) review the literature on ocean-based economic development and identify ten likely social injustices caused by BG that require attention: grabbing and displacement, tenure and access, environmental justice, ecosystem services, small-scale fisheries, food security and well-being, economic benefits, marginalization of women, human rights, and inclusive governance. While these risks to coastal populations are historical, they are exacerbated by blue economic growth. My review records underlying causes of equity-related failures in coastal development that have been previously identified in the literature (Figure 3).

[5] http://toobigtoignore.net/blue-justice-for-ssf/

3.2 Coasts and oceans are occupied in many forms

Grabbing coasts and oceans: Although "sea sparing" (Wolff, 2015), "blue grabbing" (Benjaminsen & Bryceson, 2012), and "green grabbing" (Fairhead et al., 2012) are some of the existing forms of ocean and coastal grabbing, BE and BG have recently reinforced competition for coastal space and resources under the heading of grabbing. This puts SSF at a disadvantage in terms of actions, policies, and initiatives (Bennett et al., 2015). Occupying coastal and marine spaces or "grabbing" is discussed extensively in marine sociology (WFFP, 2014; Barbesgaard, 2018, 2019; Foley and Mather, 2019; Ertör, 2021). Control of water by dominant actors through "water-grabbing" is another major problem (Franco et al., 2014). Small-scale producers and coastal communities are the main victims of the state and capital initiatives that lead to ocean grabbing (Foley and Mather, 2019). Increasing instances of grabbing lead to 'spatial injustice' for fishers resulting in "control grabbing" (Barbesgaard, 2019; Ertör, 2021).

De Schutter (2012) identifies coastal and ocean grabbing as one of the greatest threats to SSF and food security[6]. Tropical Atlantic countries such as Brazil and Senegal have already experienced ocean-grabbing phenomena (Queffelec et al., 2021). Numerous coastal development initiatives have displaced SSF (De Santo, 2011; Psuty et al., 2020). Several decades ago, in Myanmar, fishers were displaced due to pipeline construction in Yadana in the form of 'control grabbing'. Other consequences of grabbing for fishers include stock dwindling, reduction of physical ocean space, and the emergence of new competitors (other livelihood opportunities) (Barbesgaard, 2019). Bavinck (2017) mentions 'coastal grabbing' as an emerging problem in countries such as Canada, Brazil, India, and South Africa. Large-scale coastal land grabbing is also linked to current globalization and privatization of sectors (e.g., fisheries) adding further layers to this phenomenon (Bennett et al., 2015; Fairhead et al., 2012). These privatizations affect coastal conservation and livelihoods (Bavinck, 2017).

Competition for space: Increasing use of marine space and resources (Jouffray et al., 2020) and the growing need to share coastal and marine areas due to development could result in a 'crowded ocean' (Merrie et al., 2014). For SSF communities this results in limited access to marine space and resources, and thus to livelihoods (Cohen et al., 2019; Ertör, 2021). Fishers' fishing grounds are threatened by ecological impacts due to resource exploitation (e.g., deep-sea mining, renewable energy, for instance, Senegal in Queffelec et al., 2021, Brazil in Diegues and Arruda, 2001). They may be displaced due to tourism (Howard, 2018; Queffelec et al., 2021), port development (Gerhardinger et al., 2018), energy industry development (Brannstrom et al., 2017), aquaculture expansion (da Rocha et al., 2018), and mangrove reforestation (Cormier-Salem and Panfili, 2016).

BG generates risk for coastal peoples, and in particular for small-scale fishers in various ways (Figure 3). Okafor-Yarwood et al. (2020) use the Full Spectrum Sustainability (FSS) approach (with a

[6] FAO promotes BG in 2014, as "*a cohesive approach for environmentally compatible, integrated and socioeconomically sensitive management of aquatic resources including marine, freshwater, and brackish water environments"* (Moffitt and Cajas-Cano, 2014). However, the current BG policy documents have paid limited attention towards the socioeconomic impacts of blue expansion on SSF.

category of ecological, economic, social, cultural, and governance and institutional) described by Jones and Stephenson (2019), to evaluate the balance or imbalance of sustainability for selected cases from Africa to evaluate BE initiatives. They find some BE initiatives outcompete SSF in Africa and the Port of Kribi project in Cameroon, the Vridi Canal project in Côte d'Ivoire, the Lamu port project in Kenya, the sandpiper marine phosphate mining project in Namibia cause huge costs for the locals and hampered biodiversity (Okafor-Yarwood et al., 2020). On the other hand, the TRY oyster women's association in the Gambia, Vezo community fishers in Madagascar, Mikoko Pamoja in Kenya, seaweed farming project in Kenya were successful because of involving local communities for management and environmental sustainability (Okafor-Yarwood et al., 2020). These outcomes clearly indicate how important the consideration of social equity or inclusion in BE and BG initiatives is.

Coastal investments and mega-projects: Inequalities and injustice, conflicts due to the global capitalist marine economy have been recorded (Ertör, 2021). Large-scale project establishment on the coast hampers associated ecosystem integrity and social cohesion. For instance, thermal and nuclear plants' discharge caused increased water temperature, stratified seawater, and pollution (Huang et al., 2019). Energy-generating large-scale projects on the coast and offshore increase mobility and there are considerable challenges to managing compatibility among industries and sectors in the context of BG (Goodsir et al., 2015; Klinger et al., 2017). These impact SSF adversely, reinforce current inequalities, and generate conflict (Ertör, 2021). BE and BG agendas for economic expansion are leaving SSFs with unpromising prospects (Muallil et al., 2011; Schreiber et al., 2022). Diverse authors (Choi, 2017 for China; Schutter et al., 2021 for Seychelles, Rivera, 2022 for Fiji) argue that BE itself is a complex governmental project opening new governance spaces and increasing global visibility. The range of investments in coastal mega-projects and urbanization reinforce inequalities for SSFs and hence fishers react as 'social actors' to confront these issues (Mills, 2018; Ertör, 2021).

