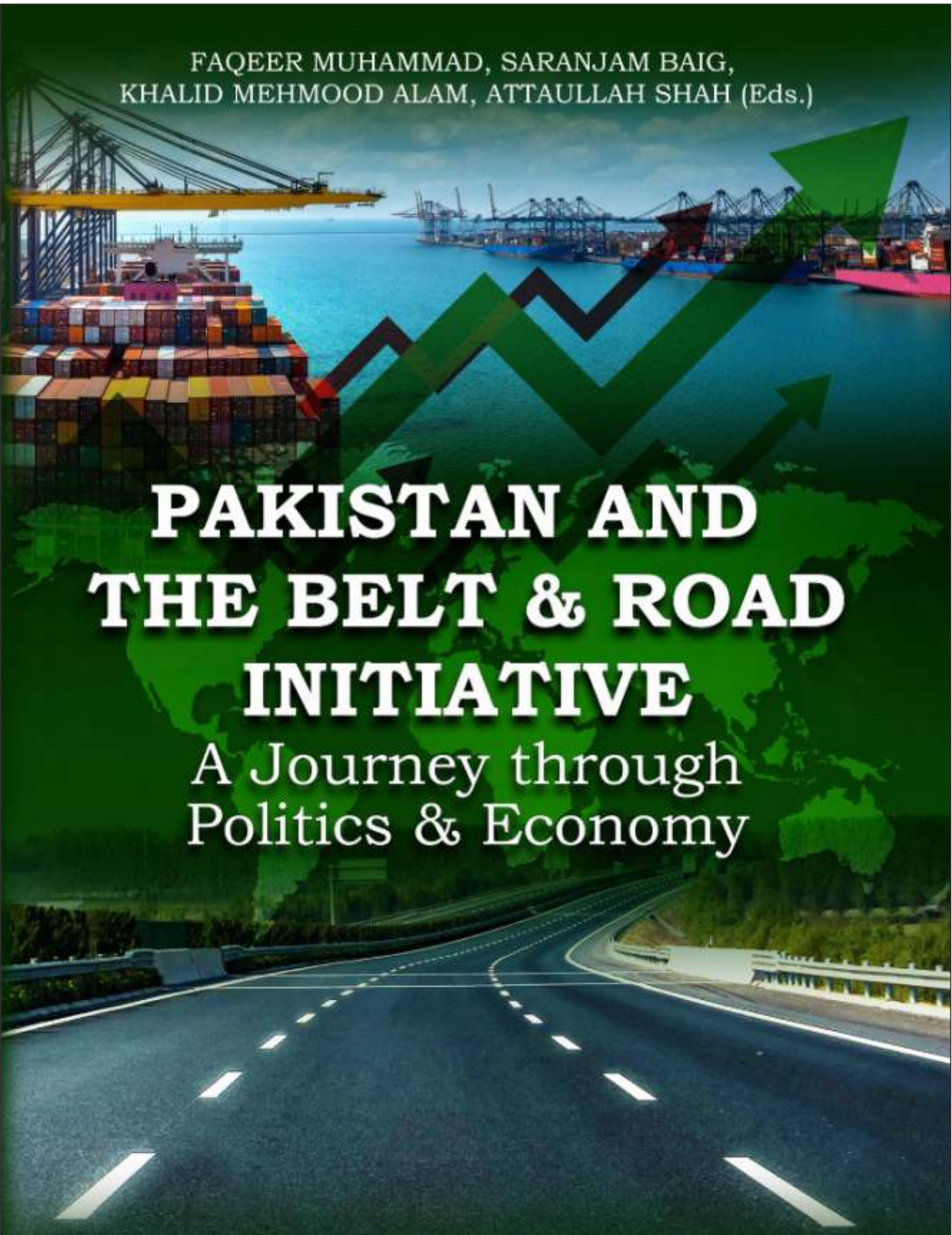
FAQEER MUHAMMAD, SARANJAM BAIG,
KHALID MEHMOOD ALAM, ATTAULLAH SHAH (Eds.)



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Unraveling the Human Narrative: Exploring Well-being and Perspectives of Border Communities along the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor in Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan

Khalid Mehmood Alam
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3222-0895
China Study Centre, Karakoram International University, Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan

Tahir Mahmood
https://orcid.org/0009-0001-6717-9485
A.G.N.Kazi State Bank of Pakistan-Memorial Chair, Karakoram International University, GB, Pakistan

Zia Uddin
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1499-6075
PhD Scholar at the Department of Economics, Karakoram International University Gilgit-Baltistan

Mehfooz Ullah
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1208-0899
Department of Management Sciences, Karakoram International University, GB, Pakistan

