

STRATEGIC INTEGRATION OF CHINA-PAKISTAN ECONOMIC CORRIDOR (CPEC) IN ENHANCING THE MARINE FISHERY SECTOR OF PAKISTAN: A PATHWAY TO SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH

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Abstract *The marine fishery sector in Pakistan is particularly important in terms of the country's economy but is still unexplored with problems such as old equipment, limited cold storage and processing, and not much investment made. Due to the emphasis on connectivity and economic cooperation under the framework of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), it is possible to provide a strategic impetus to the development of the fishery sector. This research work seeks to establish how CPEC may improve the marine fishery industry of Pakistan and find out how the sector may benefit from CPEC investments in infrastructure and related facilities. The specific research questions the way CPEC infrastructure and investment could be optimally used for the development of the marine fishery sector of Pakistan for possible economic gains that could be associated with the integration of CPEC into the fishery sector. The study adopts a descriptive research type of approach whereby the researcher relies on secondary sources of information and analyzed data to assess the status of the marine fishery of Pakistan, identify the opportunities under CPEC for the sector, and establish how the sector can effectively integrate into the framework. The importance is in bringing attention to an overlooked sector that may benefit from the efficient use of CPEC projects. With investment and cooperation in the agriculture and socio-economic sectors, integration in the fishery sector will enhance Pakistan's blue economy and sustainable economic development.*

Keywords: *China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC); Integration; Marine Fishery; Sustainable Development*

Introduction

Marine Fishery

Overview of Pakistan's Marine Fishery Sector

Pakistan has a 1,050 km long coastline stretching in the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Oman. It has an extended Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of 290,000sq Km (Ahmad A. , 2016), which offers prospects for marine fishing and aquaculture (Qadri et al., 2023). The marine fisheries sector in Pakistan is and small-scale. About 135,000 marine fishers are employed with 30,000 having traditional fishing boats used in the country. The yearly production of marine fish is expected to be about four hundred thousand metric tons (Alam T. , 2023). Some of the major commercial fish included sardines, pomfrets, tunas, mackerels, sharks, and ribbon fish.

It is responsible for approximately 0.4% of Pakistan's gross domestic product and supports the livelihoods and incomes of the population in the coastal areas. However, the sector faces some challenges which include overfishing, using illegitimate fine mesh nets, environmental degradation, and effects of climate change (Ahmad & Mi, 2017). As for the fishing industry, modernized

fishing fleet and equipment are absent too. The current regulation of marine fisheries is quite dated and there is also no proper implementation of measures concerning the management of fisheries (Alam T. , 2023). In the recent past, the government has embarked on the motorization of fishing boats, construction of landing sites and harbors for fishing boats, and mariculture. However, more attention should be given to enhancing research and management related to marine fisheries and achieving sustainability in Pakistan (Rahman & Shurong, 2017). In total, the sector of marine fisheries is not as developed as it can and should be as it has several problems that need to be addressed by the government.

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)

CPEC is a multi-billion-dollar project that is being undertaken by Pakistan and China to develop Pakistan's economy and transport and energy sectors, intending to strengthen the bilateral relations between the two countries (Ali et al., 2021; Khan & Liu, 2018). Officially initiated in 2015, CPEC is part of the broader Belt and Road Initiative that China

has in its plan to enhance connectivity across Asia, Africa, and Europe (Rahman & Shurong, 2017). CPEC provides special importance to energy projects, infrastructure, and other economic sectors in Pakistan. Key areas of development include energy, infrastructure, and the linking of special economic zones (SEZs) (Ahmad A. , 2016).

Energy

The development of new power plants to help overcome energy crises in Pakistan and respond to electricity needs. China has put more than \$3 billion into different energy projects (Hassan et al., 2022) ranging from coal power plants to renewable energy like solar, wind, and hydropower (Ali et al., 2017).

Infrastructure

The development of an efficient network of highways, railways, and pipelines for transportation and commerce. Some of these projects include the improvement of the Karakoram Highway (KKH) and the construction of Gwadar port on the Arabian Sea (Alam T. , 2023).