Privatization of coastal and marine spaces: The leasing or privatization of coastal spaces is a similar kind of BE/BG risk for marginal poor coastal populations (Pinkerton and Davis, 2015). This hampers communities' living, income, and resource management patterns (Said et al., 2017; Bavinck et al., 2017). For example, the Atlantic Canadian fishing communities suffered due to resource-based threats because of the appearance of new ocean user types such as petrochemical developments (Wiber et al., 2010; Charles, 2012). Mining impacted communities' livelihood and resource conservation plan in Olifants estuary, South Africa (Sowman, 2009). Large-scale aquaculture affected 91% of the fishing villages in terms of losing resource access rights and livelihood loss in the form of 'encroachment' in Chilika lagoon, India (Nayak and Berkes, 2011). In Bangladesh, coastal small-scale fishers lost fishing grounds in mangrove areas due to the privatization of common property (Hossain et al., 2001; Islam et al., 2013). Large-scale desalination in the Antofagasta region of Chile generated dispossession and physical displacements of the coastal poor. (Campero et al., 2021). Thus, BG can reinforce marginalization due to the privatization of coasts.

SSF and historical trends of struggle: Globally, small-scale fishers experience material, political, ecological, and social challenges (Barbesgaard, 2018; Bavinck et al., 2018) including organised crime (Witbooi et al., 2020), blue crime (Satizábal et al., 2021) such as criminal activities including sea-piracy, robbery, illegal fishing, dumping toxic materials, and drug trafficking in the sea. Displacement due to industrial 'extractivist' in the form of large-scale development in coasts (Acosta, 2013) and aquaculture expansion (Adduci 2009; Bogadóttir 2020), blue growth threats (Barbesgaard 2018; Bennett et al., 2021) cause fisheries injustice (Mills, 2018), recently, termed as epistemic injustice – testimonial and hermeneutical (Schreiber et al., 2022). Tenure and access rights along with inequity issues faced by small-scale fisheries are further jeopardized by the current BE development agenda (Isaacs, 2019; Engen et al., 2021). Displacements of locals and hampered livelihoods are evidenced in development initiatives (De Santo, 2011; Bavinck et al., 2017; Barbesgaard, 2018; Psuty et al., 2020). Said and MacMillan (2020) view 'blue growth' as a capitalist-ridden model which exacerbates SSF communities and is likely to increase disruption on the SSF resilience. Brent et al. (2018) state that small-scale fishers are not invited to the 'blue party' and SSF efforts are becoming less viable to grip fishing areas due to increasing ocean industrial development.

Changes in Social-Ecological Systems: Coastal inhabitants are an integral part of marine and coastal social-ecological systems (Berkes et al., 2003; Glaser & Glaeser et al., 2014) as they largely interact with and depend on the goods and services provided by the coastal and marine ecosystem (Seitz et al., 2013). The critical relationship between nature and local users in social-ecological systems (SES) is associated with a focus on sustainability and resilience (Berkes et al., 2003; Armitage et al., 2017). Coastal grabbing with its deleterious result might generate new social-ecological systems by excluding the associated local communities (Bavinck et al., 2017). Financing the BE creates a growing demand for attention to social accountability in terms of impacts on fisheries and maritime workers (Havice and Zalik, 2019). Sector-specific analyses of local BG in developing countries find an absence of *policy coherence, institutional coordination*, and *collaboration* that negatively correlates with SSF well-being (Carneiro and Hammar, 2021). As a result, though mega projects with multinational investments provide employment opportunities for the local community, they often deplete the coastal environment having long-term livelihood impacts (Howard, 2018).

Conflicts and injustice: Globally, conflicts in coasts and oceans are increasing (Dahlet et al., 2021). Conflict over resource access is an embedded dynamic that is connected with any change and management in human-nature interactions (Meyer-Lclean and Nursey-Bray, 2017). Currently, natural ecosystems and resources are affected by increasing deterioration (Diaz et al., 2019). As a result, the growing ocean multiuse could generate conflicts in the ocean realm. Douvere and Ehler (2009) identify two types of conflicts due to increasing pressure on marine biota: *user-environment* conflicts and *user-user* conflicts. BG dynamics and infrastructure development in the coasts generate and reinforce both types of conflicts. Conflicts among BE sectors such as industrial vs artisanal fisheries (Said and MacMillan, 2020) or carbon-intensive industries create considerable conflicts between '*oceans as*

natural capital' and '*ocean as good business*' (Voyer et al., 2018). Brent et al. (2018) argue that a comprehensive blue growth agenda leads to contradictions in ecological and social implications for the access and distribution of marine and coastal spaces.

Inequitable share of benefits, lack of fairness in distribution: The risk of inequality in enforcing the distribution of benefits from the oceans always prevails (Wynberg and Hauck, 2014). A crucial equity problem is the unfair distribution of access to ecosystem services, which leads to destabilising environmental sustainability and resilience (MEA, 2005; UNDP Human Development Report 2020). For instance, Islam et al. (2020) argue SSF is being and likely to be further marginalized due to BG in Bangladesh. Mahmud et al. (2020) study the Rampal power[7] project in Bangladesh and find that in the wake of the establishment of power plants, land control shifted away from coastal marginal poor towards rich and powerful social groups, hampering rural livelihoods and usurping rights and access to resources for the coastal marginal poor. Rampal project benefited socially powerful and wealthy groups and shareholders (Mahmud et al., 2020), and poor people's access to benefits remains challenging.

Blue economy-enabling key conditions are identified as economic and inter-group equity, human rights protection, environmental regulations, and infrastructural development (Cisneros-Montemayor, 2021). Caswell et al. (2020) study 20 historical BG cases from 13 countries and identify four major trajectories of progress. Three of those trajectories show unbalanced growth because of the dominance of the economy over social equity and sustainability. The remaining trajectory shows slow but balanced growth as social equity and environmental sustainability are considered from the beginning of the project(s).

