



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Development of Gwadar Port: A Plight for Fisherfolk Community**

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**ABSTRACT**

This research enterprise aims to investigate the plight and consequences of the common fisherfolk community of Gwadar in the context of development projects inaugurated under the canopy of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). To address the concern of the fisherfolk community of Gwadar, the research venture has investigated, reviewed, and employed secondary sources of data. To measure the impacts and the repercussions of the development projects, the study has employed several theoretical approaches to development based on the analysis of positive and negative aspects of the development. The study found that the development of Gwadar under CPEC has resulted in the economic progress of the country in one place, while the other face of development has become a plight for the common fisherfolk community residing in and around Gwadar. Therefore, to investigate and analyse the ongoing state of affairs in Gwadar with particular reference to the plight of the common fisherfolk community, the study pinpoints the risks, challenges, and repercussions associated with the development projects of Gwadar for the local fisherfolk community.

**KEYWORDS** CPEC, Development, Fisherfolks, Gwadar, Plight

**Introduction**

The process of development is a two-centric approach. It enriches and facilitates one section of society: while it frequently becomes an unadorned challenge to the other section of society. The second part of development leads to the displacement of people from their native hometowns, endangers their lives, and becomes a plight to the survival of the local masses. To this view, the case of the fisherfolk community of Gwadar is no exception. Though, Gwadar is a strategic part of Pakistan located 400 km from the Strait of Hormuz, and it is the entrance point to the Persian Gulf. The port has greater potential as it is the key shipping route after ports in Karachi for shipping and carrying tankers in different parts of the world. However, it is also the most important area for the local people of Gwadar, whose survival mostly depends on fishing in the Gwadar. The port has historically been the source of income, employment, and fishing for the indigenous population of Gwadar. The development of Gwadar under the China-Pak Economic Corridor (CPEC) has become a plight for the local fisherfolks. The CPEC is an economic collaboration between China and Pakistan at a giant level. For China and Pakistan, the project is a mega agreement throughout the history of their bilateral relations.

The CPEC is one of the projects of China's Belt and Road Initiatives (BRI) that connects Asia, Africa, and European continents with China for international trade. The CPEC project carries both, positive as well as negative ramifications. The project is a need for the economic prosperity of China and Pakistan (Shah, Muzaffar, & Yaseen, 2020). At the same time, the project possesses negative consequences for the livelihood of the local fisherfolks of Gwadar because Gwadar has been the only source of income for the locals. Around 70-80 percent of people in Gwadar are dependent on fishing (Meer, 2016). However, about 5,000 to 7,000 fisherfolks with 1,000 boats are in Sur Bandar and Koh-e-Batalis in Gwadar whose survival primarily depends upon fishing, and the development project is not allowing them

to continue fishing (Ibrahim, 2017). The development of expressways closure to jetty also results in the displacement of boats of common fisherfolks. Thus, the construction of the Gwadar port is seen as an attack on the economic activities of the locals. In the meantime, it is pertinent to address the insecurities of common fisherfolks associated with the development projects of Gwadar.

### **Literature Review**

This research study primarily discusses two areas associated with the development. Firstly, the concept of prosperity and displacement through development projects. The study steers factors of development and displacement with reference to scholarly and academic work. The last part of the discussion pinpoints the connection and relevance of these concepts with the topic by discussing different facets of analytical approaches. Therefore, the paper has reviewed existing literature to address the following core concepts and variables of the research. The coastal city of Gwadar is located in the southwestern province of Balochistan. The city is undergoing significant development projects as a part of CPEC initiatives. The development projects in Gwadar have raised concerns about the plight of traditional practices and the survival of common fisherfolk communities living in and around Gwadar. Historically, the value of Gwadar Port has been the source of fishing, and income for the fisherfolk community. Around 80 percent earnings of the fisherfolk community are based on the fishing business at Gwadar Port (Khan S. , 2017). Therefore, this paper aims to analyze and examine the available literature on the plight and consequences faced by the fisherfolk community of Gwadar with reference to the development projects.

### **The Concept of Development**

The concept of development is a vague and extensively discussed field of study in various disciplines. It is a holistic approach that encompasses social, political, economic, and environmental disciplines. It is a broader term and a process of progress and positive change that covers aspects such as geo-economics and geo-politics. Generally, it refers to advancement and growth in the economy, technology, education, infrastructure, health, and governance aiming to raise the standard and quality of life. The development also means reducing poverty, addressing inequalities, enhancing sustainability, and betterment of societies.

