

The Perspective of Native People Regarding Developmental Projects of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in Gwadar, Balochistan

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Gwadar's economic potential has become a centre of debate in national and international media. However, less discussed are the people living there, especially the native communities who are mostly dependent on fishing as a source of livelihood. This study has taken a people-centric approach by employing qualitative methods with the aim to explore the perspectives of the native people of Gwadar regarding the impacts of various projects related to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Fieldwork was carried out in Gwadar city to collect data from various groups of local people. The findings reveal that the local people had legitimate expectations of improvement in their lives and livelihoods from CPEC projects but, over the last decades, these expectations were not met. As a result, the unmet expectations have given rise to concerns and frustrations. Most of the local people appreciated the development of infrastructure in Gwadar; however, they have been feeling discriminated against and see themselves excluded from the development process. Policy measures have been suggested to make CPEC more meaningful for the local people of Gwadar and to (re)gain their trust and confidence in the government.

Keywords: CPEC, Development, Fishermen, Displacement, Perception, Exclusion

1. INTRODUCTION

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is considered to be a 'game-changer' (Qazilbash, 2017; Hamza & Gillani, 2020) for its economic and geostrategic importance for Pakistan and the region. As the flagship component of the "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI) of China, CPEC is an economic development initiative comprising various components such as transportation corridor, infrastructure construction, industrial development, trade, and livelihood improvement with the aim of socio-economic development, peace, and prosperity for the benefit of the people of the region (Pakistan, 2017). CPEC is expected to bring development, growth, and prosperity directly not only to Pakistan and China, but it will have positive impacts on Iran, Afghanistan, the Central Asian Republics, and the region (CPEC Authority, 2022). As such, there has been a great deal of discussion about CPEC, and its many advantages to Pakistan have been highlighted by experts.

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While CPEC will certainly bring infrastructure developments, economic opportunities, progression, and prosperity to the region, megaprojects usually create inconveniences for local people in the short and well as long run. Local people usually show a mix of reactions to new developments (Kanwal, et al. 2018). While some people see it as an opportunity to be welcomed, some local people of the same area might see a developmental project as a threat to their indigenous livelihood structure, culture, and identity. The recent agitations by local people in Gwadar (Dawn, 2021) are examples of how certain mega projects can create unrest among people. To ensure the smooth execution of CPEC projects, it is imperative for policymakers both in Islamabad and Beijing to take into consideration the important point that effectively managing the expectations and the concerns of the local people are important factors for the success of a megaproject.

The enormous benefits of CPEC to the national economy of Pakistan have been highlighted in the media and as well academic literature in Pakistan. However, not much is available on how CPEC projects will impact the local population in Gwadar, which is considered to be the epicentre of the CPEC (Abbas, 2019; Dawn, 2021; Kanwal, et al. 2018; Saad, et al. 2019). It can also be noted that most academic literature and media have focused on the expected benefits of CPEC to Pakistan at the *national level*, ignoring the *cost* some people at the *local level* might have to pay for these benefits. What are the costs and benefits of CPEC to the local people at Gwadar? What are the fears and expectations of various groups within Gwadar regarding various development projects? How can policymakers better manage the concerns and expectations of the local people for maximising the benefits of CPEC? These and other such questions are the focus of this study.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study aimed to achieve the following objectives.

- (1) To explore the knowledge, attitude, and perception of the native people regarding the developmental projects of CPEC in Gwadar.
- (2) To analyse the expectations and aspirations of local people regarding the developmental projects of CPEC in Gwadar.
- (3) To investigate the concerns and apprehensions of local people regarding the developmental projects of CPEC in Gwadar.
- (4) To understand how different groups within the area are affected differently by the developmental projects of CPEC in Gwadar.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

DeGood (2020) has argued that building infrastructure is an inherently political act and that the design, location, scale, and scope of what governments build reflect social, economic, and political power in society. He has further noted that most often, the benefits of access and opportunity flow to dominant social and industry groups, while the burdens of disinvestment, pollution, and geographic isolation fall on low-income communities. Indigenous populations inhabiting these spaces bear a disproportionate share of the financial, social, and ecological costs of such developmental thinking.

Specifically, large-scale projects change the current spaces and patterns of public social life in manners that nearby native people find problematic, confusing, and threatening (Ferguson, 1999).

