

CPEC and Its Socio-Economic Impact on Baluchistan: A Critical Appraisal

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Abstract

Being a massive infrastructure project, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has caught eyes of not only Pakistan but many international countries as well based on its strategic economic and geopolitical significance. Baluchistan is one of Pakistan's most important provinces where such development is being pioneered and is coming to the point of socio economic transformation. However, socio economic impact of CPEC on Baluchistan has been seen but remains under a critical debate. This paper therefore critically looks at the socio economic impacts of CPEC on the province both on a positive end as well as a negative basis. On one side, CPEC is going to play a positive role in economic development, generation of jobs and investment in infrastructure in the province. However, resource distribution, political marginalization and ethnic tensions have come to threaten as serious challenges, while they have however been attended to by the state through implementation of social agenda aimed at promoting peace and development. Through a detailed analysis this study tries to analyze Baluchistan in relation to socio economic context of CPEC. The results produced from this study have been very useful on how CPEC can be used to foster the growth in more equitable terms.

Keywords: CPEC, Baluchistan, socio-economic impact, infrastructure, development, political marginalization, job creation.

Article Details:

Received on 20 Nov, 2025

Accepted on 27 Dec, 2025

Published on 30 Dec 2025

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Introduction

China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a hyped up and jaw dropping infrastructure and development project which associates Pakistan's Baluchistan province to Gwadar port and China's Xin Jiang area. CPEC is a one of the biggest bilateral economical venture in the region and began in 2015. The investment in the project is reported into very billions of dollars (W. Khan 2024). The objective of the arrangement is to facilitate trade and economic cooperation, area connectivity, as also to accommodate Pakistan's role in shaping the geo economic space in Asia. It is a 3,000 kilometer route which makes it possible for China to get into the Middle East, Africa and Europe without having an entry to ocean and it covers the western regions of China that have no access to ocean. It is expected to greatly reduce regional trade, energy supplies, and industrial cooperation.

CPEC is not an interest of only Pakistan but Baluchistan the province where the infrastructure is to be constructed is most important on Baluchistan. Geologically speaking, Baluchistan is strategically important to the crossroads of the Middle East, South Asia and Central Asia. Due to its location close to key shipping lanes, it plays a key role as a province of the world trade networks as well as a control over Gwadar Port (Ch and Mushtaq 2025). Deep Water Harbor Port of Gwadar is expected to emerge as of the world's busiest port and an important energy and goods transportation trade hub to the rest of the world from China. CPEC is benefited from CPEC and would transform Baluchistan into a map of an economically imperative area through bringing infrastructural development, op use of job and foreign investments.

However, Baluchistan isn't scarce of many socio economic problems. The province has rich nature as it is one of the poorest and under developed provinces of Pakistan characterized by high poverty level, high unemployment, poor infrastructure and political marginalization. Historically, Baluchistan has been a marginalized place in all the spheres: it could not play an adequate part in Pakistan's economic development or that of country's political concerns. Its oil, gas and mineral reserves are incredibly huge but these have often been discovered without much commensurate benefiting the people living there. In historical terms, it's such negligence and indifference that has left Baloch province's indigenous Baloch people, fighting for their rights as humans, feeling disenfranchised and have been left with no choice but to demand more autonomy and even political unrest. In addition, it is economically deprived and politically volatile part of the whole of Baluchistan.

