

# **Rethinking the Blue Economy: A Community Economies Approach to Post-Disaster Development**

## **Reconsiderando la economía azul: promoviendo el desarrollo de economías comunitarias después de desastres naturales**

## **Repenser l'économie bleue: une approche des économies communautaires pour le développement post-catastrophe**

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### **EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

The term blue economy has emerged as a key driver of economic development based on the use of ocean space and resources since the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) (Silver et al., 2015). While there is no universal definition for what blue economy means, most definitions envision pairing economic growth with environmental sustainability, commodifying ocean resources and quantifying their use and non-use values in economic terms (Voyer et al., 2018). Critics have argued that blue economy discourse has therefore served to extend market economies into oceans, leading to ocean grabbing and private control of resources (Barbesgaard, 2018). These critics argue that “win-win” narratives surrounding the blue economy can frame it as non-political, masking inequitable impacts and precluding transformative change.

A community economies approach moves beyond critique of neoliberal economic modes, focusing on what transformative change might look like. These scholars reframe the economy with communities in mind, defining it more broadly as “all of the practices that allow us to survive and care for each other and the earth”. (Gibson-Graham, 2017). Using an iceberg metaphor, these scholars illustrate that the capital economies that are often at the surface of development discourse are made possible by a range of non-capitalist activities that sometimes remain hidden below the surface (Figure 1.) This work seeks to highlight the diverse range of economic practices that are essential to society, demonstrating that even sectors and activities that are economically unprofitable often provide meaningful contributions to community well-being (Arias Schreiber et al., 2020). Applying this theory, the blue economy can be redefined as the practices that allow people to care for each other and their coastal and marine environments, recognizing the broad range of non-monetary contributions that sectors like fisheries (both commercial and recreational) provide to local people.

This study is a discourse analysis of public documents and media surrounding blue economy in Grand Bahama since Hurricane Dorian in 2019. In Grand Bahama, the blue economy is being advanced as a framework for future development activities, with the Revitalization and Expansion of Freeport Committee (“REEF Committee”) seeking to position Grand Bahama as “The blue economy of the Caribbean.” In particular, actors in Grand Bahama like the non-profit Blue Action Lab are focused on innovative approaches to the blue economy, seeking to develop new technologies and systems that can be expanded and applied locally, regionally, and globally. Actors in these initiatives have taken center stage in regional discussions surrounding the blue economy, stressing that Grand Bahama’s economy is poised for investment: “an economy that is bouncing back, and the whole world is watching.”

Public documents and media surrounding the blue economy in Grand Bahama reveal themes related to both market economies and emphasis on community needs, reflecting possibilities for reimagining the blue economy in a broader, more equitable way. Blue economy discussions in Grand Bahama include recognition of monetary needs, such as focus on gross domestic product, blue carbon and resilience markets, opportunities for investment and profit, and discussions of monetary value of the environment as an “economic engine”. However, alongside these comments, actors in these initiatives also refer to needs of the community that go beyond economic growth and capital markets, including capacity building, educational opportunities, improved equity, community and stakeholder collaboration, and food security. By focusing on the diversity of these economic practices and emphasizing the way they exist alongside and support each other, a community blue economies approach reveals how important the entire range of these practices is to local communities.

As the blue economy is emerging, Grand Bahama has the potential to be a leader in innovation, not just in terms of technology and science, but also in redefining blue economy in a more equitable way. Future fieldwork is therefore needed to understand the breadth of this range of practices so that future development efforts can focus not only on economic growth, but also what is highlighting below the purpose that sustains people and the coastal and ocean environments on which they depend.



**Figure 1.** Diverse Economies Iceberg by Community Economies Collective is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License

**KEYWORDS:** blue economy, community economies, diverse economies, post-disaster development, ocean equity

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