The proponents of CPEC in the government and the policy community believe that the completion of the development initiatives under the flagship of CPEC in Gwadar will reduce poverty, solve the energy crisis, and creates business and employment opportunities for the local people (Abid & Ashfaq, 2015). However, Jamali (2014) argued that development in the form of large-scale infrastructure projects can lead to power rearrangements concerning capital, political power, expertise, and knowledge to serve the specific interests of the national and international actors. Similarly, Ufford and Giri (2003) believed that developmental projects bring both gains and pains to society and some people may get the benefits while others may pay for the costs in the process of development.

In recent times, several research studies have elaborated on the advantages of CPEC at the micro-level as well as macro level, but most studies have been theoretical and are not based on empirical data (Saad, et al. 2019). Secondly, for most of the studies concerned with the impact of CPEC on “local” people, the term ‘local’ means “Pakistanis as a whole.” For example, the studies conducted by Kanwal, et al. (2018) and Saad, et al. (2019) on the effects of the CPEC on the *local* people in Pakistan are based on *national* samples of people selected from all over the country. These kinds of studies are valuable, but they fall short of ‘localising the context’ to the specific groups which are directly affected by various CPEC projects and who constitute the primary stakeholders. Thirdly, most previous studies have highlighted the positive impacts of CPEC on the overall economy of Pakistan, giving little attention to the plight of some segments of people at the grassroots level who might feel alienated and excluded from the development process.

A few studies have already highlighted the plight of local communities in Gwadar who feel that the authorities have failed to listen to their concern. For instance, Ali (2018), Afzal & Naseem (2018), and Esteban (2016) found that while most of the local people will benefit from CPEC projects, some of the local communities in Balochistan have voiced their reservations regarding CPEC projects. Ali (2018) pointed out that the local people in Gwadar are concerned about the increasing securitisation of the city in which the local fishermen are restricted from catching fish in the sea as far as twenty kilometres. Notezai (2021) observed that local people are in a state of anxiety about their future in the city and “if Gwadar’s development is not meant to benefit locals first, then it is the first step towards derailing the entire development process.” Iftikhar, et al. (2019) argued that there is stress on developing Gwadar as a ‘Special Economic Zone’ and a ‘Smart City’ but there is little debate and discussion on making Gwadar an ‘inclusive city.’

It is a fact that mega-development projects including dams, railways, seaports, airports, etc. provide significant opportunities for employment, business, and trade to bring prosperity and enhance the socio-economic position and living standards of the people (Abbas, 2019). However, such projects often require large pieces of land for construction and may have impacts and consequences for the locality such as disturbance, displacement, socio-economic problems, and even social and political unrest. Thus, people may be displaced and deprived of their land and lose their socio-cultural aspects of living styles, traditions, social structure, and other economic resources due to mega-

development projects (Oliver-Smith, 2009). It is fairly common and natural that the local people expect to get socio-economic benefits from any development project (Obour, et al. 2016). Suárez & Pérez (2018) argued that if the needs of communities are not ensured in development projects, then conflicts and social unrest intensify in the areas of the affected communities. In initiating any developmental projects, the perspectives of the local population are necessary for building a mutual relationship of trust to extend the work of development.

It might be true that CPEC projects in Gwadar could help revive the aging and dysfunctional infrastructure and the flagging economy of Pakistan. But to deliver on these promises, policymakers need to implement them with considerably more sensitivity and consultation than they have displayed thus far. Given that local acceptance and ownership are a prerequisite for the success of megaprojects and given that the local people in Balochistan in general and in Gwadar, in particular, have shown resentment towards the projects, this study is of utmost importance. While research on CPEC from national, economic, and strategic perspectives is important, research from the local people's perspective is even more significant for a better understanding of the issues and successful implementation of the projects. This study, therefore, has been designed to explore and analyse the knowledge, understanding, fears, and expectations of the local people of Gwadar.

4. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted using a qualitative inductive approach. Qualitative research was chosen with "the desire to step beyond the known and enter into the world of participants, to see the world from their perspective" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used as a research design that provides a systematic framework to investigate social phenomena and explore social reality through interaction with individual research participants (El Haddad, 2016).