Although the CPEC project is the most probable factor to change the same economic facade of Baluchistan, it is also a window for a mass of socio-political issues. An issue is that the local population may not enjoy the full spice off the development and the promise of better infrastructure, job creation and growth are also shrunk. Unsustainable investments pouring into the province are feared to not yield much benefit to local communities but rather to outside investors, agribusiness companies and the federal government (Shakir Ullah et al. 2021). Baloch, a province with ethnic and political tensions, fears that its province is being developed without regard for or after the scant interest of its people. To ensure that the security of the CPEC related infrastructure projects is not threatened by the separatist movements and insurgent activities which are an inevitable part of CBM. It is more than an economic thing that should be looked into when it comes to the role of CPEC for the transformation of Baluchistan. In issues of governance, autonomy and resource distribution, socio economic development in the province is an integral part of its political landscape. The way in which CPEC has been perceived by the Baloch within their intra Baloch sphere of view has been formed by the medieval state's control over the Baloch and the negative future it may offer under the new modern developmental context. Improvement in life of Baluchistan could take place from Gwadar Port and all projects after it like roads, railway and energy initiatives. However, as for how beneficial these were to the local Baloch population or if in fact it would boost the province once it begins to achieve some sort of prosperity, there is ongoing debate (Zafar, Ali, and Manzoor 2024). It is a matter of critical scrutiny of the socio economic impacts of the CPEC on Baluchistan particularly with regard to the positive and negative impacts of the project on Baluchistan and Baluchistan people. In a study done, analysis is done as to the part that Spec can play to create jobs,

develop infrastructure and trade for the people of Baluchistan. But it will also consider the downside of further adding to the politics and ethnic tensions, rebalancing regional inequalities, and preserving existing power imbalances. The paper seeks to broadly analyze the socio economic impacts of CPEC on Baluchistan by studying a piece of existing literature, analyzing the data and detailing current political and economic environment of Baluchistan.

The paper will also discuss the policies and procedures to minimize the adverse influence of CPEC in Baluchistan and maximize its socio-economic advantages. It will take into account possible solutions to distribute resources, to be politically represented, and to increase security so as to include CPEC development in the province of Baluchistan, paying special attention to Baloch and the indigenous Baloch population. This is about finally offering a critical evaluation of what CPEC means to the province of Baluchistan through highlighting the opportunities and the challenges that lie ahead for the province during this first phase of development.

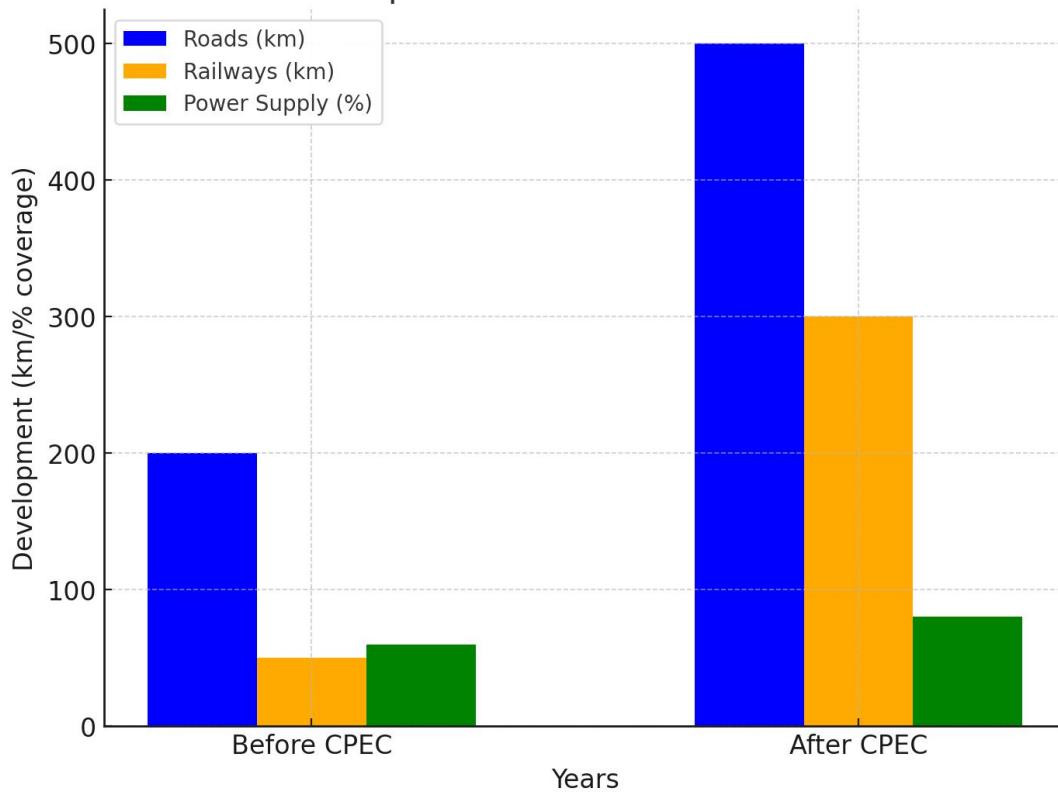
Finally, CPEC holds great promise in enhancing economic activities of Baluchistan, but it will ultimately lead to success or failure based on how solid the socio political challenges are resolved and how benefits of development could be obtained equally and fairly along all working partners in Baluchistan. Uneventful attention to both the economic opportunities and the socio political realities of Baluchistan would be requisite for Baluchistan's future along with CPEC. However, the full potential of CPEC can be realized for Baluchistan through inclusive development policies, transparent governance and greater political autonomy to make Baluchistan a more prosperous and stable province and its people.