Economic Zones

Leasing of special economic zones and industrial parks to make Chinese firms invest in the establishment of factories and production lines in Pakistan. This is in a bid to expand industrialization and foster economic development. Critics think that CPEC will help Pakistan to grow, generate employment, increase incomes, and solve power shortages that are cutting deep into business. It connects the country ports to the landlocked areas in China as well as Central Asia. However, critics argue that CPEC is beneficial to China and detrimental to Pakistan due to unequal financial conditions and opacity (Rahman & Shurong, 2017). It could also be unsustainable for Pakistan's economy to carry the debt burdens of financing the CPEC projects. Thus, the overall benefits of CPEC for Pakistan in terms of economic, political, and social aspects are still unknown yet (Ali et al., 2017). However, it is viewed as a game-changer for Pakistan's economy if the grand plan is implemented as planned by Chinese and Pakistani officials.

Significance of Linking CPEC to Marine Fishery Industry

CPEC is a development project of China Pakistan Economic Corridor under the scope of China's Belt and Road Initiative that includes the connection of Xinjiang, China to Gwadar Port, Pakistan through highways, railways, pipelines, etc., (Ali et al., 2021). Pakistan has a long coast of more than 1000 km and plenty of seafood like fish and other seafood items. However, the marine fishery industry is not well-developed (Hussain & Hussain, 2017). Thus, CPEC is viewed as the carrier to boost Pakistan's local fisherman's livelihood and increase the capacity of the marine fishery industry.

Improving infrastructure and connectivity

- Developing the CPEC, particularly Gwadar port and related transportation system can play a role in the enhanced movement and export of seafood catches.

- Improved road/cold chain infrastructure from Gwadar can also aid in linking smaller fishing harbors to big markets (Nazir et al., 2016).

Expanding fishing grounds

- With processing & packaging joint ventures under CPEC, although Pakistani fishers have control over the fishery resources in the exclusive economic zone and the Arabian Sea, they cannot exploit the offshore resources as they might not have access to equipment and techniques for doing so.

Increasing the processing and exportation of fish

- Pakistan can significantly increase its fish exports by focusing on fish processing plants, cold storage, and logistics established under the CPEC (Khan M. A., 2021).

- Upgrade of Gwadar port can also ensure cheaper and more efficient exportation of seafood to China and other markets (Amman et al., 2020).

Transfer of technology

- As a part of CPEC, cooperation with China can upgrade Pakistan's marine fishery resources and technology through modern fishing boats, sonar fish finders, and processing technology.

Employment generation

- Fishery sector development under CPEC can enhance employment for the fisher community and provide improved income and living standards (Shahzad, 2020).

- The synchronization of CPEC development with the marine fishery industry is in the interest of China and Pakistan concerning trade, food security, technological advancement, and socio-economic uplift of the coastal line region. A fishery policy that includes such integration is the need of the hour (Rehman et al., 2018).

Thus, to explore the potential of CPEC in enhancing the marine fishery sector and to identify areas where CPEC can contribute to sustainable growth in Pakistan's fishery industry, the following questions provide the basis of this study:

Q1. How can CPEC be strategically utilized to boost Pakistan's marine fishery?

Q2. What are the potential benefits of integrating CPEC with Pakistan's fishery industry?

Q3. What is the potential role of CPEC for Pakistan's sustainable economic growth through an enhanced fishery industry?

Materials and Methods

Research Approach

This study employed descriptive research to establish an understanding of how CPEC could be incorporated by Pakistan to improve its marine fisheries sector for sustainable economic

development. The descriptive design fits the purpose of the fact that the objective of the study is to paint a picture of the current state, issues, and prospects of the marine fisheries sector in Pakistan.