This study was conducted in Gwadar city which is the epicentre of CPEC (Abbas, 2019; Kanwal, et al. 2018; Saad, et al. 2019). The geo-economic location of Gwadar has become one of the prime motives behind the mega-developmental projects of CPEC. Keeping in view the qualitative nature of the study, 'saturation' was set as the target during data collection and ultimately 65 interviews were conducted out of which 49 were conducted with males, and 16 interviews were conducted with female participants. All the participants were 'natives' of Gwadar city, by which we mean the local inhabitants of Gwadar whose forefathers have been living in the city. Data was collected through in-depth interviews from different groups of the local population, including fishermen and women, displaced people, micro-businesspeople, political leaders and community influential, daily wage labourers, government officials, and students. Grounded theory was used as the method of data analysis in which the iterative process of data collection, transcription, and analysis of the data was followed.

5. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

This section of the paper has been divided into different thematic headings, roughly corresponding to the various objectives of the study. This includes the knowledge and attitude of the local people regarding CPEC in Gwadar, their

expectations, concerns, and apprehensions, and the various ways in which the different groups of the local people have been impacted by CPEC projects, both positively and negatively.

5.1. “The Chinese are Coming”: Vague Knowledge and Mixed Attitude of Local People

As Gwadar is considered to be the epicentre of CPEC, a lot of work is going on in the city in which various projects are being executed. Three projects have been completed so far which include the Development of the Port and Free Zone, Gwadar Smart Port City Master Plan, and Pak-China Technical and Vocational Institute at Gwadar, whereas some projects are under construction such as Gwadar East-Bay Expressway, New Gwadar International Airport, and Pak-China Friendship Hospital, among others. In addition, several projects are in the pipeline most of which will be completed soon (CPEC Authority, 2022).

Unexpectedly, most people who were interviewed for this study turned out to have very vague and obscure ideas about the various CPEC projects. While all people knew that “the Chinese are coming to Gwadar” and they are constructing roads and other physical infrastructures, very few people were able to name and explain the various ongoing mega projects. However, it was found that the male members of the community and local influential/community leaders had better knowledge of CPEC as compared to women and other groups such as fishermen, daily wage labourers, relocated people, micro-business communities, etc. A female participant who was interviewed for this study stated, “I just know that CPEC is an economic corridor between Pakistan and China. I don’t know more than that.” A fisherman stated that “I have heard from people that the Chinese are coming to Gwadar and that CPEC will bring development and business to Gwadar.” It is surprising that the fishermen usually visit the sea and wander in Gwadar on daily basis but do not know sufficient details about the components of CPEC executed in Gwadar city.

It was found that people had mixed attitudes towards CPEC. It seemed that two important factors determined the attitude of people, namely knowledge about the projects and their utility for the locals. As said earlier, obscure and vague knowledge of the locals caused negative attitudes towards CPEC because unaware people can easily be influenced by negative propaganda. Similarly, the utility of a particular project for the local people also plays a role in whether people have an overall positive or negative attitude towards CPEC. A woman political worker appreciated the facilities brought about by CPEC to the residents of Gwadar by saying that “Before, all of us used wood for cooking in our homes but today, due to CPEC, some houses have gas in their kitchen. This is a big relief for the women of Gwadar.” However, most people believed that the native people are in a disadvantageous position and the feelings of exclusion are increasing day by day. The negative feelings were visible more among those people who had lost something, such as their land or source of livelihood, or those who had not received any direct benefit from CPEC. For example, a fisherman angrily remarked:

“Whether CPEC will bring prosperity or not to the lives of people, it has certainly damaged my livelihood; I can’t do fishing in the water in which my father and grandfather use to do fishing.”

In short, local people have limited and vague knowledge about the various development projects in Gwadar and they have mixed attitudes regarding CPEC, mainly determined by the lack of clear and comprehensive knowledge and the lack of perceived utility of the projects for the local people.

5.2. Shattered Dreams: Expectations and Disappointments of Local People

The government and media created high expectations among local people when CPEC was initially started. The residents of Gwadar expected that CPEC would bring a drastic change in their lives. The level of their expectations was higher in early 2013 and 2014 which started declining over time. As of now, they have fewer expectations because what they have expected has not been delivered to them. A female participant, a wife of a fisherman, explained her expectations and excitement when she first heard of CPEC:

“One day, almost ten years ago, my husband told me that the Chinese are coming to Gwadar to develop the port and to build other projects. He said that we will get all the necessities of life—gas, electricity, and water and will get employment opportunities and live happy life. I got very happy at that time. ... but most of these things didn't come true”.