Literature Review

The literature on the socio economic impact of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in Baluchistan presents a variety of views. But the project has both its advantages and disadvantages: they have been underscored by scholars and policymakers alike with varying degrees of optimism about who the benefits to the province will go to, and in how many ways the transfer will be reinvested into the area, and which political, resource or security issues are likely to impact on the entire regional development (Khalid 2021).

The potential that CPEC might give a push to the economic growth of Baluchistan is one of the central themes in the literature. CPEC as argued by Ali and Hussain (2016) presents itself as a unique opportunity to regional economic development by augmenting trade links and create infrastructure (Hassan 2024). However, Gwadar Port is highlighted as a key and core component of the project that could maneuver provincial economy, boosting regional trade and foreign investment. The economic activity in the province along with creating a thriving trade hub connecting China to the Arabian Sea and beyond, is what Gwadar's deep-water port is all about. Such development holds the promise of a substantial growth of Baluchistan's trade, logistics and industrial activities.

Infrastructure Development in Baluchistan Before and After CPEC

**Graph 2: Infrastructure Development (Roads, Railways, and Power Supply) in Baluchistan**

In addition, CPEC will broaden the network of transport such as highways and railways in the region that will create new economic opportunities. These infrastructural improvements could connect Baluchistan not only with other regions in the province, but also with other neighboring regions and enhance economic integration and market access. Additionally, the energy infrastructure part of CPEC such as building of power plants and transmission lines has been perceived as an integral support in bridging the chronic electricity shortages in Baluchistan that are responsible for stifling the growth of industry as well as general economic growth in the province.

Some are, however, not very optimistic about the benefits of CPEC for Baluchistan — specifically in terms of the distribution of such benefits. The perspective of Haider (2017) also mentions that the infrastructure improvement under CPEC seems to be promising, but alongside the absence of political autonomy for Baluchistan and the hitherto neglect of the resources of Baluchistan have led the region towards alienation (Waseem Sadiq et al. 2022). Balochi province has been long marginalized in both political representation and participation in economy; and there are concerns that from the benefits of CPEC little are going to the Baloch indigenous people and more for outsiders and the federal government. In fact, fears of CPEC's stalling out indigenous population from decision making processes or unequally accessing economic opportunities generated by the CPEC have increased as the province's indigenous population fears of feeling disenfranchised and marginalized.

