

CPEC and Socio-economic Development in Balochistan: Pitfalls and Future Roadmap

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Abstract

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is the flagship project of the grand Belt & Road Initiative (BRI). The economic corridor is aimed at building a network of transport infrastructure, energy supply, industrial zones along the traditional Silk Route and across the region. The route starting from Kashgar and culminating at Gwadar has approximately 3000 km length, thus connecting millions of people. As part of the CPEC, Pakistan has a lot to offer and a lot to avail in terms of avenues and opportunities for economic development and socio-economic prosperity. The economic corridor, basically envisaged for uplifting of the backward areas of the two countries, has the potential to turn-around the public life in the concerned regions. These backward areas, western China and south western Pakistan, are basically the primary target areas of CPEC in terms of uplift action plan. These are also the areas in which the natural is generous. These areas are bestowed with tourists-attracting landscape and natural wealth. With the development of CPEC and its associated projects, these poor regions have the potential to become future economic hub of the two countries. However, in order to do that, beside mega infrastructure, industrial, and energy projects, there is also a dire need to prioritize socio-economic development, particularly in Balochistan, the most backward province of the country. There is undoubtedly a promising progress on CPEC projects overall, but there has not been a proportionate progress on projects related to socio-economic development. As a result, even after passage of ten years of CPEC, the human development index of Balochistan projects a dismal picture of the province. There are still children who are out of school, a large section of population still does not have access to clean drinking water and so on. This research paper analyses the socio-economic development projects in Balochistan under the umbrella of CPEC, the projects that were promised, the projects in progress and the projects in pipeline. It thoroughly investigates the impact of the completed projects and the potential outcome of the projects in pipeline. The paper recommends strategies to avoid pitfalls and for more successful interventions in the future, drawn after review of the available literature and interviews with concerned officers and civil society members.

Keywords: Socio-Economic Development, Feasible, Need-Based, Grievance, Livelihood Resources, Human Development Index

Introduction

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Belt & Road Initiative (BRI) are visions for economic development and regional connectivity of grand magnitude and promise. BRI is the game-changing grand

plan envisioned in the east¹, but encapsulating the west, south and north in its ambition of world connected in a web of trade and development.²

CPEC being the flagship project of the grand vision has very critical consequences both in case of success and failure.³ Since the onset of this plan, Pakistan has witnessed a phenomenal change in development. Its energy and infrastructure sectors have developed in unprecedented pace, with the help of Chinese assisted projects.⁴ A network of highways, expressways and motorways now connects major urban centres in Pakistan. Since its inception, mass transit in major cities has been raised up to the standards of European cities.⁵

The original size of investments under CPEC was estimated to be approximately USD 46 Billion, which has subsequently been increased to approximately USD 49 Billion. As per the original plan, key sectors of investment were: energy sector (70%), road and rail infrastructure, industrial cooperation, and Gwadar port development. The implementation of projects was planned in multiple phases which are as follows: Early Harvest Phase (2014-18), Short-term Phase (2018-20), Medium-term Phase (2021-25) and Long-term Phase (2026-30).

The Monographic Study on Transport Planning (2014-30), which was conducted jointly by the Governments of Pakistan and China and approved by the 5th JCC in 2015, provides the road map and plan for infrastructure development under CPEC. This study provides a list of projects to be undertaken in the Early Harvest Phase (2014-18), Short-term Phase (2018-20), Medium-term Phase (2021-25) and Long-term Phase (2026-30). These projects were planned to be implemented only after approval of PC-1s by CDWP/ECNEC (as the case may be), the relevant Joint Working Group and the Joint Cooperation Committee (JCC).

According to the Monographic study, Gwadar-based projects were included in the Early Harvest Phase whereas Balochistan's infrastructure projects outside Gwadar were planned to be executed and implemented in the short-term (2018-20) and medium-term (2021-25) phases. This included the upgradation of the Surab-Quetta-Zhob-DI Khan road into a four-lane highway by the end of 2020. Similarly, rail projects connecting Gwadar with Khuzdar and Quetta were planned for the medium-term phase (2021-25).