Gwadar is always compared with Dubai and Singapore by CPEC authorities, and this idea is promoted by the media in the minds of the common masses. A female student recalled how her elders used to describe CPEC in very positive ways and compared Gwadar to Dubai.

“When I first heard about CPEC from my family almost 08-10 years ago, they said Gwadar would develop like Dubai.

(وہدے کہ اولی رند ۽ سی پیک ۽ باروا ایش کت گڑا من سرپد بوتان کہ گوادر دینی بیت.)

We would get job opportunities and everyone would live a happy life”.

The population of Gwadar has always faced the issue of clean drinking water and they hoped that CPEC would at least provide them with clean drinking water. A male political leader, who is always in political struggle for locals, said,

“In the initial days of CPEC, everyone was saying and expecting drinking water, electricity, and other such facilities and people were happy. Some people are still hopeful, but most of us have lost faith in the promises of the government.”

These high expectations of the local people are now changing into frustrations and disappointment. The most common dreams for which people are still looking include employment opportunities, clean drinking water, electricity, gas, health facilities, education facilities, etc. On the other hand, some participants, especially government officials and those directly involved in CPEC projects in various capacities, were not only satisfied but expressed a sense of pride that Gwadar has developed considerably due to CPEC. More specifically, such participants emphasised the development of infrastructure and tourism in Gwadar. An official explained that:

“Gwadar became a tourist point due to CPEC. ... Business communities from different parts of the country came and invested here. For example, Taloo Group and Patel Group have come and invested a lot in the city.”

At the same time, a couple of officials were critical of CPEC. For example, one official working with CPEC pointed out that:

“Our expectations from CPEC were much higher but instead, the locals have been in trouble due to increased restrictions on their movement in Gwadar. I have heard from elders that the interpretation of a dream is often negative. The same looks like the case with CPEC.”

The metaphor of dream was invoked by several participants who believed that the rosy picture painted by media in the initial days was interpreted literally by the locals who believed that CPEC will change their fate. However, as time passed by, their expectation slowly turned into concerns which have been discussed at length later in his paper.

5.3. “Roads, Roads... Being Constructed Everywhere”: Development Projects and Opportunities for Local People

Despite the pessimism expressed by many locals, CPEC is right on its way to ‘changing the game’ in the region. Gwadar is rapidly becoming an international city and a hub of economic activities. For many people, the first sign of development in Gwadar is the networks of roads being constructed in the city. When asked about how CPEC has changed Gwadar, a student remarked that “I don’t see much except the decoration of Gwadar with roads.” Responding to the same question, a daily wager remarked:

“Roads, roads, small roads, bigger roads being constructed everywhere... and other such things.”

The mushroom growth of roads in Gwadar was personally observed by the researchers. While most of the roads seem to have no immediate utility, roads are said to be the gateways through which the economy pulses (Claudia, et al. 2015). For example, the Makran Coastal Highway has proved immensely beneficial in connecting the people of the region to the rest of the country. Roads are important to any development agenda which can link the producers to the markets, workers to jobs, students to school, and the sick people to hospitals (Claudia, et al. 2015).

Apart from roads, other infrastructure projects are going on everywhere in the city. A small business owner explained that “There are some good things such public hospitals, parks, stadiums, and industries etc. from which a lot of people will benefit.” Even the fishermen who were dislocated from their native homes acknowledged that development was taking place. A fisherman explained that:

“Though our movement has been restricted in the city as we can no longer catch fish in the sea as we use to and cannot wander freely in the city, some of our community members have benefited from various projects. A few people I know have earned a lot.”

It was pointed out that businessmen and owners of land, rental houses, owners of hotels and big restaurants were getting benefits and earnings due to the movement of people to Gwadar from the other parts of the province of Balochistan and Pakistan. People with some initiative and entrepreneurial spirit have become successful in making money.

CPEC has also promoted tourism in Gwadar. A woman political leader explained:

“The good thing I have noted is tourism. People from different areas visit Gwadar and it has benefited some of the owners of hotels and shopkeepers.”

Since the initiation of the CPEC in 2016, Gwadar has become the most visited city in the province of Balochistan (Amir, 2022). A beautiful cricket stadium has been constructed in a corner of the city which will go a long way in promoting sports in Gwadar. The international airport is under construction in Gwadar which would be one of the biggest airports in Pakistan. The roads and airport would enhance the connectivity of Gwadar with the rest of the world. Some participants also pointed out to increased education opportunities, vocational training centres, and health facilities in Gwadar city.