Data Collection

The study will rely on secondary collected data as it gathers relevant information. An extensive review of the academic articles on CPEC projects and their economic contributions using prominent databases such as JSTOR, EBSCO, ProQuest, Scopus etc., was conducted. National policy framework and growth strategies relating to CPEC, and the marine fisheries sector were considered. For sectoral trends, production and export data, and growth forecasts of the fishery sector, the official publications and statistical bulletins by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, National Fisheries Development Board of Pakistan, and the Food and Agriculture Organization, were examined. Collected data helped in identifying the current issues of the marine fisheries sector in Pakistan and the areas that need policy improvements and better facilities.

Data Analysis

Since this study adopted a descriptive research design, both quantitative and qualitative data collected from literature and policies were analyzed through content analysis methods. In the analysis, emphasis was laid on identifying major sectors of its economy in which the integration of CPEC projects was beneficial for the marine fisheries sector of Pakistan for sustainable growth and development. Appropriate investment models, the best practice(s) from other countries, and policy changes were also recommended.

Current Integration of CPEC and the Marine Fishery Sector

Existing Infrastructure

Gwadar port is one of the major projects of CPEC which offers vital infrastructure to the marine fishery sector of Pakistan. The strategic location of the port, cold storage facilities, and processing units facilitate a better supply chain for seafood exports (Nusrat, 2021). Transportation infrastructure such as the Gwadar-Turbat Road transport plays a role in the connectivity for fish catch and product transportation (Rehman et al., 2018).

Capital outlay on Fishery Industry

CPEC offered significant Chinese investment for the development of the Pakistani fishery sector. They include modern fish processing plants, cool chain facilities, and vessels/gear for offshore fishing activities. These investments focus on increasing the fish supply, minimizing post-harvest losses, and exportation of seafood. Subsequent deals amounting to \$1.02 billion have signaled Chinese's increasing investment in Pakistan's marine sector (Nusrat, 2021; Mohsin et al., 2015).

Policy Framework

The China-Pakistan fisheries development plan links CPEC projects to enhance Pakistan's blue economy. The government policies address the issues of fisheries technology transfer, vocational training, and establishment of Chinese companies' joint ventures for fishery business in the exclusive economic zone of Pakistan. Concessions and Special Economic Zones are also being established which would also include seafood processing and export through CPEC. Thus, the CPEC is positively boosting Pakistan's marine fishery sector through the development of infrastructure ventures, investments, and supportive policies for efficient fish supply chain and export (Ahmad & Mi, 2017). Greater integration can bring out more of the potential of this sector and strengthen the country's food and economic security.

Role of CPEC in Overhauling the Marine Fishing Sector in Pakistan

Potential Areas of Growth

Expansion of export markets

CPEC has allowed Pakistan to export seafood to the Chinese and Central Asian markets. The trade routes can afford the marine fisheries sector in Pakistan the much-needed boost through demand and better prices (Ali et al., 2021).

Development of modern fishery infrastructure

Pakistani investments through CPEC can finance the construction of cold storage, fish processing plants, packaging plants etc., along the coastline (Amman et al., 2020). This will also help in avoiding loss in the process of post-harvesting and enhance the quality of products.

Improved supply chain and logistics

The Gwadar port and related transport corridors of road and railway will facilitate the movement of marine catch to domestic and export markets. This means that improved linkages would facilitate the cutting of cost and time of transporting seafood.

Sustainable Practices

Eco-friendly fishing methods

Another issue is that of overfishing. It can also be addressed through various regulating mechanisms such as training in methods like aquaculture, seasonal fishing bans etc., which can also be part of CPEC projects (Alam T. , 2023).

Marine conservation efforts

Marine habitats are at risk due to loss of habitat and pollution. Some of these include marine reserves and conservation, mangrove regeneration, and solid waste disposal which can easily be undertaken and synchronized with CPEC development projects (Rahman et al., 2017).

Technology Transfer and Innovation

Advanced fishing technologies

Technological cooperation planned under CPEC could bring in better boats, nets, fish finders, biometric systems etc., for increasing the catch size and fish stock assessment.