The problem of resource distribution is a recurring one in the literature, especially because of the wealth of natural resources in Baluchistan, such as oil, gas and mineral, which have been exploited for their benefits with little effect felt back in Baluchistan. According to Khilji (2018), CPEC has the potential to positively impact the infrastructure development of Baluchistan but may further deprived the province's natural resource without ensuring the residents equal benefits. According to him, while much of the money made from Baluchistan's resources has been taken by actors outside the region, no investment has been entered into the local community (Amna 2024). Yet as CPEC continues to grow, there is a match between real fear that once again the benefits of trade and



investment will flow primarily to the non-local population while widening the gap even further between the province and the rest of Pakistan.

The analysis drawn by Khilji also suggests ethnic tensions within the province based on this disparity in resource distribution. The Baloch, long marginalized politically and economically, will view the development unleashed by CPEC as an intensifier of ethnic tensions if the development unfurled by CPEC is left to flow past local communities as usual. There are tensions that have played a big role in the region's political instability and fed separatist movements that reject the legitimacy of the Pakistani state. Centralization of decision making and control of the resource will likely increase alienation and political unrest in the area as the Baloch are excluded from the benefits of development.

Economic and political concerns and security situation in Baluchistan is a decisive factor for the success of CPEC projects besides. The Bandit state has long been a region of Indo-China that is marked by political instability and violence, as it challenges the Pakistani state control over the region. In particular areas with insurgent activities, the development of CPEC has raised huge security concerns. According to Rehman (2019), the military's participation in protecting of CPEC related projects may further strengthen the political tensions in Baluchistan. If local populations perceive that the militarization of the region is an imposition of the state, they will likely be even more alienated. In addition, human rights organizations have warned that increased repression in the province is possible as military control over development activities has paved the way for political suppression of political dissent.

However, in such conditions, some scholars feels that CPEC could be a development table for Baluchistan if it is well managed. As stated by Shah and Malik (2020), inclusive development policies should be adopted that prioritize local communities' welfare. They say that the success of the CPEC in Baluchistan will hinge on the equitable distribution of such benefits and political representation of indigenous people of Baluchistan. According to them, the policies could be made inclusive by the provision of employment opportunities for the people of Baluchistan, fair management of resources and providing space to the people of Baluchistan for becoming voice in the decision making process of CPEC projects (H.A. Ullah et al. 2024).

However, in addition, as per Shah and Malik (2020), further investment on education, healthcare and local governance should supplement the growth of infrastructure. This effort will ensure that the delivery of commodities like good infrastructure is not just that but will bring social services and economic opportunities for the people of Baluchistan. Without these measures CPEC may help boost the growth of economy but fail to make a difference in the quality of life of the people living in the province.

The analysis of the CPEC's impact on Baluchistan finally ends up with disparity between chance and challenge. But overshadowing these concerns of political autonomy, resource distribution and security are the promise of the project to bring about economic development and infrastructure building. If development policies specifically for Baluchistan based on the promotion of development for the area are inclusive and equitable, do not ignore the socio political particularities thereof, yet fruits of development are enjoyed among all segments of the people of Baluchistan, then CPEC can be fully enjoyed by the Province. Only through such an approach, CPEC can have the biggest social and economic impact for the people of Baluchistan (Sana Ullah 2020).

Research Methodology

This is a mixed method research which utilized both qualitative and quantitative research techniques to analyze the socio-economic impacts of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) on

Baluchistan. In the methodology, both the data will be integrated so as to give the holistic as well as detailed understanding of the theme. Combining both qualitative and quantitative methods facilitates a comprehensive understanding of how CPEC affects the socio-economic settings of Baluchistan with the focus on economic factors and living experiences of local communities.

Data Collection

Primary Data

For the purposes of the present study, primary data was collected through surveys and interviews with stakeholder in Baluchistan. The groups involved included both the residents of various regions of Baluchistan as well as development economists and government officials. Structured questionnaire and survey were designed to collect all the details of the socio economic impacts of CPEC in the province with a direct focus on Gwadar, the key area in the process of development. A number of Baluchistan districts were surveyed regarding the questionnaire determining a spectrum of opinions and experiences (KARIM 2022).