The lack of consideration of local voices in development project implementation marginalizes coastal communities (Kerr et al., 2017; Flannery et al., 2018; Vega-Muñoz et al., 2021). A systematic literature study on the two decades of scientific publication on frequently appeared stakeholders in the constructs of 'blue economy' and 'sustainable development goals', reveals that the key stakeholders are i) government agencies/policy makers, ii) NGOs, iii) Scientists/Researchers, iv) Business/Industries, and v) Local community/Society. The study states 'Local community/society' is the least included stakeholder group with their level of inclusion in the literature at only 15% of total statements (Lee et al., 2020). This indicates the low level of attention towards inclusion and other aspects of social equity in BE and SDG initiatives. Bennett (2018) finds that while exclusion in decision-making and societal injustice are prevalent, little consideration has been given to social justice and inclusion in ocean research and management.

[7] It is a 1320-megawatt coal-fired power station at Rampal Upazila of Bagerhat District in Khulna, Bangladesh

3.3 Social Equity in international BE policy documents, multilateral reports, and conference proceedings

Voyer et al. (2022) state that high-level BE objectives prioritize aspects of economic growth and environmental sustainability with rare inclusion of equity (e.g., food security and gender equality). The recent development of global frameworks and guidelines to mobilize interested countries to develop BE initiatives calls for a more critical assessment of the inclusiveness of equity and blue justice (Cohen et al., 2019; Schutter et al., 2021). In the following (Table 2), I reviewed sixteen international policy documents, reports, and proceedings of international conferences on BE and BG.

The first high-level Pacific Blue Economy conference in 2017 addressed equity issues (Pacific Blue Economy Conference, 2017). Participants and presenters agree that BE should be connected with communities and regeneration of livelihoods, benefit locals with an equitable share to ensure the sustainability of BE. Regarding inclusiveness, they ask for a shared definition of BE that involves all sectors. They further urge for better governance and principles of BE which should be connected with community-based definitions of coastal and ocean resource management.

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) report in 2014 entitled 'The Ocean Economy: Opportunities and Challenges for Small Island Developing States' considers "*the improvement of human wellbeing and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities*" as their central agenda and shapes further thoughts and directions based on this (UNCTAD, 2014, p.2). Their comprehensive objectives include human well-being and social equity while minimizing risks and ecological dearth. However, the Blue Economy Report 2021 by the European Commission documents BE success stories and estimated economic growth globally but does not address SSF and social equity as a challenge in progressing BE or BG. This report emphasizes social and environmental aspects to ensure the sustainable economic growth of BE.

The representatives of the seas of East Asia in the Changwon declaration (PEMSEA, 2012) address socioeconomic development obstacles due to the degradation of coastal and marine ecosystem services in the face of the Sustainable Development Strategy for the Seas of East Asia (SDS-SEA). They develop national coastal and marine policies for nine Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia (PEMSEA) countries. Another important recommendation of the Changwon declaration was to reform ocean governance towards inclusiveness, collaborating with stakeholders, and provisioning livelihoods for the coastal poor. A related declaration "Dongying Declaration (PEMSEA, 2011)" from the PEMSEA network prioritizes Integrated Coastal Management (ICM) to adopt BE, while ICM has been considered as an integrated effective management framework in coastal context, globally, and yet, remains a challenge to implement in effectively in different coastal states of the world (Warnken and Mosadeghi, 2018).

Table 2. Summary of the selected international BE policy documents

BE Policy-documents	Key issues	Addressing equity
Pacific Blue Economy Conference proceedings, 2017	Assisting the Pacific region in defining BE and implementing it	Deepening cultural and social tie to the ocean
Sustainability criteria for the blue economy, EC, 2021	Assessing BE contribution, Developing blueprint for Blue Economy Sustainable Framework (BESF)	Recommends refining BE sustainable frameworks to ensure economic, environmental, social, and governance impacts of investments
Africa blue economy strategy, AU-IBAR, 2019	Towards a prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development within the context of the Africa Union Agenda 2063	Policies, institutional and governance, employment, job creation, and poverty eradication
Towards a blue economy: A promise for sustainable growth in the Caribbean, 2016	Sustainable development of oceans and seas (SDG 14) and economic growth	Guides Caribbean policy-makers toward transitioning blue economy and socially equitable blue growth
The blue economy report 2020, EU	Analysing the scope and size of the blue economy in the European Union	Accounts employment generation
Achieving Blue Growth Building vibrant fisheries and aquaculture communities, FAO, 2018	Supporting blue communities includes food security and nutrition	Empowering marginalized groups, maximizing social/community benefits
Blue growth initiative: Partnering with countries to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, FAO, 2017	Sustainably developing fisheries and aquaculture, initiatives to maximise economic and social benefits	Aligning with SDGs 2030
Sustainable blue economy conference report, Nairobi, Kenya, 2018	the Blue Economy and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development	Emphasizing accelerated economic growth, job creation and poverty alleviation, and sustainability
Changwon Declaration towards an ocean-based economy: Moving ahead with the sustainable development strategy for the Seas of East Asia, Korea, 2012	Commitment toward sustainable ocean management	Recommendation to shift coastal and ocean governance from government-centred to a more inclusive approach, ensuring food security and livelihoods
Dongying Declaration on building a "Blue Economy" through Integrated Coastal Management, China, 2011	Commitment towards embracing blue economy for the region by taking an active role in Integrated Coastal Management (ICM)	ICM and sustainable coastal and marine development
PROBLUE annual report, World Bank, 2021	Building back better: considered BE as key to an inclusive recovery after COVID – 19	Gender equality
The Oceans Economy: Opportunities and Challenges for Small Island Developing States, UNCTAD, 2014	Guiding small island developing states for a sustainable ocean economy	Improve human well-being and social equity
The EU Blue Economy report 2021	Aims to support policymakers and stakeholders in the way of sustainable ocean resource development, estimation of global blue economic growth	Defines BE and emphasized social and environmental aspects and sustainability central to sustaining economic activities
The Ocean Economy in 2030, OECD, 2016	Blue growth agenda to maximise revenue from the ocean	Considering the risk of BG, address employment generation, innovation, and inclusiveness
Oceans 2030: Financing the blue economy for sustainable development, World Bank, 2016	Addressing the blue economy development framework	Rising the blue economy to fight poverty and enhance prosperity
Principles for a sustainable blue economy, WWF Baltic Ecoregion Programme, 2015	Developing a set of principles for a sustainable blue economy	Social and economic benefits for current and future generations