Abstract

Economic corridors around the world have created job opportunities for people living along their routes, which is why it is important to have the support of local communities. This study focuses on investigating the residents' support for the development of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the perceived impacts and personal benefits of the CPEC project in Gilgit-Baltistan. The research approach used a quantitative method with random sampling for a field survey. Data were collected from four districts - Hunza, Nagar, Gilgit, and Diamer - located in the Gilgit-Baltistan province. The study breaks down subjective well-being into five distinct domains: Health, Material, Community, Emotional, and Educational Well-being. The model examines the structural connections between these dimensions, assessing their combined impact on the subjective well-being of residents and determining their implications for supporting the development

of the CPEC. After confirming the validity of the measurement model, a structural model evaluation was conducted. The results from the structural models provide valuable insights into the connections between subjective well-being dimensions and support for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project. The reliability and validity statistics of the measurement model ensure its robustness. Structural Model One's findings confirm a significant positive relationship between the perceived subjective well-being of local residents and support for the CPEC project. The results validate Material Well-being, Community Well-being, Educational Well-being, Health Well-being, and Emotional Well-being, demonstrating that each dimension significantly influences support for the CPEC project.

Introduction

Economic corridors represent strategic developmental initiatives designed to facilitate a nation's augmentation of internal or localized economic endeavors (Brand, 2018). These initiatives involve establishing linkages between distinct economic centers, fostering interconnectivity within transportation networks, and fostering the adoption of pivotal technologies crucial for regional economic consolidation and trade integration (Amir, 2016). The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is the flagship project of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which aims to connect China's Xinjiang area to Pakistan's Gwadar Port by a network of roads, trains, and pipelines. The CPEC, which spans more than 3,000 km, has huge economic consequences for both countries, promising to improve commerce, infrastructure development, and energy cooperation. It is envisioned as a game changer not just for Pakistan's economy, but also for regional connectivity, forging closer relations between China and Pakistan while opening up new opportunities for investment and growth in the larger South Asian area.

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is an important initiative for both China and Pakistan. To promote economic ties between China and Pakistan, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a development project that includes road infrastructure, energy, and various industries (Khwaja, Saeed, & Urooj, 2018). China focus also remains on strengthening their own economy, creating new economic goals, and searching for international markets and investment possibilities (Afzal & Naseem, 2018). To achieve this goal, the Chinese government launched the massive One Belt, One Road (OBOR) project, of which CPEC is a component. According to Abid & Ashfaq, (2015), CPEC is seen as a major economic game changer for Pakistan because it promises creating millions of jobs and business opportunities for the surrounding area (Haqiqat & Alam, 2023).

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a project that has greatly benefited the community in Pakistan. For instance, the CPEC development project offers necessities such as employment opportunities, access to education, and convenient access to large cities and marketplaces (Ghanem, Xuemei, Alam, & Baig, 2021). Researchers and politicians argue that the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) will improve living conditions for the local population by providing more opportunities for economic growth (Ali et al., 2017; Kanwal, Chong, & Pitafi, 2019b). Several studies have showed that various development initiatives can improve the well-being of local communities (Kanwal et al., 2020; Woo, Kim, & Uysal, 2015). However, there are only a few studies that focus on the standard of living in local communities and the growth of CPECs (Kanwal et al., 2019b). According to L. Ali et al. (2017), by providing local people with global connections, the CPEC road and transit project can increase their standard of living. Additionally, Kanwal, Chong, & Pitafi (2019a) argue that the development of CPEC infrastructure can boost local community revenue by providing commercial, job, and educational opportunities, ultimately leading to an improved quality of life. According to Asomani-Boateng, Fricano, & Adarkwa (2015), the improvement of road and transportation infrastructure will increase trade, tourism and land connectivity. While CPEC has often been disregarded, prior research has looked at the influence of socio-cultural factors on local populations' well-being through festivals and tourist development (Nawijn & Mitas, 2012; Yolal, Gursoy, Uysal, Kim, & Karacaoğlu, 2016). This study will fill this research gap by primarily examining how the socio-cultural effects of CPEC on residents' subjective well-being are perceived by them. We will be able to determine the strength and direction of the association between sociocultural influences and residents' subjective well-being by assessing subjective well-being as an outcome concept. Since CPEC presents both opportunities and problems, we are looking at how CPEC projects affect individuals' well-being.

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) traverses through China's Xinjiang Province and subsequently extends into Gilgit-Baltistan through the Hunza, Nagar, Gilgit, and Diamer districts, covering a distance of over 300 kilometers before proceeding into the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) region via the Kohistan area. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is anticipated to provide a significant opportunity for trade, particularly within the Gilgit-Baltistan region of Pakistan. Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) exhibits substantial potential for advancement through strengthened trade ties with China, possessing a conducive environment with the capacity for further development in energy, business, fruit handling, and livestock sectors, as highlighted by (Khan, 2013). It is envisioned that this multi-billion-dollar

collaborative project traversing the formidable Karakorum and Himalayan Mountain ranges in Northern Pakistan will not only stimulate trade and industrial activities in GB but will also contribute to the overall promotion of tourism in Pakistan and, more specifically, in Gilgit-Baltistan, as indicated by (Malik & Akbar, 2021). Given that one of the primary objectives of CPEC is to ameliorate the socio-economic conditions in underprivileged regions of Pakistan, the development of GB along the Karakoram Highway (KKH) remains a central focus of CPEC projects. Consequently, the enhancement of socio-economic circumstances is expected to exert a positive influence on peace, harmony, and reconciliation in Gilgit-Baltistan, as asserted by (Wolf, 2018).