The term is defined and explained by various academicians and scholars through different approaches in different fields of study. The concept of development is as a theory and policy associated with sustainability and economic growth of infrastructure, environment, and overall progress of society (Todaro & William, 2020). The term development is a tool for achieving sustainable growth and promoting human freedom (Sen, 1999). Another view describes the term development as a discourse of growth and sustainability that has repercussions for marginalized communities – particularly in third-world regions (Escobar, 1995). For another theorist, the notion of development is a change in the socioeconomic, environmental, and infrastructure of society (Slim, 1995). However, the idea of development is also associated with an improvement of the entire system of economic and non-economic activities on an equal basis for the progress of socioeconomic and political fields (Myrdal, 1974). Therefore, the term development is a multilayered process that seeks to enhance economic growth, social, environmental, and individual sustainability, and progress in society as a whole. However, many scholars view development as a source of plight for the poor section of society – which they believe – should be a sustainable, inclusive, and participatory approach.

## **Development Induces Displacement**

Displacement is a social phenomenon. The concept of displacement refers to the forced movement and the spontaneous exclusion of communities, groups or individuals from their indigenous places of residence due to various factors i.e., natural calamities, development projects, and conflicts. Displacement often occurs due to loss of land, home, resources, and cultural and religious identity resulting the lasting impacts on the socio-economic, political, and psychological of life. Displacement is also assumed as a compelled and involuntary action that enables the happening of displacement, and it takes place within the boundaries of a state; for instance, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) or refugees (Hyndman, 2000). However, there is a concept of physical displacement as well, which takes place in the name of the construction of public infrastructure which compels the native people to become vulnerable (Cernea, 2000).

The notion of displacement is also addressed as a cause of development projects such as urbanization and the construction of dams (Kothari, 2001). The factors such as intra-state and inter-state conflicts also results displacement of people. During the conflict, the native population is forced to migrate (Bond, 2002). Moreover, the gentrification is also considered as one of the core factors of displacement, particularly within low-income urban families (Atkinson & Bridge, 2005). In the case of Gwadar, the city is no exception. The development of Gwadar Port fuels more misery to the already victimized fisherfolk community. The development projects on the port have witnessed the plight of the fisherfolk community in terms of social network, employment, and per-capita income. For them, the development is nothing but a plight to their present and future generations – which in any case – is unacceptable to them.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Environmental Justice Theory**

The paper has employed the Environmental Justice Theory to address the impacts of development projects of Gwadar Port on the socio-economic life of the fisherfolks and the environment. The proponent of the theory is Robert Bullard. Robert is an American Sociologist, and environmental activist. He is best known for his work in addressing environmental inequalities with particular reference to the low-income and minority communities. This theoretical approach analyzes environmental inequalities, land and resource rights, decision-making process, and distributive and procedural justice. Therefore, Environmental Justice Theory is a comprehensive theoretical approach that addresses the injustices and inequalities faced by the already vulnerable fisherfolk community of Gwadar owing to the large-scale development projects.

## **Material and Methods**

### **Research Method**

Since the nature of this research paper is descriptive, the qualitative method of research has been employed to address the statement of problem by using the secondary and primary sources of data.

### **Research Design**

### **Ethnographic Approach**

The insights and information about the life, culture, traditions, and life standard of the fisherfolk community have been investigated and incorporated into the paper.

## **Case Study**

This research paper has primarily focused on the experiences of the fisherfolk community in the wake of development projects of Gwadar Port.

## **Data Collection**

For this research enterprise, the primary and secondary sources of data are employed to address the core concerns.

## **Secondary Sources**

For the secondary collection of data, the journal articles, news items, archives, books, documentaries, and official reports – based on the development of Gwadar and its repercussions for the fisherfolk community – are reviewed in detail.

## **Primary Sources**

Additionally, for the collection of primary data, face-to-face, and virtual in-depth interviews are conducted with the locals of fisherfolk communities. Focus group discussions and participant observation were also employed during the interviews with local fisherfolks.

## **Sampling**

### **Purposeful Sampling**

The purposeful sampling method has been employed. Under this method, respondents were selected in terms of their experience with the repercussions of development projects in Gwadar on their livelihood and environment.

### **Sample Size**

Due to the shortage of time and financial constraints, only 20 most senior and experienced respondent were selected.

### **Sample Age**

The age criteria for the respondent ranges from 40 years to 60 years. The criteria are based on the requirement of the research. This criterion has been set to address the issue by interviewing the most experienced respondents.

### **Sample Gender**

Due to male dominancy and patriarchal mindset within the fisherfolk community, only male respondents were selected for the interviews.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Thematic Analysis**

To analyze the impact of development projects of Gwadar on the fisherfolk community, the focus group discussions, and interview transcripts have been analyzed through themes and coding schemes.

### **Ethical Consideration**

### **Informed Consent Letter**

The respondents were informed about and presented with a consent letter for their participation in focus group discussions before the conduct of interviews. They were also informed and given 15 days in case of withdrawal from their given information on the topic.