For becoming eligible for Chinese financing under CPEC, the approved PC-1s of these projects should have been approved by the concerned JWG and the JCC forum. However, Chinese financing could not be made available for Balochistan-based road projects. Similarly, railways projects have faced major delays due to difference and prolonged negotiations over high costs. After major delays, some of the Balochistan road projects have been taken up through Federal PSDP recently.⁶

In order to manage and review the implementation and progress of CPEC projects, different Joint Working Group (JWGs) were constituted. The JWG on Socio-economic Development (SED) was created by the Government of Pakistan and the Government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in December 2018 to

¹ John Hurley; Scott Morris; Gailyn Portelance (March 2018). "Examining the Debt Implications of the Belt and Road Initiative from a Policy Perspective" (PDF). CGD Policy Paper. Center for Global Development: 19. Retrieved July 4 2023.

² Jon Boone (20 April 2015). "China president in Pakistan to sign £30bn 'land corridor' agreement". The Guardian. Islamabad. Retrieved 20 June 2023.

³ Sukumar, Arun Mohan (10 January 2017). "What the Marshall Plan Can Teach India About the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor". The Wire (India). Retrieved 22 January 2017. The CPEC may be a bilateral endeavour, but New Delhi cannot ignore its spillover effects on regional governance. The inequities in the China-Pakistan relationship and the nature of proposed Chinese investment in the CPEC merit a comparison with the Marshall Plan, the most successful foreign assistance project of the 20th century.

⁴ Lucy Hornby; Charles Clover (12 October 2015). "China's Great Game: Road to a new empire". Financial Times. Retrieved June 26 2023.

⁵ "Orange Line Lahore wins top accolades at 'Brands of the Year Award 2021'" The Daily Times, September 1, 2022, retrieved on July 1, 2023 <https://dailytimes.com.pk/990950/orange-line-lahore-wins-top-accolades-at-brands-of-the-year-award-2021/>

⁶ "NHA to build 210 km DI Khan-Zhob section of CPEC western route", The News International, December 10, 2018, retrieved on July 1, 2023 <https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/404220-nha-to-build-210-km-di-khan-zhob-section-of-cpec-western-route>

promote and implement socio-economic development projects under the umbrella of CPEC. The first meeting of the JWG-SED was held on 19th December, 2018 in Beijing. During the meeting, the Chinese side committed a grant of USD One Billion, spread over a period of five years, for financing socio-economic projects in the areas of agriculture, education, medical treatment, poverty alleviation, water supply, and vocational training.⁷

How these mega projects have actually translated in improvement of socio-economic conditions of the people living on the fringes, and how has CPEC fostered their livelihood resources, is the question of this paper. This research paper analyses the progress on these projects, their outcome and how the pitfalls can be avoided in future.

Problem Statement:

The total CPEC portfolio in Balochistan is worth approximately PKR 462 Billion (USD 2.88 Billion). This includes the cost of completed and on-going CPEC projects as well as planned projects that have been agreed upon and procedural formalities have been completed but actual physical work has not started. Investments made in Gwadar Free Zone are not included as their cost is unknown.

The figure of USD 2.88 Billion includes the USD 2 Billion investment in the 1,320 MW Coal-fired Hub Power Plant, which accounts for nearly 70% of the total portfolio. The electricity generated under CPEC energy projects is added to the national grid. So the Hub Power Plant doesn't directly benefit Balochistan. Excluding the Hub Power Plant, the total worth of remaining projects in Balochistan comes down to around USD 0.8 Billion. Of these projects, only 4 projects worth USD 374 Million are active and under implementation in Balochistan under Chinese financing. Balochistan being home to Gwadar, warrants special attention. For the reason that, it is home province of the promising Port on the Arabian Sea but also the poorest province of the country in terms of human development. It goes without saying that CPEC was originally proposed to bring the naturally rich but economically poor regions of China and Pakistan at par with the developed areas in the region, and connect them with consumer markets of the developed world. Therefore, Balochistan, in this respect poses great opportunity as well as great challenge. It is resource rich and the most backward region of Pakistan, which makes it a perfect test of the grand vision of BRI and CPEC.⁸

The real potential of CPEC and Gwadar port will be harnessed only if it creates wider socio-economic benefits and returns for the people of Pakistan in general and those of Gwadar in particular. Given that CPEC-related investments are concentrated mainly in energy, infrastructure and industrial sectors, it is highly important that the Government of Pakistan and the Government of the Peoples' Republic of China and mobilize their resources to ensure provision of basic public services and uplift the livelihood resources of the people of the province.