The PROBLUE[8] annual report of the World Bank, names gender equality in their specific agenda for BE-related ocean development initiatives. Moreover, PROBLUE Blue Economy Development Framework (BEDF) focuses on *knowledge management, policy, institutional, and fiscal reforms, and on fostering investment in the blue economy*. These components proceed with tools like blue public expenditure reviews, National Ocean Accounting, and Marine Spatial Planning (MSP). The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) advances "The Ocean Economy in 2030" policy document that addresses multiple BG agendas and plans to increase revenue from the ocean. They also identify a complex variety of risks and integrated ocean management plans and guides to include stakeholders from multiple levels to ensure inclusiveness in ocean management (OECD, 2016).

Commonwealth (2016) Blue Economy series, No. 1 prioritize fundamental changes in ocean governance at national, regional, and global levels that recognize the full portfolio across and within the blue economy. Baltic Ecoregion Programme (2015) develops principles to guide the blue economy and prioritizes social and economic benefits for current and future generations. The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) report on 'Achieving Blue Growth' in 2017 is a strategy with three components; *Blue production*, *Blue trade*, and *Blue communities*. Blue communities specify empowerment of communities, their livelihoods, food security and nutrition, and resilience to shocks. These objectives facilitate the consideration of equity issues relating to the ocean and coast (FAO, 2017, 2018). The Sustainable Blue Economy Conference (SBEC, 2018) report from Nairobi emphasizes the deployment of the BE concept in a people-centred initiative that ensures addressing inequality gaps.

The World Bank report on the Caribbean Blue Economy pathways aims *to guide Caribbean policy-makers towards the transition to a blue economy, and socially equitable 'blue growth'.* Among the ten principles of the Caribbean blue economy pathways, one specifically addresses the 'sharing of BE benefits' (Patil et al., 2016). The World Bank's (2016) BE development framework also identifies some challenges undermining the BE. One of those is 'Ad hoc development'. It happens due to unplanned and unregulated development initiatives in the coastal region that cause externalities, overlapping, and conflicts. This report specifies that the outcome of BE must benefit the poor (World Bank, 2016).

The European Commission (EC) BE reports describe sectoral growth with the competitiveness of driving economic forces and employment generation (EC, 2020, 2021). After a decade of BE conceptualization, the EC (2021) report analyses the BE frameworks based on four sustainability dimensions (economic, environmental, governance, and social). Among fifteen Blue Economy Strategic Frameworks (BESF) studied by EC (2021) finds these BESFs lack governance in most cases and recommends integrating the governance dimension to reflect all aspects of sustainable BE management. This report also provides common criteria and indicators for the consideration of social dimensions such

[8] PROBLUE is a Multi-Donor Trust Fund, held at the World Bank that provides support to the development of integrated, sustainable and healthy marine and coastal resources. It contributes to the enactment of Sustainable Development Goal 14 (SDG 14) with the BE action plan and is fully allied with the World Bank's goals of extreme poverty eradication and enhancing the sustainable income and welfare of the poor.

as employment conditions, health and safety management, inclusiveness, fairness in remuneration, and level of acceptance by stakeholders.

3.4 Social equity and justice in national-level BE policy documents, frameworks, and research articles

International policies, guidelines, and agendas may influence the development of national policies and implementation frameworks. Adopting BE at the national-level needs diversification of current policies, priorities, and attention at the country level. This review also explores national-level BE policy frameworks, drafts, scoping reports, and intervention plans proposed by researchers. These documents do not mention any specific plan for ensuring social equity and justice (one exception is Grenada[9], they specify equity in the guiding principles of their master plan as *Equity as manifested by transparency and fairness in decision-making and provision of access to public coastal spaces including all beaches*). Bennett (2019a) examines a connection between social inequity and non-compliance with regulations. National BE implementation frameworks and working drafts promote policies that boost the national economy by enhancing coastal sectoral investment. I did not find any national BE framework that keeps social equity central among the eighteen countries and one continent BE documents I studied in my review.

Although national-level policy documents envision sustainable development objectives, they often lack a clear statement on what social equity does mean and how it can be integrated into BE and BG policies and frames. The lives and livelihoods of individuals, different groups, and communities dependent on marine and coastal resources are often overlooked, while economic growth is given importance. For instance, the BE framework of Bangladesh suggests exploring untapped potentials and expanding coastal and marine sectors. The Government of Bangladesh proposed twelve BE action plans (Patil et al., 2018). Most of these plans and interventions are part of BG and they do not clearly define equity and justice or suggest that these issues be addressed. Moreover, countries like Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritius, Myanmar, Philippines, Seychelles, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Vietnam, along with other African countries have also initiated BE for their national economic growth. Their policies, frameworks, and plans are mostly addressing the exploration of potential sectors, expand the coastal and marine business, introduce intensified technologies, and invite private sectors and international investors to enhance the productivity of maritime sectors. Concerns about ocean health and the well-being of coastal marginal poor are not central and/or these initiatives lack intervention tools to ensure equity and justice in the coasts and oceans.