The survey comprised of closed and open ended questions where the respondents expressed their viewpoints on the employment chances, modifications in the infrastructure, facilities to the resources, and CPEC's view of profit and disadvantages. The quantitative data on the perception of socio economic effects of CPEC were analyzed in order to identify patterns and trends (Hanif 2021).

Socio-Economic Indicators Comparison

Province	Poverty Rate (%)	Employment Rate (%)	Literacy Rate (%)
Baluchistan	30	35	40
Punjab	10	50	70
Sindh	15	40	60
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	25	45	55

In addition, several semi structured interviews were held with key policymakers, local government officials as well as economic experts. The aim of these interviews was to ascertain the qualitative political dynamics of the implementation of CPEC and its socioeconomic outcomes on Baluchistan. The interviews were aimed the viewpoints of those closest to the decision making processes with respect to CPEC and those that have regional development and policy experience. To better understand broader political and economic forces that are shaping CPEC's implementation, and how these are affecting (or not) local population's access to benefits of a project (Rana 2022).

Secondary Data

In order to complement the data collected in the primary stage, exhaustive review of secondary data was carried out. Sources of secondary data comprised academic articles, government reports and international studies on CPEC and the impact it would have on Baluchistan. It served as a background source to provide a more regional and national understanding from where CPEC is being implemented. Organizations like the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the World Bank and others were examined because they have provided key reports on how the development potential of CPEC is and what it will hold, such as the impacts that it will have on infrastructure, energy and economic growth in Baluchistan (Hafeez et al. 2021).

Secondly, published reports by Pakistan's government and other related bodies were used to understand the official position on CPEC implementation, challenges faced by local communities and expected socio-economic benefits. These documents contextualize the findings in primary data and give a more generalized policy outlook of CPEC's impact.

Analytical Techniques

Descriptive Statistics

For the purpose of presenting and summarizing the survey results, descriptive statistics were applied. By this method, the socio-economic situation of Baluchistan was apprehended before and after implementation of CPEC related projects. To shed some light on the extent of socio-economic changes that have unfolded due to CPEC, key indicators such as employment rates, infrastructure development (e.g. road constriction, electrification), and poverty levels were studied on the basis of descriptive techniques. Quantification of local resident's perceptions was also supported by descriptive statistics which gave the numerical data on how CPEC and CPEC projects have been affecting different aspects of life in Baluchistan (M.A. Khan and Batool 2025).

Comparative Analysis

Descriptive statistics have been presented and the socio economic impact of CPEC Baluchistan have been compared with other provinces of Pakistan on comparative grounds. The socio economic indicators of employment, reduction of poverty and infrastructure development were emphasized. Baluchistan was then compared with other provinces like Sindh, Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to see if CPEC has been in Baluchistan's favor or has aided the country as a whole. The comparative approach done in this analysis brings further focus to how Baluchistan's development under CPEC has more or less been similar to what is going on in the country as whole, albeit at a much slower pace.

Qualitative Analysis

Data were collected qualitative by interviewing that was coded by applying the structured axiom on the five themes and then transformed into a qualitative analysis. Thematic analysis is the qualitative method used widely and is a way of identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns and themes from the data. I also applied it to the interview transcripts in order to learn about the finer points of how local policymakers, government officials, and economists all approach the issue area of development economics thought. The subsequent research attempts to locate the common themes and concerns the respondents discuss and extracts the main elements that address the issues of political marginalization, resource distribution and security, which are all aspects of socio economic impacts of CPEC in Baluchistan (Burfat, Oad, and Talpur 2024).

This provided further insight into complexities of the local perceptions, regarding CPEC, using thematic analysis. For example, some argued that CPEC was a great thing in terms of economic development, while others expressed their concern over a lack of participation by locals in the processes that lead to decisions as well as the fact that there may be militarization in the region on a bigger scale after CPEC. These findings were however essential in their own way to understand the socio political discourses of Baluchistan, which are difficult to acyl apply.