The economic activities along the newly developed infrastructure projects, complimented by the increased supply of energy, have flourished from Gilgit-Baltistan to Gwadar. These economic activities have very crucial dividends particularly in socio-economic development realm. Although socio-economic development (SED) projects are not key component of the cooperation areas under the umbrella of CPEC, but lately there has been a realization that socio-economic development projects are as important as projects in industrial, energy, or infrastructure sectors. For the reason that, the ultimate objective of any development scheme is to uplift the people and usher them to prosperity. This research paper examines the SED projects promised for Balochistan, the progress on these projects, how they have benefited the people of the province and lays out

⁷ 3rd Joint Working Group Meeting Of Socio-Economic Development Under CPEC, CPEC Secretariat Website, Ministry of Planning, Development & Special Initiatives, December 16, 2021, retrieved on June 29, 2023 <https://cpec.gov.pk/news/215#:~:text=The%20Group%20was%20established%20in,and%20peoples'%20livelihood%20are%20improved.>

⁸ Authors' research

a future road map for socio-economic development in Balochistan.

Methodology:

This is a qualitative research study. Qualitative research methods are used to analyse data thoroughly. The data for this study is solicited from the Planning & Development Department, Government of Balochistan, CPEC Authority, MPD&SI, Gwadar Development Authority, and Gwadar Port Authority. Interviews with officers of relevant sections at the above authorities/departments are conducted. Since the Principal Investigator of this study has worked in CPEC Cell at Planning & Development Department, Government of Balochistan, the links developed there will be fully utilised to furnish an informed and data based research paper with feasible recommendations at the end of this paper.

The study critically analyses the SED projects since the inception of JWG on SED and also examines the concept papers developed by concerned provincial departments in order to point out the pitfalls and review the outcome of completed projects, and potential results of the projects in pipeline.

Most of the data, information and research material for this paper has been the result of author's own work at the CPEC Cell of Government of Balochistan, hence, the lesser number of external sources and reference.

Socio-economic Development in Balochistan

Unfortunately, the resource rich province Balochistan has been in stark poverty and always been at the lowest in terms of human development. Balochistan has always been in stark poverty ever since 1947, for a number of reasons the colonial regime didn't prefer to invest in modern infrastructure in Balochistan, KP and FATA and one of the major reasons is the mountainous terrain and climate. Therefore, unlike Punjab, Sindh, the initial endowment for these regions were too little to take off, and unfortunately, the post-colonial period Balochistan's was not provided the proportionate economic benefits according to what it was contributing to national economy and green revolution in terms of its natural gas and resources.