[9] Blue Growth Coastal Master Plan (2016), Grenada

4. Discussions

4.1 Equity implications in the BE/BG literature

BE advances mainly with the objective of economic growth. Perceptions towards BE vary widely. BE is a model which moves towards an abundant state of society from a scarcity based on existing realities, considering environmental protection as well as a management tool that relies on ecosystem management to manage BG on coasts (Kathijotes, 2013; Mulazzani et al., 2016). A collaborative and inclusive BE on a basis of mutual trust has also been identified as the key to holistically sustainable blue growth management (Soma et al., 2018). The understanding is that BE delivers sustainable development in terms of economy, livelihoods, food and nutrition security, and protection of the oceans. Moreover, Liang et al. (2022) find a lack of institutional collaboration in BE sustainable research. Its connection with SDGs reinforces the necessity for it. Yet, the challenge is embracing BE or BG in different ways by different countries. 'Blind spots' are needed to be addressed while pursuing BE research (Farmery et al., 2021).

Consideration of ocean equity or social equity or social justice or environmental justice in ocean-centric policy formation is crucial from instrumental and ethical aspects (Alexander, 2019; Ganseforth, 2021; Bennett, 2021). Figure 2 shows the dominancy of economic expansion in the coasts and oceans while advancing BE and BG initiatives. A debate revolves around the question: 'do BE development frameworks consider 'social equity' or not (Cisneros-Montemayor, 2019)? Because BE also creates social risks and those can lead to inequalities and injustice. Procedural fairness and distributional impacts of actions in marine and coastal realms are important to consider social equity (Hanich et al., 2015; Bennett 2018). Although BE holds the promise of a 'triple win' on the ecological, social, and economic fronts, the social and ecological impacts of these changes are poorly addressed in BE policy papers (Brent et al., 2018). Access to benefits and resources from the ocean is inequitably distributed which is vastly evidenced (Österblom et al., 2020). Nevertheless, economic benefits due to ocean industries advantage society or lead to marginalization – remain unexplored. Building upon SSF research that sheds light on resiliency, researchers increasingly argue that 'life above water' needs more concern for access rights, inclusion, and equitable distribution of resources.

Despite having 'triple bottom line objectives' of ensuring a sustainable environment, economic expansion, and social equity, in several definitions (World Bank, 2017, P.4; Voyer et al., 2018), it is not reflected in BE practices. Bueger (2015) states aspects of BE '*represent a general agreement in the abstract, but they generate endless (and irresolvable) disagreements about what they might mean in practice*' (Bueger, 2015, p. 160). Global evidence of ocean and coastal grabbing, control grabbing, dispossession, displacement, inequitable distribution of benefits, conflicts, etc. are common (Figure 3). This study finds that national-level BE initiatives also clearly lack equity and justice directives. Developing countries, where poverty is entwined with coastal marginal communities, are excessively experiencing negative impacts of privatization and coastal industrial growth. Dominance in economic expansion hinders social sustainability. Moreover, environmental sustainability is also vital to sustaining coastal societal systems due to people's dependence on nature.

The economic frontier – the ocean signifies a dimension of opportunity. The pressing question regarding this is, of course, the creation of opportunity for whom? A demand for systematic studies of coastal development and poverty status remains imperative. Though BE appeals to stable development and protection simultaneously, it is complicated by overlapping and multiple uses of coasts and oceans (Winder and Le Heron, 2017). Now, focusing on policies needs to be considered for the social and economic well-being of natives at the national level. Choi (2017) criticizes BE as a state-driven complex initiative as it turns ecologically productive contexts into eco-cities and wipes out local fishers. Sometimes it is difficult for the locals to assess the monetary value of nature and its longstanding value (Howard, 2018). The coastal poor receive the excessive pressures of coastal investment in terms of grabbing. Hearing local users' voices in national-level BE policy formulation and implementation is necessary based on the global evidence that is also documented in this study.

The necessity of defining 'blue' (or 'green') sectors remains vital to justifying BE and its connected activities (Voyer et al., 2018). From a country's perspective, it is important to expand economic sectoral growth, but investing in proper sectors needs careful investigation. Even, in higher-income countries, the growing value of coasts creates less accessibility to it for less well-off groups (Depledge et al., 2017). In such cases, BE hampers the livelihood of the coastal poor, particularly, small-scale fishers due to competition and marginalization. From a justice point of view, SSF and other marginal coastal communities suffer from sectoral growth on the coasts and oceans. Further privatizations and industrializations on the coasts are likely to hamper poor peoples' access to common resources and undermine social cohesion leading to generating grievances and conflicts.

BG or power grabs have been considered purportedly in global policies in terms of positioning poor people's interests and climate change (Barbesgaard, 2018). My review also finds that international policy documents address social equity in terms of social sustainability, however, national-level BE frameworks, approaches, and implementation plans lack a clear consideration of social equities and justice. This missing link hampers equities and justice in the coasts and oceans while advancing BE. I argue most of the BE or ocean economy sector expansion generated ample incidents to violate six types of ocean equity stated by Bennett (2022a). BE experiences so far tend to focus on income-generating aspects, these approaches along with investment plans need to do better, incorporating factors such as tenure rights and access, distributive justice, supporting livelihoods, and food and nutrition security for the local communities. Local communities' well-being is closely connected with sustainability, productivity, and health of the ecosystem and nature's contributions to humans (Díaz et al., 2018).

Universal notions of fairness are challenged by inequalities, which are 'normative arguments and sustainability objectives must be aligned with equity, known as instrumental argument' (Bennett, 2018; Österblom et al., 2020). Blue economic growth or investing in coastal mega-projects need to hear local communities' voices. Otherwise, it hinders the sustainability of the growth. Farmey et al. (2020) argue there are 'blind spots' in BE vision, such as production growth without equitable distribution of the benefit. Ehlers (2016) argues regulations alone are not enough rather than their proper implementation

and enforcement. The legitimacy of ocean-based economic growth needs to consider social equity, which is committed to SDGs and other globally existing legal frameworks.