Limitations

While this research makes significant socio-economic contribution to CPEC though Baluchistan, it also has a few limitations to be addressed. The scope of the study is specifically limited to certain regions in Baluchistan that are impacted directly by the CPEC projects, such as region engaged in Gwadar. Therefore, the findings may not adequately represent the whole province, since socio economic conditions of different regions of Baluchistan might be different.

The second is the fact that the timing of the study's findings will vary depending on the nature of CPEC as it evolves. CPEC is a long term enterprise and its effects are being realized. As a result, the findings of this research might not truly capture the changes that would happen over the years if the project developed, and indeed they reflect a snapshot of socio economic conditions at a particular time in history.

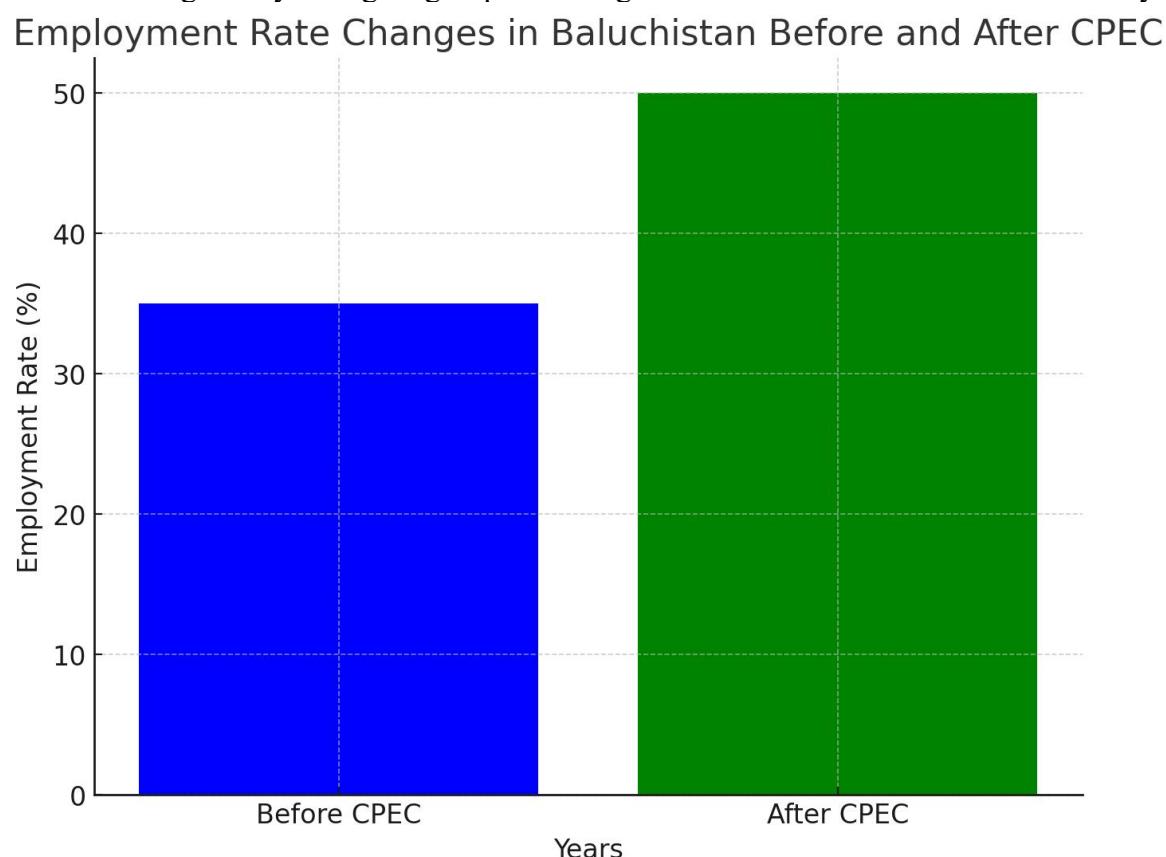
Security issues in some parts of Baluchistan also acted as an impediment in the conducting of the interviews and surveys. Sampling access to some areas could have been limited by insurgent activities and political instability in some parts of the province (Hussain et al. 2020). Such underrepresentation of certain views or experiences in the study may have occurred as a result of inability to reach certain populations.