The most significant impact of CPEC in Gwadar, as well as the rest of the country, will be giving a boost to commerce and business. The improved infrastructure of the city will attract investors from across the region which will turn Gwadar into a vibrant economic hub. The local business community has already observed this change. In the words of a participant,

“Local business is better these days and banking system is also improved due to foreign investment due to better infrastructure such as roads. Land prices increased”.

The population has increased in the city which has caused an upward increase in demand for local goods and services. This is how macro-level projects have micro-level impacts. In short, Gwadar has rapidly been changing into a developed city with improved infrastructure, more jobs and business opportunities, tourism, educational and health services, and increased business activities. All these developments are having a positive impact on the lives of the local people, directly or indirectly. However, the development in Gwadar lacks inclusiveness, i.e., the local people are not involved in the process. Ideally, the development of a city should be designed to protect the rights of people who are living in informal and vulnerable settlements, improve the infrastructure with urban design and facilities, and provide tenure security. In Gwadar, there are a few signs that local people are part of the process.

5.4. Relocation and Compensation: A Success Story in Gwadar

CPEC has caused the relocation of local people living near the Gwadar port. Contrary to the expectations of the research team, it was found that most of those people who were relocated from their native villages were feeling happy and satisfied for the reason that the government compensated them in cash and provided them with alternative land/plots for the construction of houses. Although some of these people lost their jobs; overall, they were happy because relocation resulted in improved living standards for these people. In some cases, the local people willingly accepted the proposal of relocation during the construction of the Gwadar port (before the inception of CPEC projects). They wanted to get the basic amenities of life promised by the government. A micro-businessman expressed his satisfaction over their displacement:

“People previously living in *Kacha* houses have been able to build *Pakka* houses for themselves with the compensation money provided by the government.... the

compensation is provided according to the need and house size. We had four rooms for which we were given 16 lakh rupees and two flats in the Singhar housing scheme.”

A male relocated fisherman explained his views regarding the process of displacement and their apprehension at that time:

“When we were told to be displaced, we were very shocked. When they said that we were going to be shifted to New Mullah Band, we resisted and protested because we thought that it would affect our life and livelihood as the sea would be very far from us. But today I am happy that I agreed and shifted here. When we were in our old Mullah, we had congested houses but here we have got an open and wide house.”

Most of the relocated and resettled people also seemed satisfied with the process of relocation. The authority consulted the local people and sought their consent before relocation. It also needs to be noted that relocation had both positive and negative impacts on people. The most visible impact of relocation in Gwadar was the change in the means of livelihood of people who used to live along the coast and who were dependent on fishing and salt making. A relocated person pointed out that their sources of livelihood were affected as they used to work in salt fields which were now far away from their new location. Another male pointed out that:

“Everything here is far from like the city-schools, hospitals, etc. —and the sea is far away, and our works of fishing are affected. ... Our children's education is affected because the schools are far away, and transportation is costly”.

In short, relocation and monetary compensation of local people have resulted in contradictory effects. On the one hand, people have received what they think is fair compensation which is a positive. On the other hand, they have lost their previous livelihoods and their access to their previous places of work has become difficult. In some cases, some of the relocated people have sold again their new houses to migrate back to the old city in search of better livelihood opportunities and civic facilities.

5.5. “A Sword is Hanging Above Our Heads”. Fear of Displacement among the Local People

Like any other mega project, CPEC-related development in Gwadar has already resulted in the displacement and relocation of thousands of local people. More people are at risk of displacement and have been living under constant fear of losing their land, homes, and ways of livelihood. When asked what their biggest concern was, a 39-year-old community leader put his fear in the context in a vivid manner:

“The locals of Gwadar are suffering from the fear of displacement from the beginning. ...For us, this is a hanging sword above our heads and anytime the government can order us to leave the area. We have to live in constant fear of losing our house and land.”

In particular, people from the east neighbourhood fear that they will be displaced, sooner or later. The majority of the fishing communities reside in the East Bay neighbourhood and are afraid that their jetty is being shifted from the East Bay of the sea

to nearby the town of Surbandar. The poor segments of society have a more intense fear of displacement from this city in the near future because the social, economic, and geographical conditions are becoming unfavourable for native inhabitants. An old man argued that:

“Gwadar is becoming a city for the rich, and as such, the poor will ultimately be pushed out of the city to make way for the rich people.”

