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CSOs and experts urged for pro poor growth

**Prepare policy to realize untapped Bay of Bengal resources**

Today 21 July 2018, in a seminar, right based civil society organizations and experts demanded the government to develop an appropriate and pro poor policy to realize the untapped resources in the Bay of Bengal in the context of poverty reduction and achieving the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goal). They also demand to ensure coastal fishers’ access to the fishging in the Bay of Bengal that is going to be government planning. The seminar is held at CIRDAP auditorium titled “Blue Economy of Bangladesh: Context, Poverty Reduction and SDGs” organized by COAST Trust.

Dr. Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad- Economist & Chairman-PKSF chaired the seminar while Md. KM Abdus Salam, Director General of NGO Affairs Bureau participated as the chief guest and Mr. Rezaul Karim Chowdhury, Executive Director of COAST Trust moderated the proceedings. Keynotes are presented by Dr. Lailufar Yasmin (Professor of International Relation, Dhaka University), Dr. Md. Moshiur Rahman (Professor of Fisheries and Marine Resource Technology Discipline, Khulna University) and Mr. Salehin Sarfaraz (Coordinator, Partnership & Advocacy, COAST Trust). Among others, Dr. Sayedur Rahman Chowdhury (Professor of Institute of Marine Sciences and fisheries, Chittagong University), Dr. AKM Aminul Hoque (Director-Marine Department of Fisheries) and Mr. Pankaj Hazaarika-Director BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) spoke as expert in the seminar while civil society representatives raised their opinion and recommendations.

The keynote presenters have addressed two important issues of foreign policy and government’s poverty reduction approach through Blue Economy. Their recommendations include, i. Bangladesh is seen as a central cohesive source as the economic hub connecting Asian states. So, we have to be cautious to design the Blue Economy strategies in case of trade, resource capturing and geo-political perspectives; ii. Government should emphasize on coastal poverty dimensions where fishers are the major part of the poverty. So, create opportunities and access for the coastal population especially for the fishers. Government must ensure access for the fishers to the fishing sphere of the Bay of Bengal by developing an appropriate policy and action plan. This will contribute to the growth and reducing socio-economic inequality.

Dr. Sayedur Rahaman said that government has policy but there are considerable gaps between policy assumption and real base data. This need to remove those gaps and prepare special plan connecting policy and information. He expresses concern of declining trend of fish in the Bay of Bengal and plan for alternative livelihood of coastal fishers.

Dr. Aminul Hoque said that multi-stakeholder engagement is required in the process of the Blue Economy strategy. We have to consider the alternative livelihood of coastal fishers and good to know that the government has taken project with World Bank for this. His proposed to initiate cage aquaculture in estuaries of Bay of Bengal during the ban period of Hilsha fishing for the benefit of coastal communities.

Md KM Abdus Salam said that coastal fishers should be rescued from the high interest loans if we really want to develop their livelihood. He requests the NGOs to work on this issue. Mr. Pankaj Hazaarika opine that, Bangladesh can take lead initiate effective cooperation among the BIMSTEC in view of implementing Blue Economy issues.

Dr. Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad said in his speech, we are revising our BCCSAP (Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan) where the Blue Economy issues will be addressed. He also opines to set priorities for Blue Economy activities with required pro poor infrastructure development and institutional capacity building. Relation to this issue, he asks to open all public water bodies for the benefit of genuine fisher communities.

Mr. Nurul Islam, Chairman, Fisherman Association, Bhola, proposed government to save the fish breeding zones like Sundarban Mangrove forest in the estuaries of Meghna and Halda rivers. He also demands to take protecting measures for the coastal fishers and their resources from the pirates.

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