



SAGAR Vision

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This article is based on **Putting the SAGAR vision to the test** published in The Hindu on 22/04/2020. It talks about India's strategic vision (Security and Growth for All in the Region - SAGAR) for the Indian Ocean.

Recently, India has admitted as an observer member of Indian Ocean Commission (IOC). This development is one of the steps in India's strategic vision (SAGAR) for the Indian Ocean.

In 2015, India unveiled its strategic vision for the Indian Ocean i.e. **Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR)**. It is an increasing recognition of the increasing importance of **maritime security, maritime commons and cooperation**.

Thorough SAGAR, India seeks to deepen **economic and security cooperation** with its maritime neighbours and assist in building their maritime security capabilities. For this, India would cooperate on the **exchange of information, coastal surveillance, building of infrastructure and strengthening their capabilities**.

Further, India seeks to safeguard its national interests and ensure Indian Ocean region to become **inclusive, collaborative and respect international law**.

Need for SAGAR Vision

Leveraging Blue Economy

- **Blue economy** presents India with an unprecedented opportunity to meet its national socio-economic objectives (livelihood generation, achieving energy security, building ecological resilience etc.) as well as strengthening connectivity with neighbors.
- Apart from it, blue economy provides many opportunities:
 - Oceans provide a substantial portion of the global population with food and livelihood, as well as transportation for 80% of global trade.
 - The seabed currently provides 32% of the global supply of hydrocarbons, with exploration expanding. The sea also offers vast potential for renewable **blue energy** production from wind, wave, tidal, thermal and biomass sources.
 - New technologies are opening frontiers of **marine resource development from bio-prospecting to mining of seabed mineral resources (poly-metallic nodules)**.

Tackling Regional Issues

- There is a need to strengthen efforts to provide **humanitarian assistance** in wake of natural disasters and counter non-state actors engaged in **piracy and terrorism**.
- Further, India seeks an integrated approach and cooperative future, which will result in **sustainable development for all** in the region.

Checking Chinese Influence

- China through its **maritime silk route (part of BRI initiative)** has been increasing its influence in Indian ocean region (IOR).
- Moreover, Chinese investments in India's neighboring countries are of **dual nature i.e commercial with military underpinnings**. The **string of pearls** has caused strategic concerns for India.
- In this context, SAGAR vision assumes much importance in countering such issues.

Significance of SAGAR Vision

- SAGAR provides a mechanism for India to expand strategic partnerships with other IOR littorals in Asia and Africa.
- SAGAR indicates the leadership role and responsibilities India is ready to play in the region on a long-term basis in a transparent manner through its capacity building and capability enhancement programs.
- The key relevance of SAGAR emerges when seen in conjunction with India's other policies impacting the maritime domain like **Act East Policy, Project Sagarmala, Project Mausam, India as 'net security provider', focus on Blue Economy** etc.
This symbolises India's maritime resurgence, as maritime issues are now centre of India's foreign policy.
- With effective implementation of all these policies, India can **act as an enabler to create a positive environment in the IOR**.

Associated Challenges

- The **'Global Commons' approach** (everyone's property is no one's responsibility) to using marine resources, especially in areas beyond national jurisdiction, with no oversight on issues of governance, access and benefit sharing.
It poses a risk for overexploitation of marine resources.
- SAGAR Vision has created engagement of **multiple players, the duplication of actions, and regional dependence on international navies**.

Way Forward

Formulating a Governance Framework

A regional legally-binding instrument concerning marine genetic resource governance including issues of access to genetic resources and benefit sharing (ABS), is to be concluded within the framework of the **UN Convention on the Law of the Seas (UNCLOS)**.

Further, there is a need to identify options and areas for designating as special ecologically and biologically sensitive areas to ensure such areas receive additional protection and sustainable management provisions.

