



# Policy Brief



## THE PERSPECTIVE OF NATIVE PEOPLE REGARDING DEVELOPMENTAL PROJECTS OF CHINA PAKISTAN ECONOMIC CORRIDOR (CPEC) IN GWADAR, BALOCHISTAN

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### INTRODUCTION

The enormous benefits of CPEC to the national economy of Pakistan have been highlighted in the media and as well as 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 CPEC (Abbas, 2019; Dawn, Dec. 01, 2021; 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's economy at the *national level*, ignoring the *cost* some people at the *local level* might have to pay for these benefits. Local people usually show a mix of reactions to new developments. 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. Notezai (2021) has observed that local people in Gwadar 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 of the entire development process". The recent agitations by local people in Gwadar (Dawn, Dec 01, 2021) are examples of how certain mega projects can espouse unrest among people. To ensure the smooth execution of CPEC projects, it is imperative for policymakers to take into consideration the important point that effectively managing the expectations and the concerns of the local people are important factors behind the success of a megaproject. The current study was designed to explore how do the local people of Gwadar perceive the various development projects of CPEC, what are the costs and benefits of these projects to the local people, and how can policymakers better manage the concerns and expectations of the local people for maximizing the benefits of CPEC.



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## METHODOLOGY

Most of the available studies on CPEC have taken a quantitative approach, obscuring the genuine voices of the local people. This study was conducted with a people-centric approach by employing qualitative methods with grounded theory as a research design. Intensive fieldwork has been carried out in Gwadar city wherein data was collected through interviews from a total of 64 participants, representing various groups of local people including fishermen community, people displaced/relocated by the CPEC projects, daily wage laborers, local community leaders and influential, micro-business community, government officials/authorities, and students. A simultaneous process of data gathering and analysis through a constant comparative method was followed for data analysis.

## MAJOR FINDINGS

The major findings of the study have been summarized into the following themes, mainly focusing on perception, attitude and apprehensions of the local people regarding CPEC projects.

### **1. *Vague Knowledge and Mixed Attitude of Local People Regarding CPEC***

Being the epicenter of CPEC, Gwadar has witnessed a number of mega projects and lot of work is currently going on in the city. Unexpectedly, this study found that most of the local people have very vague and obscure ideas about the various CPEC projects. While all people knew that “the Chinese are coming to Gwadar”, there seems to be a culture of silence and secrecy around CPEC projects; neither the local people seem to be interested to know about the projects nor the CPEC authorities bother much to disclose and publicize the nature of various projects. This has important impact on the perception and attitude of people as their lack of knowledge make them susceptible to negative propaganda against CPEC.

### **2. *Expectations and Disappointments of Local People***

The hype created by government and media regarding CPEC and the comparison of Gwadar with Dubai has led to the development of high expectations among the local people who believed that CPEC will change their lives over night by providing all types of facilities and opportunities. The level of their expectations was higher in early 2013 - 2014 which started declining over time. As of now, these expectations are changing to disappointments because their dreams are not coming true, at least in the short run.

### **3. *The feeling of Exclusion among the Current Generation***



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Despite their pessimism, almost all of the local people agreed that Gwadar will develop one day and CPEC will bring prosperity to Gwadar city in the long run. However, the local people have developed the feelings that they will not see the positive impact in their lifetime. People have witnessed the rapid development of Gwadar city, but at the same time, they feel excluded from the process. Along with this, some participants also pointed out that most of the opportunities provided by CPEC projects are availed by rich people, both local and non-locals, while the poor and ordinary local people are suffering as collateral damage.