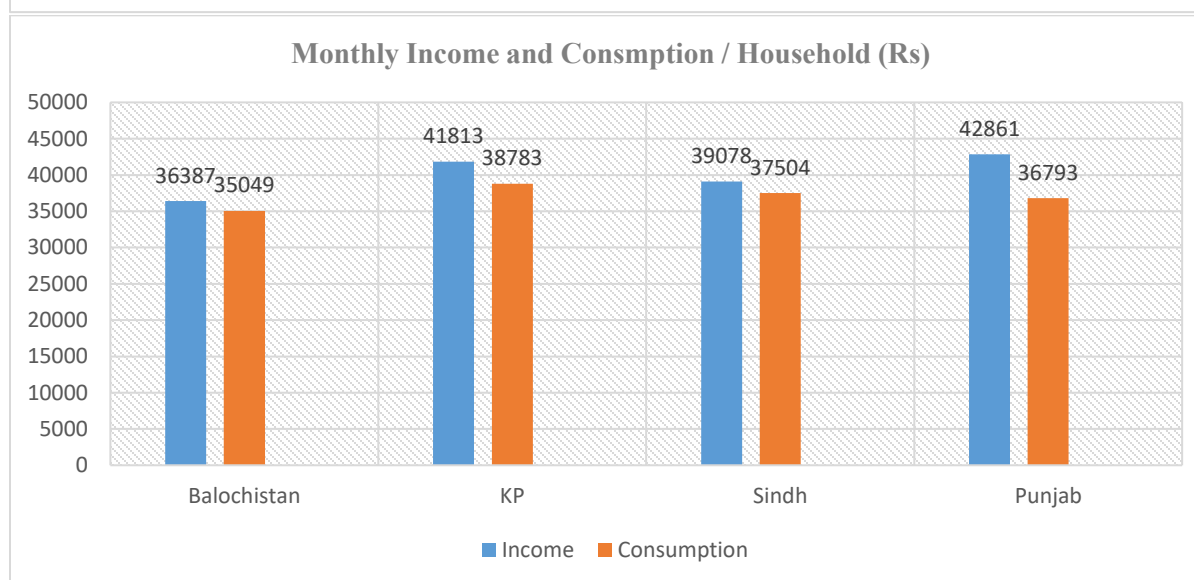
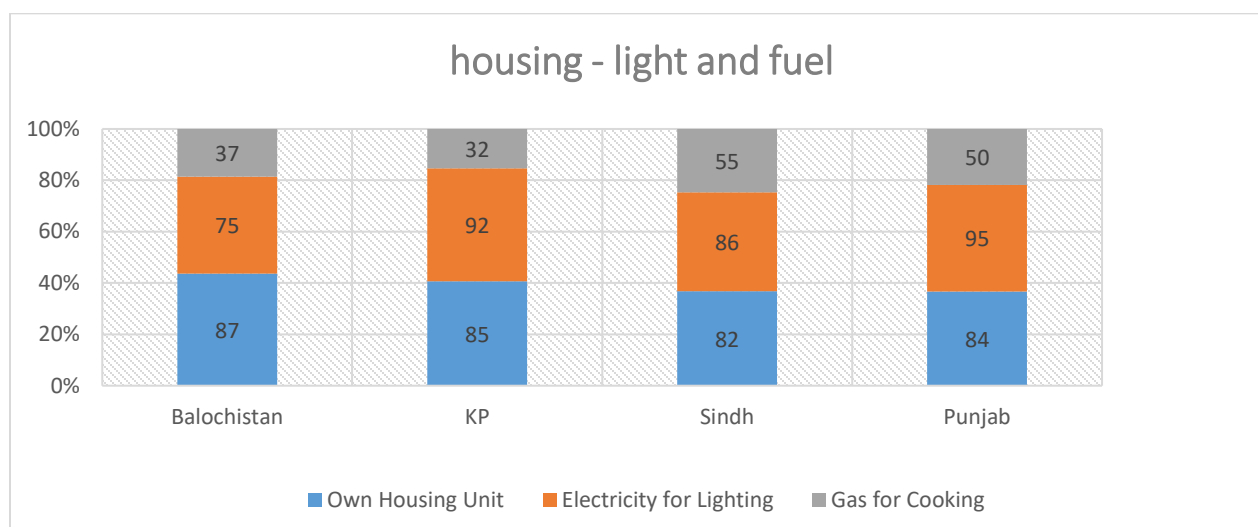
Since Balochistan lacks the economic base that it deserves as per its contribution to national economy, so is the case with economic opportunities and employment. The economic principles suggest public investment complement the private investment. Since it has been deprived of public investment in infrastructure, transport and communication (including ports), financial markets, banking system, housing etc. the private sector employment opportunities are insufficient for population which is sparsely distributed over a territory of 347,190 square kilometres which is nearly half of Pakistan's area.

These graphs and tables below portray a glimpse of the socio-economic development in Pakistan.

Table 1. Human Development Index and Relative Position of Provinces in Pakistan – 2017

					2015	2015	2015		2013
1	AJK	High Medium	0.734	86.7	66.3	12.2	4.8	80	0.726
2	Punjab	High Medium	0.732	89	78.3	10.1	4.6	83	0.705
3	Sindh	Medium	0.64	73	73.2	8.3	5.1	67.6	0.620
4	KP	Medium	0.628	78	72.7	9.7	3.3	67.1	0.605
5	GB	Low Medium	0.523	73.1	51.4	10.5	3.4	44.2	0.426
6	Balochistan	Low	0.421	51	65.8	7.4	2.6	33.9	0.382
7	FATA	Very Low	0.216	15.7	7.5	6.7	1.8	27.7	-