### **Anonymity and Confidentiality**

The respondents were also informed about the confidentiality and anonymity of their personal information before the conduct of interviews

### **The Fisherfolk Community in Gwadar**

#### **Social and Economic Profile**

The source of livelihood for the diverse community of fisherfolks in Gwadar is based on the fishing practices. The fisherfolk community is comprised of family system and settled in villages residing at the coastal areas of Gwadar. The culture and traditions of fisherfolks are centered on the sea. The gender roles are assigned: men, women, and children of their families are involved in fishing practices (Shahrukh, Hussain, Azeem, & Khan, 2020). The practice of fishing is gendered. Men and adult children are engaged in fishing activities while women carry marketing, fish processing, managing household activities. In terms of education, the literacy rate of the community is very low: only a small segment of fisherfolk receives formal education due to economic and geographical constraints. Due to dearth of economic diversity, and perpetual low literacy rate, the community does not have alternative sources of livelihood and earnings. The seasonal variations have also a greater impact on fishing and fisherfolk income. During the season of monsoon, the fishing activities remain restricted resulting low income and economic adversities (Ali & Khan, 2018). Therefore, for most of the fisherfolk families, fishing is primary source of their household income: they are primarily dependent on traditional patterns of fishing such as nets and small boats for catching fish on coastal regions.

#### **Cultural Inheritance**

The fisherfolk community residing in Gwadar Port has a rich cultural inheritance that dates back to the ancient times. The community's cultural life is associated with the sea life, seafoods, fishing, customs, and festivals are separate from other traditions (Ali & Khan, 2018). The members of the community have strong ties with the life of sea and fishing. They have been living in the coastal regions of Gwadar for years. The main source of their survival and cultural employment has been fishing (Shahrukh, Hussain, Azeem, & Khan, 2020). In contemporary times, they still practice their traditional patterns and live in accordance with the norms of centuries. However, the development project of Gwadar has recently posed severe challenges to the old practices of their tradition. For instance, fishing and environmental changes are being deteriorated, and access to the port and jetty is being taken away. Resultantly, the fisherfolk community and their old traditions are at risk of extinction.

#### **Traditional Livelihood and Fishing Practice**

The majority of fisherfolk families rely on traditional patterns of livelihood and fishing activities. The fishing and traditional practices of earnings are deeply rooted in the cultural heritage of the fisherfolk community. These traditional practices have sustained for generations and maintained an ecological balance of the marine life. The fisherfolk community has a separate method craftsmanship for fishing boats. Most of the boats are made of woods called 'Mahis' or 'Noks' designed for a stable fishing activity (Azeem, 2019). Other traditional method includes the use of handline and net fishing, night and seasonal

fishing, art of navigation, and employment of indigenous techniques such as fishing traps, spears, and fishing lines (Khalid & Khan, 2019). This way, the fisherfolk community of Gwadar maintain their livelihood through traditional means and patterns of fishing.

### **Fisherfolks Role in Informal Economic Sector**

The fisherfolk community of Gwadar plays an important role in informal economic sector of Gwadar. It contributes in different economic sectors resulting the maintenance of livelihood in the region. Fishing is the primary sources of their economic activities. They supply fish and sea foods to the tourists and local markets that help them generate income. The economic value chain of the community is based on the ripple effect. The fish processing and fish trade is based on the speedy supply of fish from the community resulting into the expansion of small level industries (Ullah, Khan, & begum, 2023). This process also creates local markets, transportation, jobs, and small businesses related to the fishing (Azeem, 2019). The availability of fresh seafood, cultural, and the beauty of coastal areas at Gwadar also attracts the tourists. The tourism provides additional opportunities for fisherfolks to supply seafoods, fish, hotels, restaurants, and other employment and income opportunities. The method of fishing and gathering seafoods is environment-friendly (Zia-ur-Rehman, 2020). Therefore, the traditional patterns of earning are based on sustainability of environment resulting smooth expansion of informal economic activities in the region.

### **Development of Gwadar: A Plight for Fisherfolk Community**

The development of Gwadar Port has been presaged as a significant economic and strategic initiative between China and Pakistan. It is heralded as a project that has the potential to expand regional economic cooperation, connectivity, and growth. However, the development project has raised concerns about the plight of the local fisherfolk community residing in the coastal region of the Gwadar Port. The challenges posed by the development project to the fisherfolk community have socio-economic and environmental consequences for the community. The challenges and repercussions are discussed with reference to the primary and secondary sources in detail (Rahim, Khan, & Muzaffar, 2018).