It was found that the people from the old Mullah Band to Javed Complex situated East neighbourhood were at high risk of displacement due to current and future development projects in Gwadar. Projects such as Gwadar port, East Bay Expressway, Free and Industrial Zones, Planned Railway Tracks and all other related projects under the umbrella of CPEC will result in significant displacement of local people. In the words of a male participant:

“The local people are gradually being taken out. Gwadar won’t be the same anymore; rather, it will be a new city for businessmen and investors”.

On the other hand, a businessman opined that displacement is indispensable and inevitable by saying:

“You cannot have a new Gwadar with old people. New people have to come here, new buildings have to be erected in places of old houses, and the old culture has to be replaced by a new one. Only then can we have a newly developed city with an international character”.

It can be inferred that not all people viewed displacement as a terrible thing if, in return, they expect to receive good compensation and better livelihoods. Political activists and socially aware individuals with nationalist outlooks were eager to highlight this threat more than business-oriented and enterprising individuals among the research participants.

5.6. Strangers in their City: Illumination of Gwadar and Alienation of Gwadaris

As the hustle and bustle in Gwadar city is increasing day by day due to ongoing CPEC projects, tourism, and business and commerce, the local people are feeling a sense of alienation in their native town. When asked for the reason, a government official said:

“It is because most of the local people are not a part of CPEC projects. Not enough people are getting jobs in CPEC projects, and they continue to engage in their old occupations. ... They are not feeling a sense of relationship with the new developments going on in Gwadar.”

These remarks point out towards the lack of sufficient sense of attachment between the local people and CPEC projects. Secondly, it was found that the local people of Gwadar were fearful of the rapid demographic change in the city. They think that their language and culture are going to vanish by the non-locals. The population of non-Balochi speakers has been increasing since CPEC. One of the officials elaborated that

“Some of the locals think their language and culture are vanishing. For example, a large number of people are migrating to Gwadar which outnumber the Gwadari people”.

The fact is that majority of migrants to Gwadar are from other parts of Balochistan, especially from the surrounding districts of Kech and Panjgur. A very less percentage of these migrants are from China and other provinces of Pakistan. This exaggerated fear seems to be due to the following two reasons. Firstly, it is the effect of political discourse/rhetoric currently at its peak in Gwadar, especially the Gwadar rights movement led by Moulana Hidayat Ur Rehman (see *Dawn*, Dec. 01, 2021). Secondly, local people are afraid of losing control over their lives and neighbourhoods. Due to their lack of skills and resources, the local people cannot catch up with the pace of the ongoing development. They feel being outperformed by ‘outsiders’ due to which they exaggerate the issue. It has been observed that due to the increased number of non-local people, hate between the locals and non-locals has increased. For example, locals hate the people of Turbat and Panjgur as they think that they are taking the job opportunities and benefits of CPEC. A male political leader responded:

“The local people are fearful that a demographic change may happen in Gwadar. They think that they will soon be replaced by non-locals because they (the local people) are mostly uneducated, and they lack skills.”

A female student put it more vividly by saying that:

آپاں ٹرسیت کہ چو مه بیت وتی جند ء بند ء در آمدے به بنت
 “They fear that in future they will be strangers in their own city.”

Moreover, some of the participants also pointed out that the local culture was getting eroded and there was no mechanism/policy for the preservation of the local culture, language, and historical places that used to be the identity of Gwadar city. As an example, a participants reported that:

“There used to be a big fort (*morchha*) of the Portuguese army at the top of Koh-e-Batil, but it has been demolished and you can’t find it there now. Instead of protecting such sites, they are destroying them”.

While historical sites are being destroyed and eliminated, modern monuments are buildings are constructed and illuminated to increase their visibility. Such developments are alienating the local Gwadaris. A more inclusive development plan is required in which a participatory model should be adopted by planners and policymakers to preserve the cultural identity of the city and include the local people in the process.