Source: Pakistan Human Development Index Report 2017 – UNDP



Prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity in the population, based on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) is the indicator 2.12 of SDGs. FAO's methodology is used for calculation of this indicator being custodian of this indicator. In Pakistan 84 percent of households are food secure and remaining 15.92 percent households in Pakistan is experiencing severe or moderate food insecurity.⁹

Province /Quintile	Moderate or Severe	Severe
Overall (individual)	15.98	2.4
Overall (Households)	15.92	2.37
Province /Region/ Quintile	Moderate or Severe	Severe
Urban	9.22	1.24
Rural	19.96	3.05
Punjab	14.43	3.06

⁹ Integrated Context Analysis (ICA) On Vulnerability to Food Insecurity and Natural Hazards Pakistan, 2017 National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) and United Nations World Food Programme (WFP).

Sindh	19.51	1.55
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	16.73	0.9
Balochistan	15.18	2.05
1st Quintile	39.57	8.5
2nd Quintile	21.42	2.59
3rd Quintile	16.07	1.65
4th Quintile	9.74	1.05

The Balochistan's situation is worst among all provinces. In Balochistan, 5 districts face alarming levels of vulnerability in all areas. 22 districts have a high food insecurity and to put it into perspective, only five districts face medium or low food insecurity. 15 districts face either high flood or drought vulnerability while 5 districts face combined climatic hazard vulnerability.¹⁰

The table below ranks all the districts of Pakistan in terms of social development and thus creates quartiles. The upper quartiles show better state of social development and lower ones show poor state of social development. Not only the Balochistan's relative position among other provinces is at the bottom, but the inter-district position is also not very encouraging,

Quetta is the only district from Balochistan in the upper quartile. Sibi is the only one from Balochistan in the second quartile. Ziarat is the only one in third quartile and the remaining ones are all in the lowest quartile.

It can be deduced from the data that most districts of Balochistan are among the lowest ranking. Quetta ranks the top in Balochistan districts that has a rank of 38 in entire Pakistan. The above-mentioned observation is corroborated from another study of estimation of district wise Human Development. The comparison of Human development indices of the all the districts sorted under their provinces based on their ranking starting from the areas with least human development. Here again, Balochistan scores lower lows and implying impoverished state of human development. Not even a single district in Balochistan comes under Medium Level HD.¹¹

There are 14 districts of Balochistan among the top 20 poorest districts namely Kohlu, Dera Bugti, Barkhan, Washuk, Qilla Abdullah, Musa Khel, Chaghi, Awaran, Nasirabad Qilla Saifullah, Bolan/Kachi, Harnai and Jhal Magsi.

Bottom Quartile							
Rank	District	Province	WFS	Rank	District	Province	Z-Score
55	Shikarpur	S	-2.2492	57	Layyah	P	-2.3279
56	Muzaffargarh	P	-2.5598	58	Vehari	P	-2.3336
57	Bannu	N	-2.9875	59	D.G. Khan	P	-2.6532
58	Larkana	S	-3.0215	60	Dadu	S	-3.0322
59	Sanghar	S	-3.1303	61	Thatta	S	-3.0647
60	Bhakkar	P	-3.1602	62	Sanghar	S	-3.7943
61	Manshera	N	-3.1704	63	Manshera	N	-3.8104
62	Swat	N	-3.1779	64	Kohlu	B	-4.1405
63	Barkhan	B	-3.6361	65	Dir	N	-4.7799
64	Thatta	S	-3.7789	66	Lodhran	P	-4.8434
65	Tharparkar	S	-3.9269	67	Chagai	B	-4.9470

¹⁰ ibid

¹¹ Multidimensional Poverty in Pakistan, Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Pakistan and The Ministry of Planning, Development & Special Initiatives (MPD&SI) Pakistan.