### **Displacement and Land Acquisition**

The development projects in Gwadar has resulted in increased land acquisition for numerous industrial and infrastructure projects resulting in the displacement of the fisherfolk community. The repercussions of the rapid development projects have severe impacts on the fisherfolk community, often resulting the loss of traditional settlements, displacement of families, loss of cultural heritage, damage to traditional fishing and livelihood practices, environmental pollution, and social fragmentation (Ali, 2017). The villages near to the coastal regions are subject to land acquisition, often compelling the families to evacuate the ancestral lands (Zia-ur-Rehman, 2020). They are also left with no other alternative mechanisms. Therefore, development projects of Gwadar have brought a plight for the fisherfolk families residing around the Gwadar Port.

### **Impact on Fishing Practices**

The growth of infrastructure and industrial projects in Gwadar port has also greatly impacted the traditional fishing practices. The access to the marine's resources has been restricted, leading to the reduced income for the community. The economic hardships posed by the development projects also results into the food security, disruption to the traditional practices, festivals, and customs, migration and relocations (Ali & Khan, 2018). The consumption of seafood and the livelihood from tourism are also fading, leading to the increased malnutrition among the families. The ecological balance and the marine environment are also among the greater repercussions resulting from the development projects of Gwadar (Anees, 2020). The dearth of fishing areas and less access to the seafood

can result into the competition among the families and thereby, the chances of conflict are inevitable.

### **Environmental Degradation**

The environmental degradation of Gwadar is also subject to the rapid industrialization and development projects. The growing pollution of marine impacts marine life, disturbs ecosystem, and increases health issues among fisherfolk community. The shipping, industrial activities, and waste disposal, plastics, and chemicals, have increased environmental pollution at marines affecting the growth of fish, pollutes water, and increases vulnerability of the community (Khan S. A., 2017). The decline and probably the extinction of marine biodiversity has reduced the fish stocks. Moreover, there is nutrient run off from the increased industrial activities that spreads harmful algal blooms and the eutrophication in the water, leading to the extinction of fishes, as well as, deteriorating the health conditions of the fisherfolks (Anees, 2020). The increased health hazards have also reduced the productivity and availability of local markets. Therefore, the increased damage of environmental regulations has brought a plight to the traditional heritage, and livelihood of fisherfolk community.

### **Marginalization of the Fisherfolks**

In the face of development, disempowerment and marginalization are common practices. The social and economic disparities caused by the development projects hinder the process of livelihood and day to day income. In terms marginalization, the fisherfolk community have limited voice and access to participate in decision-making processes pertinent to the development projects (Anees, 2020). The exclusion of the community from policy-making fades away their rights to the land and resources, making their livelihood more vulnerable and segregated. This has produced a sense of alienation among the masses living around coastal part of the Port. They feel betrayal, more often, victimized by the authorities in the name of development (Azeem, 2019). The development process has further thrown the already poor community into the well of poverty, economic disparities, and inadequate social services. The community has also been kept away from the benefits of the development, often resulting into the exploitative laboring practices, cultural erosion and lack of access to the justice. Therefore, development has brought an era of darkness for the indigenous population of the fisherfolks.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, this study has recognized development as a challenge to the livelihood and tradition of fisherfolk community of Gwadar. The literature reviewed has highlighted the challenges faced by the fisherfolk community due to the development projects of Gwadar underscored the value for an inclusive approach to the development that could consider the rights and needs of the communities living in Gwadar. The stakeholders, policymakers, and researchers should collectively devise a sustainable strategy that can address the plight and concerns of the fisherfolk community and benefit everyone.

### **Recommendations**

#### **Sustainable Development Strategies**

Sustainable development strategy is needed to ensure the long-term well-being of the fisherfolk community. There should be an integrated coastal management for every zone, management for ecosystem-based fisheries, adaption for climate change, community based developmental policies, sustainable policies for fishing, social safety nets, education, capacity building, and awareness, and monitoring and research so that the development process can benefit every stakeholder.

### **Strengthening the Livelihood of Fisherfolks**

Strengthening the livelihood of fisherfolk needs to be addressed by adopting diversification of livelihood, financial access to the fisherfolks, skill developments, and access to the markets, and coastal sights, environmental conservation and climate resilience, and collective partnership with the locals. Doing so will benefit the fisherfolks as well as the major shareholders of the projects

### **Government Initiatives for Fisherfolk Community**

The government of Pakistan is liable to preserve and protect the cultural heritage and tradition of the masses. The government also needs to address the concerns and plights of the fisherfolk community while farming policies for the development projects of Gwadar. The government should initiate livelihood support programs, schemes supporting social welfare, management for coastal resource, reintegration and relocation, and ensure financial packages for the fisherfolks. Last but not the least, the government should frame an inclusive strategy that can address their challenges, and plights, in order to benefit them from the development projects.



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