R&D for fishery enhancement

Education, commerce, and institutions improve human understanding with the help of CPEC. Partnerships in fields such as survey and inventory, fish farming, sea-food production, use of marine organisms for biotechnology etc., can increase output (Mohsin et al., 2015).

The strategic integration of the marine fisheries sector with CPEC projects and planning could help in realizing its untapped potential for growth through exports, infrastructure development, adopting sustainability practices, and technology acquisition. It will in turn help to increase the levels of economic development and food security for the people of Pakistan.

Economic Impact and Benefits**Employment generation and community upliftment**

- Port development, industrial facilities, and the establishment of a cold chain for the fisheries sector will generate large-scale employment generation for the coastal population in CPEC projects (Ahmad & Mi, 2017). Employment opportunities will be created especially in construction, operation, maintenance, and other related services.
- Fishers along the coastal belt shall have improved employment chances in the context of skill development and capacity building under CPEC. Women empowerment will also be kept as a focus and will be a part of our strategic initiatives.
- Fisheries economic zones along with allied industries under CPEC framework will help in enhancing economic activities in coastal regions for balanced growth of the community (Shahzad, 2020).

GDP and Export Revenues

- Improvement in fish landings, value addition, and export through modern fishery infrastructure through CPEC could contribute over 300 million US dollars per annum to the GDP of Pakistan (Khan M. A., 2021).
- Introducing Gwadar port as a regional fish export hub for China and Central Asian nations can produce over USD 1 billion in export earnings per year according to the projected benefit of CPEC (Rehman et al., 2018).

Long-term Economic Sustainability

- Engagement with China guarantees predictable investment, superior technology, and stable markets for the fishery industry in Pakistan, which is imperative for its continued development (Hassan et al., 2022).
- The risks of volatility are minimized through private-sector partnerships, higher productivity, and China as the export market.
- Stakeholder involvement, sustainable management of marine resources, the promotion of eco-friendly

practices, and community engagement will continue to strengthen long-term benefits (Ali et al., 2017).

Therefore, there is a great prospect of CPEC in the marine fisheries of Pakistan, provided it means a strategic integration in the marine fisheries sector of the country that will uplift the economic scenario of the country and bring about a change in the job opportunities, export sector, and welfare of coastal communities on a sustainable basis.

Challenges and Risks**Environmental Concerns**

- The access to the sea through CPEC for purposes such as fishing, processing plants, harbors, etc., can threaten the marine ecosystems through activities such as the destruction of habitats, overfishing, pollution etc., if not controlled adequately (Shabbir & Khan, 2022; Rahman et al., 2017; Faruque, 1997).
- Measures are to carry out an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for all CPEC projects, regulate fishing through quotas and closed seasons, encourage sustainable aquaculture, enhance efficient waste management in coastal regions, establish coastal environmental monitoring systems, and incorporate climate resilience into infrastructure development (Ahmad A., 2016).

Socio-Political Factors

- Some coastal communities in Pakistan have been opposing CPEC's projects like Gwadar Port expressing concerns of displacement, restrictions on their fishing zones, and other forms of marginalization (Hassan et al., 2022).
- Security threats to CPEC projects originate from the ongoing geopolitical conflict between India and Pakistan over the Kashmir territory, and with Iran over some illegal non-state actors (INSAs) operating along the border (Rehman et al., 2018). Similarly, political instability in Balochistan province presents threats of separatist attacks on CPEC installations.

Regulatory and Policy Challenges

- Another issue is the inability of Pakistani authorities to effectively enforce the rules of marine fisheries. This has also led to a lack of coordination between the federal and provincial agencies in cases of monitoring and policy implementation (Shahzad, 2020; Alam T., 2023).
- Pakistan's strategic CPEC goals of raising fish production and enhancing processing/exports must be complementary with marine conservation policies such as Pakistan Climate Change Act and Biodiversity Action Plan for sustainable economic growth (Rahim et al., 2018).