66	Musa Khail	B	-3.9667	68	Muzaffarghar	P	-4.9657
67	Dir	N	-4.1152	69	Barkhan	B	-5.2614
68	Sibi	B	-4.3073	70	Badin	S	-5.3758
69	Ziarat	B	-4.3808	71	Pishin	B	-5.4476
70	Lakki Marwar	N	-4.4524	72	Jhal Magsi	B	-5.61750
71	Loralai	B	-4.6029	73	Rajanpur	P	-5.93790
72	Rajanpur	P	-4.7602	74	Pakpattan	P	-6.15700
73	Mastung	B	-4.7734	75	Gwadar	B	-6.16160
74	Badin	S	-4.8466	76	Jacobabad	S	-6.19180
75	Pishin	B	-5.0904	77	Lasbela	B	-6.77400
76	Chagai	B	-5.1677	78	Loralai	B	-7.78370
77	Panjugur	B	-6.0387	79	Mastung	B	-7.95940
78	Kohlu	B	-6.0408	80	Tharparkar	S	-8.91780
79	Gawader	B	-6.3226	81	Jaffarabad	B	-9.14190
80	Lasbela	B	-6.5395	82	Musa Khail	B	-9.29950
81	Jacobabad	S	-6.5698	83	Bolan	B	-9.32370
82	Killa Saifullah	B	-6.7825	84	Dera Bugti	B	-9.46430
83	Jaffarabad	B	-6.8593	85	Kharan	B	-9.63480
84	Awaran	B	-7.1243	86	Khuzdar	B	-10.1718
85	Kalat	B	-7.1316	87	Killa Saifullah	B	-10.2935
86	Turbat	B	-7.2116	88	Awaran	B	-10.5132
87	Kharan	B	-7.2608	89	Kalat	B	-10.8131
88	Kohistan	N	-7.3670	90	Panjugur	B	-10.8265
89	Khuzdar	B	-7.4268	91	Zhob	B	-11.0581
90	Bolan	B	-7.5248	92	Turbat	B	-11.0819
91	Nasirabad	B	-7.7698	93	Nasirabad	B	-11.1989
92	Zhob	B	-7.8430	94	Kohistan	N	-12.6158
93	Jhalmagsi	B	-8.7686				
94	Dera Bugti	B	-9.4706				

SED Projects in Balochistan Review: Pitfalls

The Joint Working Group on Social and Economic Development (JWG-SED) was created by the Governments of Pakistan and China in December 2018 to promote and implement socio-economic development projects under the umbrella of CPEC. The first meeting of the JWG-SED was held on 19th December, 2018 in Beijing. During the meeting, the Chinese side committed a grant of USD One Billion, spread over a period of five years, for financing socio-economic projects in the areas of agriculture, education, medical treatment, poverty alleviation, water supply, and vocational training.

Subsequently, in Feb 2019, the Chinese Expert Group on Socio-Economic Development visited Pakistan to discuss and finalize socio-economic development projects. The Federal Ministry for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives (MPDSI) organized meetings with all provincial governments and solicited proposals for consideration under the JWG-SED. The proposals shared by provinces were then reviewed and vetted by

the MPDSI and the Chinese side.¹²

In June 2019, the MPDSI communicated a list of ‘27 priority projects’ shortlisted by the Chinese side for Pakistan. On 25th August 2019, the Government of Balochistan received a list of ‘17 Fast Track projects’ from MPDSI. These 17 projects were meant to be implemented immediately. Of these 17 projects, there were five projects related directly to Balochistan. Of the 5 fast track projects, only one, Pakistan China Technical and Vocational Training Institute has been completed in the span of 04 years. Physical work on Pak-China Friendship hospital is in progress.

Tables below show progress on Balochistan specific fast track and priority projects under the umbrella of SED JWG:

FAST TRACK PROJECTS

S. No.	Project Name	Progress Status
01.	Gwadar Hospital Project	Physical Work In Progress
02.	Balochistan Solar Powered Equipment Project	Physical Work Not Started
03.	Gwadar Desalination Plant	Physical Work Not Started
04.	Gwadar Vocational and Technical School Project	Project Completed

PRIORITY PROJECTS

S. No.	Project Name	Progress Status
01.	Burn Centre (at Hub, Lasbela, Balochistan)	Physical Work Not Started
02.	Medical Emergency Centre in Balochistan (at Hoshab, Turbat)	Physical Work Not Started

The tables above highlight that the progress on socio-economic development projects in Balochistan has been too slow. Not only that, the GoB had reservations regarding the shortlisted ‘priority’ and ‘fast-track’ projects. Most of the projects shortlisted for Balochistan were not proposed by the Government of Balochistan. Most of the projects recommended by GoB were ignored. Majority of the shortlisted projects are about the provision of basic equipment. The GoB believes that transfer of equipment will neither contribute to poverty reduction nor socio-economic development. Two old and Early Harvest projects of CPEC have been included in Balochistan’s share of socio-economic projects. Some of the agreed socio-economic projects are to be executed by Federal departments or organizations. MPDSI has informed the provinces that NFC criteria will be used for inter-province distribution, which the Government of Balochistan opposes, given its advantageous situation.