4.2 Blue economy reforms governance

BE, as a framework, can facilitate achieving multiple SDGs, yet there is a lack of clarity and consistency in finding the most appropriate and practical governance mechanisms of BE (Voyer et al., 2018; 2022). The ocean is the focus of extensive worldwide attention and various demands for transformation, recently (Blythe et al., 2021). One of the way forward initiatives is reforming ocean governance. The necessity of a holistic governance approach addressing the connection between terrestrial activities and coastal resources seems central (IRP, 2021). However, ocean governance has also been identified as a failed (Cunningham et al., 2009) and fragmented (Zalik, 2015) strategy and it calls for improvement. It is challenging in the face of its multi-dimensional and interconnected aspects, comprising justice and inequity (Bennett et al., 2019; Cohen et al., 2019; Joufrray et al., 2020). Ocean governance transformation is likewise yet to address livelihoods, social justice, and food and nutrition security comprehensively (Cohen et al., 2019; Crona et al., 2020). The most and largest marginalized ocean users, SSF, are further marginalized from ocean policy discourses. BE brings inherent conflicts as it offers two competing aspects – growth opportunity and threats to nature (Voyer et al., 2018) and is likely to affect coastal and marine ecosystems and stocks which ultimately hamper resource users (Mulazzani et al., 2016) and calls for governance responses. Hence, a reformation of maritime governance is a current demand. Concerns regarding ocean governance are increasingly included in international policy discussions by stakeholders (e.g., scientists, governments, NGOs, and private sectors) (Campbell et al., 2016). To trigger conflict resolution, globally, different contexts need new forms of social interaction and governance (Bax et al., 2021). Guerreiro (2021) also argues the BG approach needed to be bottom-up and recommends plans such as spatial planning and specialised institution setup, intersectoral coordination to resolve likely conflicts, mandating ministries specifically to deal with maritime and sea issues, and, regional and transboundary cooperation.

BE and its principles are thoroughly allied with an ecosystem-based approach (EBA) and resilience thinking, which ultimately harness achieving SDG goals (Caswell et al., 2020). Keen et al. (2018) study BE cases in Solomon Island and related BE literature and state BE discourses have a tendency of negligence towards socio-political elements which is crucial to achieving sustainable ocean governance. As BE calls for new ways of governance in the coastal and marine realm, Choi (2017) argues this could be ‘space governance’ from the government and exemplifies how the sea governance system in China displaced small-scale fisheries tactically in a certain place in the form of ‘blue grabbing’. Inhabitants living near marine resources should be prioritized while developing those resources and based on the ‘terraqueous territoriality of adjacent rights’, there is evidence that various social groups positioned themselves to privilege their access to state properties (Foley and Mather, 2019). Competition for resource access and using coastal and marine spaces are likely to lead to galvanize conflicts that call for collective actions. Collective action can reform rules, norms, and practices among different interest

groups (Basurto et al., 2016). Human rights need to be ensured in ocean governance transformation for the ocean-dependent people (Leach et al. 2012) to make a 'safe and just space' (Dearing et al., 2014). Successful governance-based fisheries management was recorded in Costa Rica, where the action was collective (Rivera et al., 2017). Pedersen et al. (2014) suggest strengthening political space for SSF in fisheries governance emphasizing social justice-driven and human right-based alternatives.

Bennett (2019b) terms oceans as 'political seas' because the ocean and coastal management and governance are mostly dominated by power and politics. Increasing attention towards global ocean governance is influenced by environmental sustainability (Campbell et al., 2016), though it should be addressed to promote social sustainability as well. Power relations among different stakeholders play a crucial role in the control and access to resources (see Tan-Mullins, 2007; Chambers et al., 2017). Examples of failure risk of external initiatives without hearing local voices lead to unsustainable ecological context (Vazquez, 2017), which generates social inequity. BE initiatives need trade-offs among economic, social, and environmental sustainability (Lillebø et al., 2017). BE is likely to produce various social and environmental injustices, and crucial changes in ocean governance are obvious (Bennett et al., 2021; Guerreiro, 2021).

However, recent capitalism-focused BE and BG embedding inequalities call for rethinking global policies. Governing ocean and coastal social-ecological systems (SES) is always challenging and complex (Neumann et al., 2017; O'Hagan et al., 2020). A few new legislative tools are on the way to direct sustainable blue acceleration (Jouffray, 2020). Conflict due to the multi-use of coastal and marine space could be a useful entry point to assess fishers' struggle (Bavinck, 2018). Global legal frameworks documented equity properly, but not in practice, and criticized the ocean policies as 'equity-blind' (Österblom et al., 2020). Cisneros-Montemayor (2019) emphasizes that BE needs to integrate 'social equity' and 'environmental sustainability' and 'economic viability' comprehensively. Thus, reforming ocean governance to ensure equity and justice in the ocean is thought-provoking.

Cisneros-Montemayor et al. (2022) argue a transformation of social equity-centric BE will be a challenge, and also suggest to follow available guidelines for emerging ocean sectors. Available international guidelines (e.g. FAO SSF guidelines[10]) are endorsed by international policy-makers to provide and promote sustainable management of ocean and coastal resources. The primary objectives of these guidelines address food security, eradicating poverty, ensuring human rights, etc. BE discourses keep ample space to embrace international policy guidelines on specific sectors. For instance, SSF is the most vulnerable sector in the face of BG and FAO SSF guidelines that address the SSF sector and its governance in a comprehensive way. A 'regulative idea' blue justice addresses SSF research and governance (Jentoft, 2022). The idea of blue justice calls for ensuring the promises of BE and BG. Jentoft (2021) argues for a 'suitable language' in the BE 'language game' which raises SSF voices and

[10] Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries by the Committee of Fisheries (COFI) of FAO (FAO 2015)

harmonizes BE discourses with FAO SSF guidelines. The recent book 'Small-scale fisheries in a sustainable ocean economy' by Jentoft et al. (2022) documents SSF case studies, globally, through its 35 chapters. The 12 thematic parts of this book reveal how SSF faces inequities, injustice, conflicts, governance weakness, and urge for blue justice and emphasize on the implementation of FAO SSF guidelines to the current discourses of BE. To enhance SSF sectors, TBTI recommends seven actions such as - including supporting SSF implementing the principles of SSF guidelines, illustrating SSF as a key for sustainable ocean development, the inclusion of SSF in decision-making, reforming governance, promoting coordinated policies, cross-sectoral collaboration and awareness build-up[11].