5.7. Chinese Trawling and the Issues of Local Fishing Communities

About 70 percent of the population’s livelihood depends on marine resources and fishing for the past several generations. The fishing communities consider themselves to be the first causality of CPEC projects as their lives and livelihoods have been affected in several ways. They also consider themselves to be the true locals of Gwadar because most of them have been living in the old town of Gwadar for centuries. In particular, the issue of Chinese trawling in the sea has created much unrest among the fishing communities and other groups of local people. The local people alleged that the Chinese are taking all things from them one by one. They pointed out that due to trawling by Chinese companies, there will be less or no fish in the sea and it will make the fishermen unemployed. During the fieldwork in Gwadar in July 2021, the researchers observed and

participated in a *Jirga* (council of elders) which was organised by all political and fishing community parties to raise the issue of illegal fishing by Chinese and Sindhi trawlers and the use of the conical net by the trawlers which have caused much damage to marine life in the sea. One of the speakers of the *Jirga* said,

“We are the sons of the soil and know how to protect our sea. We request the provisional and federal governments to take seriously our legal and constitutional demands and stop Chinese trawling immediately. If not, then we will resist.”

Another local fisherman argued that:

“Trawling is a sort of genocide of fish and other marine species... fish lay eggs in the summer season and we the locals do not fish in that season. The Chinese don't take such care”.

According to one fisherman, the Chinese have brought around 100 trawlers which have seriously disturbed the livelihood of the locals and if the trawling culture remains the same, there will be unemployment and poverty in the local fishing communities. Ban on illegal Chinese trawling was also one of the demands of the protest by the local population in Gwadar in November 2021 led by Maulana Hidayat-ur-Rehman. In response to these protests, the Government of Balochistan issued a notification in November 2021 in which a ban was imposed on illegal fishing/trawling within twelve nautical miles of the Gwadar Sea area.

In short, the fishing communities of Gwadar have been affected the most by CPEC. Their sources of income are shrinking, and the Chinese trawling has almost threatened their livelihood. Hence, affirmative action is needed to protect them and their source of livelihood.

5.8. Beyond the Glittering Port: The Threat of Ghettoisation of Local Population

It was observed during the fieldwork that local people in Gwadar have been confined to “Old Gwadar” where the standard of living is very low as compared to the new Gwadar which is glittering with lights and where development is going on day and night. Old Gwadar faces a severe shortage of clean drinking water, electricity, and other such facilities. The streets are narrow and unpaved with *Kacha* houses. Poverty is visible everywhere in old Gwadar. There are rumors that this is intentional as the government wants these people to voluntarily migrate elsewhere. A male political leader said, “They want us to move out, to leave the place. But where should we go, and why? It is our land, and we should be provided facilities here.” A female student elaborated and contrasted the two worlds: the old and the new Gwadar in the following words:

“I have seen the local area of Gwadar such as Shado Band and Ismaili Mohalla. There the people do not have the basic facilities ... CPEC has decorated the surface of Gwadar but if you visit inside of (old) Gwadar you will see the nasty Gwadar where no signs of CPEC are visible”.

The common perception of people is that the government is not facilitating the local people because the government is interested in the land (Gwadar) not the people (Gwadaris). A male participant explained:

“The old city is under threat as it is near the port. The people of the old city are not getting facilities like roads, clean water, and electricity. It is like people are being forced to leave the city”.

It has commonly been observed by the local people that roads are being constructed in those areas where there are no people; and where there are people, there are no roads. There is dirt everywhere in the old city where poor people live. The glittering Gwadar port and the rest of the city are clean and beautiful; the opposite can be seen in the old city. This process of ghettoisation, in which the local, poor population are increasingly marginalised has increased the feeling of estrangement, discrimination, alienation, and altogether elimination of the local people.

6. DISCUSSION

Mega development projects always have diverse effects on the lives of people. It is usually believed that macroeconomic development will have a trickle-down effect which will eventually improve the lives of poor people. However, this idea has proven to be a mere excuse for public policymakers for ill-planned development projects in which some people at the micro level face the burden (Morse and Berger, 1992; Flood, 1997). Therefore, it is the primary responsibility of policymakers and authorities to ensure that economic inequality is reduced and damage caused (if any) is properly compensated. This study was conducted with the assumption that CPEC projects in Gwadar would have both positively and negatively affected the local people of Gwadar, and that the perspective of the native people living there must be explored and scrutinised.