#### **4. *Development Projects and Opportunities for Local People***

The construction of roads and communication networks is the most visible sign of CPEC in Gwadar due to which Gwadar is no more an isolated, faraway place. When asked about how has CPEC changed Gwadar, a daily-wager remarked that “Roads, roads, smaller roads, bigger roads being constructed everywhere... and other such things”. Similarly, public hospitals, parks, stadiums, and industries etc. are being constructed from which a lot of people will benefit. CPEC has also promoted tourism in Gwadar and real estate business is on the rise. All these developments point out that despite the feeling of disappointment by many locals, there is a light at the end of the tunnel and that CPEC is right on its way to ‘changing the game’ in the region.

#### **5. *Displacement, Re-location, and Compensation in Gwadar***

Like any other mega-development project, CPEC has caused what is known as “development induced displacement”. People from a number of villages have been already displaced and relocated and more people are living through a constant fear of displacement. However, contrary to the general perception, it was found that most of the relocated people have been feeling happy and satisfied with the process of relocation and the compensation provided by the government in the forms of cash and alternatives land/plots for construction of houses. In some cases, local people have willingly accepted the proposal of relocation and their living standard has improved as a result. Overall, the government has successfully managed the relocation issue which should be celebrated as a success story.

#### **6. *Illumination of Gwadar and Alienation of Gwadari***

As the hustles and bustles in Gwadar city are increasing due to the ongoing CPEC projects, the local people are feeling a sense of alienation in their native town. There is a lack of sufficient sense of attachment between the local people and CPEC projects. It was found that local people have been ghettoized to “Old Gwadar” where the living standard is very low and people are faced with issues such as severe shortage of clean drinking water, frequent



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electricity load shedding etc. Secondly, the local people of Gwadar are fearful of the rapid demographic change in the city. Some people also pointed out that the local culture is getting eroded and there is no policy for the preservation of the local culture, language and historical places which used to be the identity of Gwadar city. The common perception is that the government is interested in the land (Gawadar) not the people (Gwadari).

## **7. *The Issues of Local Fishing Community in Gwadar***

About 70% of the population's livelihood depends on marine resources and fishing for the past several generations. They consider themselves to be the true locals and first causality of CPEC projects as their lives and livelihoods have been affected in a number of ways. Some of these people have been relocated by the government away from the coast. Diminishing space for fishing and increasing restrictions on their movement, coupled with the Chinese trawling in the sea has threatened their livelihood.

The findings of the study have led us to conclude that while the future of CPEC and Gwadar is bright, all is not well in the city. The initial high expectations of people from CPEC development project ultimately led to intense feelings of disappointment. Immediate, short-term, and tangible benefits of a development project play a more significant role in spurring positive attitude among the local people as compared to indirect and long-term benefits. Lastly, the lack of awareness among people regarding the nature and importance of CPEC makes the local people susceptible to negative propaganda. This knowledge gap is usually filled by vested interest groups / political leaders for their propaganda.

## **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

Based on the findings, the study recommends the following measures which will help in mainstreaming the local people into the development process.

- ***Employment Opportunities to the Natives***

A policy should be in place prioritizing the employment rights of the locals in mega projects. The provision of jobs to local people will glue them with CPEC and will create a sense of belonging which is currently lacking.

- ***Development of Fishing and Marine Life Policy***



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Given that most of the local population is dependent on fishing, and given that the marine life is going to be adversely affected by CPEC projects, the government should devise a comprehensive policy and set out priorities for the fishery industry and marine life in Gwadar.

- ***Special Developmental Package for the Fishing Community***

The local fisherfolks in Gwadar should be given special attention as they are the most vulnerable and the ‘first causality’ of CPEC projects. A special developmental package should be introduced which could include development of alternative fishing areas, facilitation of fish marketing, provision of advanced fishing technology and training, and alternative employment opportunities, etc. The government should try to increase the employability skills of the local people by arranging skill development training for fisherfolks and the other local people.

- ***Engaging the Locals on the Natures and Purpose of CPEC Projects***

There seems to be a communication gap between the local people and the CPEC authorities. A “community engagement / public relations wing” should be introduced in CPEC authority for the purpose of public engagement and countering negative propaganda against CPEC.

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