4.3 Blue degrowth

To criticize capitalism and growth driven policies, the 'blue degrowth' term has been used, which enhances societal community rights (Hadjmichael, 2018; Ertör and Hadjmichael, 2020). SSF within a blue degrowth structure could resolve most of the BG and capitalism-driven problems along with fish stock declining, fishing community displacement, social cohesion and empathy loss, and other social-ecological system struggles (Said and MacMillan, 2020). Researchers recommend a collaborative economy, including limiting or degrowth strategies wherever needed to retreat SSF communities (Pauly, 2017; Hadjmichael, 2018; Österblom et al., 2020). For instance, improving government efficiency has been considered as an important factor while securing fisheries and aquaculture income from local BG in Vietnam (Hanh and Boonstra, 2018). Again, a comprehensive policy fails if the inequitable distribution occurs (Ramenzoni, 2017). Favouring large-scale investors over small-scale in BG can generate chaos and hamper social cohesion. For example, in Bangladesh, leasing rights to better-off parties demoted poor fishers (Khan et al., 2012).

Another major challenge of BE is it lacks any established frameworks, guidelines, or specific toolkits to guide its objectives (Voyer et al., 2018). Developing countries, which sometimes struggle to implement effective governance tools, can face challenges to embrace it. BE initiators must deliberate fisheries governance model and non-fisheries developments, as they bring risks to food, nutrition, and livelihood security (Cohen et al., 2019). Common coastal and ocean governance frameworks and management tools (e.g. Integrated Coastal Management – ICM, Marine Spatial Planning – MSP, Ecosystem-based Management – EBM, etc.) can be linked to initiating BG or BE.

4.4 MSP: poses solution or risk?

Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) is an increasingly used tool in coastal contexts. In recent decades, its popularity brought it into action to resolve conflicts and maritime jurisdictional issues (Ehler and Douvere, 2009; Ehler et al., 2019). Almost 45% of the coastal states (70 countries) adopted the MSP concept (Frazão Santos et al., 2018). Trouillet (2020) mentions that MSP is a socio-technical device and it gives freedom to 'blue growth' to perform. Such planning might hold a dichotomous role to address both economic and environmental simultaneously (Trouillet, 2020).

[11] http://toobigtoignore.net/blue-justice-for-ssf/

However, MSP differs in theory and practices as it aims mainly at blue growth and economy (Jones et al., 2016). As it is connected with adaptive management, actors' power, and balanced decision-supporting tools, MSP must avoid ocean grabbing (Queffelec et al., 2021). Kirkfeldt et al. (2021) conclude their review on MSP as a perfect tool for SDG 14 targets, but other objectives cannot be adequately addressed by MSP and may need further management strategies. I argue environmental sustainability is interconnected with social equity. Resource users' livelihoods and income are mostly based on the ecosystem and its sustainability. If MSP does not serve the coastal poor's expectations in BE contexts, it is critical to achieving sustainability. Thus, one of the MSP's objectives needs to be surfacing equity and justice in the coasts and oceans.

MSP can be misused by powerful actors and power relations can dominate the process (Tafon et al., 2019). Globally, environmental sustainability sometimes dominates over social sustainability (Boonstra et al., 2015, Bennett et al., 2019). Österblom et al. (2020) state that any ocean economy investment plan sustains if it pays attention to reducing inequality (Österblom et al., 2020). Neoliberal economic policies, worldwide, impacted reducing global poverty, yet increased inequalities (Alvaredo et al., 2018). My concern is when privatization takes place in coasts and oceans in terms of BE, there are risks to widen social inequity as the coastal poor are likely to be more marginalized. Such inequality could exacerbate economic growth in terms of pace and sustainability immediately or in the long run (Berg et al., 2018; Cisneros-Montemayor, 2021).

4.5 Way forward challenges

There is no "tragedy of the commons" in the coastal and ocean resources, but rather a "tragedy of the open access" (Visbeck et al., 2014). Given the importance of coastal and marine resources that contribute to the livelihood of these large communities, one of the major challenges to initiating BE would be to harmonize among inclusivity, natural resource conservation, and economy. Global South countries are prone to ocean-grabbing risks due to their legislation, politics, socio-economic and ecological characteristics (Bennett et al., 2015). For instance, Bangladesh prioritizes not only mariculture but also shipping, port development, and megaprojects in the coastal and marine realm (Patil et al., 2018), it is likely to generate inequitable benefits and uneven current infrastructure (Cisneros-Montemayor, 2021) in such cases. These initiatives generate pressure on the coasts and oceans for boosting the national economy. To ensure sustainable BE/BG, a transformation of the governance mechanism is recommended (Islam et al., 2020). My concern is that to avoid likely conflicts due to 'space competition' on the coasts and inequitable distribution of benefits, the policies need to keep scopes to ensure equity and justice. Because of growing anthropogenic pressures on the environment, the science-policy nexus must be informed by evidence-based knowledge to make effective decisions (Karcher et al., 2021). A perpetuation of widening inequity is assumed if there is improper consideration of social sustainability in BE/BG advancement (Bennett et al., 2022b). Hence, focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) have been recommended in BE initiatives (Schuhbauer and Sumaila, 2016).

Despite documentation of equity in the international framework to support the fisheries sector, it remains a challenge always (Österblom, 2020). Moreover, BE and BG initiatives give the impression to overlook SSF, and not paying sufficient attention, ultimately, marginalizing them (Chuenpagdee, 2020). Much of the coasts and oceans worldwide are peopled seascapes and the human dimension receives profound impacts from the seas (Bennett, 2019a). BG legitimises social injustice and exclusion of the traditional fishers and less powerful and unrecognized coastal groups (Said and MacMillan, 2020; Engen et al., 2021). Just operation and considering human well-being by private sectors or investors (Bennett, 2022b) in BE/BG initiatives could enhance sustainability for small-scale fishers.