It was surprising to find out that the local people have a very vague knowledge of CPEC and its associated projects. Except for a few well-known projects, people hardly know the names and natures of various ongoing initiatives. The common misperception is that the Chinese are coming to take over Gwadar and that the local people will be soon displaced to other areas. Indeed, displacement has taken place as several fishing communities have been relocated by the government. However, the way this process of relocation has been executed by the government is a textbook example of a success story in Gwadar as the relocated people were found to be satisfied with the prior consultation and compensation. Most of the local people seem to exaggerate their issues. They assert that “we have received no benefit from CPEC.” In reality, however, most people benefited indirectly or directly in various ways. For example, business opportunities for local entrepreneurs have increased manifold. Public hospitals, parks, stadiums, industries, and other such infrastructures are catering to the needs of the common people. The influx of migrant workers from other parts of the country has increased the demand for housing and hoteling which has benefited the locals. Land prices have increased due to which the local landowners have earned a handsome amount of money. Local products such as Gwadari halwa (sweets) have found new markets and their demand has increased. Gwadar is fast becoming a tourist spot and the entertainment and recreation facilities are now accessible to the local people as well. Despite these tangible benefits, the local people want more. It is mainly because they have developed much higher expectations from CPEC due to media hype around the project, and because people do not know how to assess the indirect benefit that they might have received or will receive from development projects. Negative propaganda against CPEC has also visibly impacted the perception and attitude of the local people. Some people tend to exaggerate the issue of ‘outsiders taking up everything’ even though most of the workers in Gwadar are ethnic Balochs from the neighbouring districts of Gwadar. The presence of security checkpoints has resulted in restrictions on the movement of local people which is one of the reasons responsible for the disillusionment of the local people.

Some of the issues of the local people are real and government needs to revisit its policies and practices in Gwadar. People must be made to feel part of CPEC projects by providing them with more employment opportunities. There is a need for the policymakers to involve the local people in the planning process and to make sure of inclusive and people-centred development in Gwadar. The Gwadar Development Authority and other such bodies are feeling no obligation and accountability to the people. This should change. Instead of working as a bureaucracy, a more democratic and participatory approach should be followed. This will help in countering the negative propaganda and anti-CPEC discourse.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1. Conclusions

There seems to be a communication gap between the local people and CPEC authorities/government due to which most of the local people have vague knowledge and blurred understandings of CPEC projects. The various groups of local people such as fisher folks, micro-businessmen, local politicians, students, and government officials had different perspectives and were variously impacted by CPEC. A lot of visible developments could be witnessed in the shape of improved roads connecting Gwadar to the rest of the country, hospitals, schools, parks, stadiums, etc., which have greatly benefited the inhabitants of the city, both locals and non-locals. These developments have directly or indirectly benefited the local population in the shape of employment, improved business opportunities, tourism, improved health and education facilities, and the like. However, the locals have also developed feelings of discrimination and alienation as they believe that the government has failed to provide basic facilities, especially drinking water, electricity, and gas. Frustration among the local people, coupled with their blurred knowledge of CPEC, is being manipulated by local politicians and other groups who present a negative picture of CPEC. The fishing communities are the most directly affected; some of them have lost their livelihood due to relocation, others have no access to the sea due to the construction of CPEC projects along the coast. Overall, people tend to exaggerate their problems but most of their genuine issues need to be solved so that the feeling of deprivation is reduced among the local people. Adaptation of a more inclusive and people-centred development policy is imperative to gain the trust of the local people and to bridge the gap between authorities and the local people in Gwadar.

7.2. Policy Implications

The study recommends the following measures that will hopefully help in mainstreaming the local people into the development process.

- (1) *Employment opportunities* for the locals should be prioritising which will glue them with CPEC and will create a sense of belonging which is currently lacking.
- (2) *Fishing and marine life policies* should be devised to protect and regularise the fishery industry. The Chinese and other trawlers must be stopped or better managed.

- (3) *A special developmental package for the fishing communities* should be announced as they are the most vulnerable and the ‘first causality’ of CPEC projects.
- (4) *The provision of drinking water and electricity supply* to the residents of Gwadar will greatly help in reducing the ill-feeling among the locals.
- (5) *The provision of skill training and promotion of SMEs* by the government will increase the employability of the locals which will create a feeling of inclusion among them.
- (6) *Engaging and educating the locals* on the nature and purpose of CPEC projects should be an inbuilt part of the CPEC planning/Gwadar Master Plan to reduce the communication gap between the local people and the CPEC authorities/ government.
- (7) *The concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR)* should be invoked more vigorously and a proper policy should be developed to channel the CSR fund more systematically.

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