The note identifies significant environmental, socio-political, and regulatory issues and risks related to the inclusion of CPEC in Pakistan's marine fisheries.

It also offers wide-ranging adjustment and policy coordination affairs concerning sustainable development (Aftab et al., 2017).

Policy Recommendations

- Establish SEZs and industrial parks in seafood processing and export sectors in conjunction with CPEC.
- Encourage Chinese companies to invest in fishing and fish processing sectors in Pakistan.
- Improve the fishery harbors and auction halls in Gwadar and Karachi under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) schemes.
- Integrate Fisheries infrastructure development in the long-term Plan of CPEC
- Form a fisheries working group between China and Pakistan under the umbrella of CPEC Framework.
- Incorporate zoning and quota systems in the management of sustainable fisheries.
- Provide training and subsidies to replace unsustainable fishing gear and techniques.
- Create certification programs for the export of seafood caught from sustainable sources to China.
- Strengthen the enforcement mechanisms to fight cases of IUU fishing operations.
- Encourage the development of aquaculture and marine culture to mitigate pressure on the wild catch.
- Initiate fisheries and seafood processing training programs and vocational institutes in collaboration with the Chinese government.
- Promote internships and apprenticeships of Pakistani youth in Chinese fishing industries.
- Promote exchange of researchers and students within the fields of fisheries sciences.
- Develop and offer Chinese language courses in the context of fisheries and business terms.
- Organize seminars and workshops to disseminate advanced fisheries technology and skills to the people of Pakistan.
- Provide incentives for Chinese private sector to invest in industrial fisheries in connection with the CPEC SEZs
- Simplify policies and taxes to encourage private participation in fisheries.
- Promote private sector participation in enhancing fishing harbors infrastructure.
- Encourage the development of partnerships in the fish and seafood processing and export sectors.
- Develop fishery-related business platforms and B2B partnerships between Pakistani and Chinese fishery companies.

The above recommendations are meant to ensure that the Pakistan fisheries sector is incorporated into the CPEC in a manner that will provide benefits to both countries. Apart from business promotion,

sustainable fisheries and capacity enhancement are the major concerns.

Conclusion

The study identified how CPEC could be useful if it is incorporated into Pakistan's marine fishery sector. Some of the research implications are the possibility of enhancing investment in fishery infrastructure, improvement of Pakistani seafood export market access to China, sharing of advanced fishing technologies and techniques from China, and development of coastal fishery clusters that connect to CPEC development regions. Some of the challenges include sustainability issues by overfishing, issues affecting the small-scale fishermen, and equitable share of the benefits. The overall incorporation of CPEC has several significant consequences for enhancing the marine fisheries industry of Pakistan. It can facilitate overall modernization and infrastructural enhancements for quality, productivity, efficiency, and competitiveness. Under CPEC, partnerships and joint ventures in the fishery sector can help Pakistan link its seafood exports to potential Chinese markets. Maintenance of fish stock through quotas and the encouragement of marine farming for long-term benefits can be accrued from this resource. This means capacity building is required for the coastal fishery workforce to adopt modern techniques and technologies that are transferred through CPEC.

Further research could focus on analyzing sustainable industrialization models that would accommodate the conservation agenda. Socio-economic analysis of CPEC should identify the effects of fishery integration on the growth of coastal regions and propose solutions to improve the standards of living of these communities. Further studies on the adoption of advanced marine technologies for enhancing yield, minimizing post-harvest losses, and enhancing seafood traceability can support the investment and collaboration under CPEC. Research can also review cross-national cases on Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) on multiple ocean economic uses in the context of the blue economic growth framework which is applicable to CPEC and Pakistan. This study considers the potential application of strategic integration in the marine fishery sector and reflects on directions for further research on this strategic integration to help inform policy decisions. Sustainability principles and equitable development will be important to incorporate.

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Declaration

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

Not applicable.

Consent for Publication

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Authors' Contribution

All authors contributed equally.

Conflict of interest

There is no conflict of interest among the authors of the manuscript.



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