Focusing on Regional Organisation

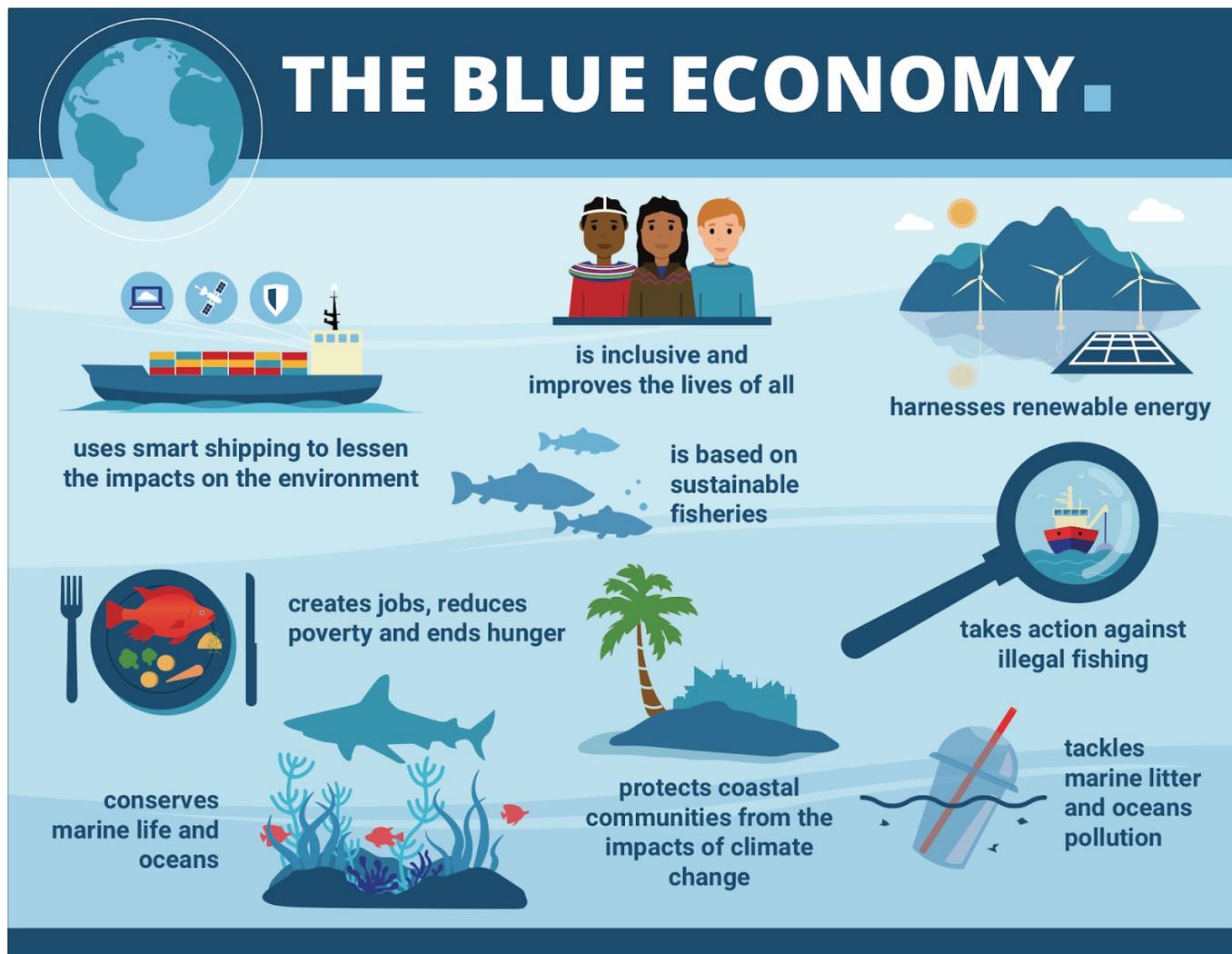
- India must focus on the **Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)**. IORA's mandate is to promote sustainable growth and balanced development in the region.
IORA needs to consider a special regional cooperation programme on Blue Economy.
- Recently, India has been granted the observer status in **Indian Ocean Commission (IOC)**. India can learn from **IOC Bottom-up regionalism**.

Indian Ocean Commission

- The IOC is an intergovernmental organisation founded in 1982 comprises **five small-island states** in the Western Indian Ocean: the Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, Réunion (a French department), and Seychelles.
- The IOC has its own regional agenda, and has made impressive headway in the design and implementation of a regional maritime security architecture in the Western Indian Ocean.
- Over the years, the IOC has emerged as an active and trusted regional actor, working in and for the Western Indian Ocean and implementing a range of projects.
For example, in 2012, the IOC was one of the four regional organisations to launch the MASE Programme.
 - MASE programme is the European Union-funded programme to promote Maritime Security in Eastern and Southern Africa and Indian Ocean.
 - Under MASE, the IOC has established a mechanism for surveillance and control of the Western Indian Ocean with two regional centres.
 - The **Regional Maritime Information Fusion Center (RMIFC)**, based in Madagascar, is designed to deepen maritime domain awareness by monitoring maritime activities and promoting information sharing and exchange.
 - The Regional Coordination Operations Centre (RCOC), based in Seychelles, will eventually facilitate joint or jointly coordinated interventions at sea based on information gathered through the RMIFC.
 - These centres are a response to the limitations that the states in the region face in policing and patrolling their often enormous Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs).
- **Bottom-up Regionalism**
The IOC style of 'bottom-up regionalism' has produced a **sub-regional view and definition of maritime security problems and local ownership of pathways** towards workable solutions.
- There is a need to make a tangible impact through **Project Sagarmala**, with a focus on port **development, connectivity, port-led industrialisation, and coastal community development**, in a timely and effective manner.
- The role of the **Coast Guard Agencies** in all the Indian Ocean littorals becomes critical. Therefore, SAGAR vision should now be expanded to include the coast guard agencies of the IOR littorals countries.
- SAGAR vision should not only tap the potential of oceans and marine areas for economic development of member states but also consider focusing on contribution to achieving the **Sustainable Development Goals**.

Conclusion

India's consultative, democratic and equitable leadership can help achieve the Security and sustainable growth to all in the region. Apart from it, India must also lead in ensuring **Sustainability and Growth for All in the Region**.



Drishti Mains Question

Discuss the importance of SAGAR vision in safeguarding India's maritime interest.



Watch Video At:

<https://youtu.be/r1HPIbk4RTs>

This editorial is based on "Future Shock" published in The Hindu on April 22, 2020. Follow editorial analysis on our youtube channel.