¹² “Agriculture, socio-economic projects to be made part of CPEC: CM”, The Express Tribune, December 24, 2018, Retrieved on July 03, 2023 <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1873254/agriculture-socio-economic-projects-made-part-cpec-cm>

Way Forward:

Moving forward, the Government of Balochistan needs develop a plan for tapping the potential of CPEC and aligning its own policies and public development expenditures (provincial and Federal PSDP) with CPEC in a way that income-generation and livelihood opportunities are created for local people. Interventions need to be made in multiple sector to harness the opportunities presented by CPEC.

Owing to its locational advantages and natural endowments, Balochistan has great potential to become a key lynchpin in Pakistan's quest for becoming a regional hub for trade in goods and energy. The Government of Balochistan should aim to realize this potential both within the framework of CPEC as well as outside it. The most important component of such a strategy should be measures for realization of the trade and commercial potential of Gwadar.

The Government of Balochistan (GoB) should continue to raise with the Federal Government as well as with the Chinese side the issue of non-availability of finances for CPEC infrastructure projects planned in Balochistan. The GoB should also incentivize and attract foreign investment in its productive sectors outside the framework of CPEC.

Gwadar Port has the potential to become a growth node for regional economic development. The realization of Gwadar port's potential as a hub of regional trade is unlikely to be realized in the short and medium term, owing to a number of domestic and external factors. Most of these factors are beyond the control of Government of Balochistan. The real prospects for Gwadar's commercial success in the medium term pertain to its potential via-a-vis transshipment cargo and domestic trade. But, in both these respects, Gwadar will be competing with other ports in the country and the region. Therefore, it is important to consider and implement measures that will improve the competitiveness and commercial viability of Gwadar port compared to other ports in the country and the region. The commercial success of Gwadar is likely to have a multiplier effect on local economy and will create livelihood opportunities for people of Balochistan.

Over the past couple of years, the focus of CPEC seems to have shifted from infrastructure-focused investments to industrial cooperation and attraction of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). This puts Balochistan in a disadvantageous position as most of province's infrastructure projects were planned to be implemented in this phase. Balochistan is unlikely to benefit much from the new phase, which focuses mainly on industrial development, because the province continues to face major gaps in road and transport infrastructure as well as in access to energy. Without addressing major gaps in the road, rail and energy infrastructure, the province of Balochistan is unlikely to benefit from industrial cooperation under CPEC.

Balochistan didn't benefit much from the Early Harvest Phase (EHP) of CPEC, which came to an end in 2018. During the EHP, not even a single infrastructure project was completed in Balochistan under the framework of CPEC. Therefore, in order to ensure benefits of CPEC to the people of Balochistan, it is highly important that the province receives priority in all CPEC-related investments in this and coming phases.

Importantly, projects implemented under socio-economic component of CPEC are meant for the under-developed regions of Pakistan. Being the poorest and most-underdeveloped province of Pakistan, Balochistan, therefore, deserves a major share in projects funded through the proposed USD 1 Billion grant. For instance, there is a project about the provision of 20,000 scholarships to Pakistani students in Chinese Universities (Overseas Student Scholarship Program). The Government of Balochistan wants that 40-50% of these scholarships be reserved for the students of Balochistan. This issue has been consistently raised by the Government of Balochistan through official letters and in relevant forums. Previous history of HEC-managed Chinese scholarships reveals that students of Balochistan didn't benefit much from them. Therefore, given the backwardness of Balochistan, its student may be discriminated positively in share of the scholarships.

In addition to that, the Federal Government and the Government of PRC, shall be convinced to include all the projects proposed in the 3rd batch and Key Projects with China, except Model Dairy farms at Kharan & Zhob,

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