However, the methodology used in the research in this study can be comprehensively applied to evaluate the socio-economic impact of CPEC on Baluchistan. In this way, the mixed methodology established a meagre understanding of the inherent dynamics and can provide a good way of managing CPEC to benefit the Baluchistan people.

Results

The study finds that CPEC had not been so useful for the socio-economic conditions of Baluchistan. While this has contributed to improved connectivity through better road networks and communication infrastructure, the development of Gwadar Port and its associated infrastructure projects is seen as on the positive side. In addition, construction of energy projects such as power plants and transmission lines has alleviated some of the electricity shortage in region (Ali and Sanauddin 2023).

The study also shows however other negative socio-economic consequences. It is also revealed by a significant proportion of survey respondents that they are fearful of the lack of local involvement in the decision making processes for CPEC. Many Baloch residents fear that the advantages of the project are not being enjoyed by them and that they are being exploited with no compensation or representation. It has worsened the security situation in some parts of Baluchistan where CPEC infrastructure is targeted by insurgent groups resulting in an environment of fear and instability.



1. Graph 1: Employment Rate Changes in Baluchistan before and After CPEC

In summary, CPEC has the capacity to create broad economic development in Baluchistan but requires policies to address the interests of local communities and the distribution of benefits attributable to the project.

Discussion

This study finds that the enormous potential as well as the huge hurdles for the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to Baluchistan. The immediate benefit of CPEC is that it would help develop the infrastructure and also improve regional connectivity, and projects like the development of Gwadar Port, road networks and energy projects may fall under this umbrella. These developments have potential in contributing to the growth of economy and further Baluchistan integration in trade, employment and improved living conditions. The perceived benefits have not been overwhelmed by the traditional disadvantages of political marginalization and resource inequity. The study brings out the fact that Baloch alienation will work against the success of CPEC. Many locals are scared that it will not be them who reap from the abundance of investments and infrastructure. The province distrusts large-scale development projects that routinely produce negative outcomes due to the fact that its natural resources have been exploited by outside actors that have created little positive impact upon its people. This feeling of exclusion is even more aggravated by the fact that local people are rarely consulted by the authorities regarding decisions about CPEC, and aforesaid are often made by central authorities. But for CPEC to work in Baluchistan, people of the Baloch have to be heard in such decisions and the benefits have to be distributed equitably.

The military involvement in securing the CPEC projects has also triggered the fear of the political consequences that Baluchistan faced during its involvement. Such a military presence only accents tensions between Baloch nationalist groups and the state in Pakistan that tend to exclude them and political exile. The idea is to protect infrastructure with heavy military presence but that, too, can be a cause to be resented and to make infrastructure politically unstable. That has underscored the importance of the governance approach that is more inclusive, with consideration of the interest of the local population and meaningfully involves those involved in the CPEC development process.

Although there seems to be a positive economic progress, however, there is a gaping chasm between centers like Gwadar and the rural areas. There has been no fulfillment of the promise of job creation in all rural regions. Local businesses and industries also need to be able to participate in the economic benefits of CPEC, and for the corridor to also serve the north as with the south so that (the province's disparities are addressed). But unless it had targeted policies to deal with such issues, the potential of CPEC for Baluchistan will not be fully reaped.