SSFs are subsumed under 'fisheries and aquaculture' in global literature, mostly, hence, the importance of SSFs is overseen, sometimes (Ayilu et al., 2022). From global literature, it is evident that unplanned BE poses risk to coastal communities, particularly SSF. Other factors like access to education, gender equity, social services, and socioeconomic structures are important along with the livelihoods of locals (Sowman et al., 2014; Almaden, 2016). Consideration of local realities is key to an effective BE policy formation (Carneiro and Hammar, 2021). Nine core factors for local BG, according to Göthber et al. (2022) are infrastructure, credit, local community organisation formation, legal framework, environmental regulation, well-functioning value chain, institutions, technology, and strategic planning. I argue social sustainability needs to be reflected in these factors. Otherwise, sustaining human-nature interactions in terms of BG progress remains a challenge. Because an indicator of success or failure of any factor governing a social-ecological system is social sustainability. Legislations need to comply with the due needs of the populations affected by BG. The feasibility of BG lies in the understanding of the competitive users.

Jouffray (2020) finds four challenges of BG i) improved knowledge about claims, resources, and affected stakeholders, ii) increased attention to the actors who place the claim, iii) focusing on *who* and *what* funding the BG could reveal effective leverage points, and iv) concerns about BG beneficiaries. These four challenges play a crucial role in almost every part of the world. BE governance and management strategies may accentuate equitable outcomes while producing private wealth (Béné et al., 2010). Moreover, 'power grabs' regarding coastal and marine resources is one of the poorly explored issues (Barbesgaard, 2018). Hence, developing countries face more challenges in shaping BG in their contexts. Fundamental questions for effective coastal and ocean management and governance then remain: who is the steward to control resources, access, and govern BG services to society in an equitable way? Because no clear implications of sustainability and the role of ecosystems are established related to foment BE or BG (Mulazzani and Malorgio, 2017).

4.6 The missing link between BE discourses and their implementation

After reviewing research articles, international policy documents, and national-level documents related to BE and BG, I conclude there are sufficient discussions on BE/BG and its potential among the states interested to embrace BE. International policy documents, guidelines, and policy deliberations of BE and BG address human well-being considerably in different forms. Social sustainability, equitable benefits,

achieving SDG objectives, environmental sustainability, human rights, gender equality, good governance, and justice and peace, etc. (Table 2) are documented in most of the multilateral international policy documents and BE frameworks. Furthermore, increasing attention toward SSF and equity seems emerging. Despite these indications of growing momentum, for social equity in the coastal and ocean economic policies, the proper translation of these objectives is not visible in the national-level BE and BG plans. A recent study (Voyer et al., 2022) on Commonwealth countries also finds a similar mismatch between international BE policy objectives and national-level conceptualization and implementation.

I offer some thoughts on the research gap and way forward directions in this review. The scientific literature on BE substantially emphasizes economic growth in the coastal and marine space; there has been expressly less consideration of social equity framing. Future research and policies need to focus on bringing explicit social justice to research on BE risks such as displacement, grabbing, inequitable distribution, fairness, blue justice, etc. Equally, following international policies and consideration of priorities, the national-level blue economy policy framework needs to pay more attention to the coastal communities in terms of social and distributional impacts of equity and justice in the ocean. I recommend studying global drivers and proximal causes of social injustice, including policies, political, and local responses toward the resilience of the global coastal communities.

5. Conclusions

The definition of BE is evolving and international organisations are increasingly paying attention to the consideration of social equity and SSF in shaping their policies. However, implementation at the national level seems to focus on a conventional understanding of BE and BG, which is definitely a gap. The ocean economy and its promises are attracting the attention of international funders, the private sectors, governments, and multi-faceted organisations (Cohen et al., 2019). To ensure the robustness of the ocean economy, projects and interventions must consider SSF, social equity along with environmental sustainability. This review shows that publishing on BE/BG and SSF is increasing with a focus on sector expansion, conflict, ocean grabbing and various forms of coastal and marine investment. The results of these scientific research should be leveraged by decision-makers and stakeholders involved to achieve the goals of UN-SDG and to sustain SSF in the face of the growth of BE. A literature synthesis to inform policies is missing in SSF in developing countries, mostly. I represent an initial effort to address the dimensions of the BE, BG, and SSF contexts studied in different parts of the world and encourage further research on ‘social equity’ and SSF in BE/BG contexts. SSF resilience to the SES changes needs widespread research to be fully explored. Apart from researchers and agencies responsible for implementing the BE, there are other stakeholder ideas that may represent critical gaps in the knowledge domain and need to be explored. Moreover, the promises of public-private partnerships in the implementation phases of BE/BG cannot be fulfilled if monopolization occurs (Mallin et al., 2019; Vega-Muñoz et al., 2021). Nevertheless, the research community can ask- ‘What blue economic growth strategies ensure synergies that safeguard social equity?’

BE holds ambiguity and flexibility in application and is adopted by numerous actors, which is not compatible in every case. All of the objectives of the BE/BG agenda cannot be achieved simultaneously (Caswell et al., 2020). To achieve the goals of BE/BG, all contexts must be assessed within stressors, past and present situations, factors controlling social-ecological systems, and trade-offs (Caswell et al., 2020). Although economic growth is the primary driver of the BE, social sustainability is also essential for the just use of the coasts and oceans. Three key parties; *coastal communities*, *the environment,* and *investors* (Barbesgaard, 2018), and their interest in BE/BG will play a role in achieving the goals. BE is still in its early stages, and from global 'lessons learned', further critical research has been recommended to assess the impacts of BE from a social and political economy perspective, refine strategies, and understand the complexities of BE initiatives. At this stage of growth of BE at the national level, further research is needed to be rolled up to explore coastal contexts in terms of social equity and environmental sustainability consistent with economic growth. Understanding the trends of BE and BG and recognizing the effective role of governance could provide results to advance these efforts.

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