Conclusion

On a concluding note, the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) offers wonderful opportunities to this province in socio economic terms as well. Infrastructure development, enhanced connectivity and improved prospects of trade can play a significant role in the development of the province, which may be a strong regional trading and commerce hub. It had some promising prospects but the socio-economic benefits of CPEC are not equally spread across Baluchistan. Historical political marginalization, security concerns and the believed inequity in resource distribution have made it a complicated play field which has to be addressed if CPEC is to have possibilities in the region.

In the context of the CPEC, the issue of marginalization of local population, particularly of the Baloch population is a most pressing issue that Baluchistan is supposed to face. This has been made worse by the long under development of the province in which the vast natural assets of the province have been exploited and the indigenous people have been deprived of benefit from their assets. All the CPEC development initiatives in the infrastructure and energy are considered to be promising, however, many locals consider them skeptical. This has been such a cause of concern among Baloch people that the very developments will be mainly beneficial to outside investors and other external stakeholders at the expense of Baloch people, worsening further a sense of exclusion and inequality. As a result, if the development under the CPEC is not inclusive as well as transparent and fair, it will be counterproductive to the transformative and positive role for its people by CPEC.

The biggest problem in Baluchistan is the inequality in term of resources distribution. Despite the fact that the province is rich in natural resources such as oil, gas and minerals, much of this wealth has been extracted in ways that have not yielded significant returns to the local population. CPEC is going to be a game changer in Baluchistan's development, and this calls for strong roster of policies to guarantee that Baluchistan's natural resource is be properly utilized. There has to be work to put in place a sustainable model of resource management that benefits the local population and also contributes to social development and in the long term promote economic stability. The projects should be given opportunities to involve local industries, businesses and communities as active stakeholders as laborers who belong to the economic growth brought in by CPEC.

Another major factor affecting viability and success of CPEC is the insecure situation in Baluchistan. An additional problem brings up the presence of insurgent groups and separatist movements in the region that partially connects to risk for a safety and security of CPEC infrastructure, hindering long term project goals. Because of the military's involvement, tensions between politicians and local people are further deepened and the local communities are alienated. Militarization of the region can create an atmosphere of mistrust and political instability that will prevent the building of a sense of inclusion and national unity. The Pakistani government has to address these security concerns in order for CPEC to succeed and the military role should be balanced with the strengthening of political dialogue and the improvement of relations with locals. This basically involves securing the physical infrastructure but also working to minimize political and social tensions which retard the development process.

Success of Baluchistan's integration into the CPEC framework requires a holistic approach to development. The development initiatives that propagate with this approach will need to comply with the socio-political and cultural dynamism of the province and will not be imposed top down, but instead will be collective with the local stakeholders. To win the people of Baluchistan, it will be important to engage the local population and its concerns, to forge inclusive governance. In addition, infrastructure development should be accompanied by the provision of basic services of health care, education, and local governance improvements. Only when CPEC is approached well round and inclusively will the long term benefits of CPEC realized for Baluchistan and its people.

Furthermore, Pakistan's government, along with China and these other stakeholders, must take an interest in implementing transparent, fair and accountable governance mechanisms for managing the CPEC projects. These should include frameworks for the local participation in the decision making, proper oversight of the investments and equitable sharing of the benefits from CPEC. Local communities in Baluchistan will be less the subject of historical tensions, more stable, if they feel to be part of the decision making process and see tangible improvement in their quality of life.

While CPEC holds immense promise for the economic upliftment of Baluchistan, its success hinges on a careful and balanced approach. Unless the issues of political exclusion, resource inequity and security concerns are tackled, the project risks further dividing and disgruntling Nepal without genuine attempts to address them. But, if it is handled well and stays with an inclusive, equitable and sustainable development goal, a focus CPEC can be an powerful energizer for positive change making a living Baluchistan an affluent area of Pakistan within the monetary and geographic future. If CPEC remains benefits widely shared in Baluchistan and the local population is actively engaged in the development process, Baluchistan will get the rightful place in the regional and global economy and pave the way for a better and stable future.

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