Due to limited research on the subject of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) development initiatives in Pakistan, with a notable absence of prior scholarly works specifically addressing the region of Gilgit-Baltistan, the primary aim of this investigation is to examine the level of support among residents for CPEC development. Firstly, this study is the first to focus on the welfare of locals in Gilgit-Baltistan along the CPEC route. Secondly, by stressing the material, community, educational, health, and emotional advantages of CPEC as well as its favorable effects on infrastructure development, the current study raises awareness of CPEC projects among Gilgit-Baltistan citizens along the CPEC route. Thirdly, the multidimensional nature of subjective wellbeing, encompassing material, community, education, health, and emotional dimensions, plays a crucial role in shaping residents' attitudes toward CPEC development initiatives.

This research is organized as follows: Section 2 succinctly expounds upon the literature review within the framework of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), introducing the CPEC itself, and formulating a hypothesis. Section 3 delineates the research methodology and details the procedures employed for data collection. Section 4 elucidates the data analysis undertaken in the study. Section 5 furnishes a discussion of the findings, implications, and limitations, while Section 6 offers a conclusion to the study.

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

China–Pakistan Economic Corridor

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) encompasses a variety of infrastructure projects, economic development initiatives, industrial zones, and regional connectivity projects that are currently being constructed across Pakistan. Originating in Gwadar, Baluchistan, Pakistan, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) extends all the way to Kashgar, China, passing through several provinces in Pakistan, namely Baluchistan, Sindh, Punjab,

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Gilgit-Baltistan. This monumental initiative was inaugurated in April 2015 by Chinese President Xi Jinping and represents a substantial investment, totaling $62 billion (Ahmed, Arshad, Mahmood, & Akhtar, 2017). For China, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) offers a vital strategic advantage. It provides a swifter and more cost-effective alternative to the Strait of Malacca, a route currently responsible for 83% of China's oil imports. The Malacca route, controlled by the United States, presents a potential threat to Chinese business interests. Hence, CPEC stands as a secure and efficient pathway, substantially shortening the distance from approximately 12,500 to 3,000 km. This reduction not only decreases shipping costs but also significantly cuts transportation time (Shaikh, Ji, & Fan, 2016).

In the context of Pakistan, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) signifies a transformative economic initiative. It holds the promise of alleviating poverty, resolving energy shortages, and generating significant business opportunities and employment prospects for local communities (Sun, Pitafi, Ghani, & Islam, 2020). Amid these optimistic advancements, scholars have expressed apprehensions regarding potential adverse effects. Prior research has underscored environmental challenges, such as glacier melting in northern Pakistan attributed to CPEC (Nabi, Ullah, Khan, Ahmad, & Kumar, 2018).

Moreover, the significant water usage in the construction of various projects, such as motorways, gives rise to worries regarding potential water scarcity for neighboring communities (Khwaja, Saeed, & Urooj, 2018). The noise pollution stemming from drilling and the operation of heavy machinery not only irritates the local populace but also has the potential to disrupt the region's ecosystem. Additionally, the considerable deforestation undertaken to facilitate construction, particularly in forested areas, emerges as a noteworthy concern (Khwaja et al., 2018).

Hence, it is imperative to conduct a thorough examination of the subjective well-being of residents, scrutinizing the effects of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) development project and its ramifications on the local community. Such a comprehensive research endeavor is indispensable for acquiring a nuanced comprehension and facilitating well-informed policymaking pertaining to the project.

Support for CPEC

Within this investigation, the dependent variable under scrutiny is the support for China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The imperative nature of local community endorsement is underscored, as it holds pivotal significance for

the efficacy of CPEC projects, given the substantial role played by the local community as a primary stakeholder in the initiatives associated with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (Alam, Baig, & Muhammad, 2023; Alam, Xuemei, et al., 2023). Previous research indicates that, generally, the local community maintains a favorable attitude towards development projects (Andereck & Vogt, 2000). Although there are limited studies suggesting a negative disposition of the local community towards certain development projects like tourism (Álvarez-García, Durán-Sánchez, & del Río-Rama, 2018). Consistent with the principles of social exchange theory, the level of support from the host community is contingent on perceived benefits. In the case of CPEC development projects, higher levels of support are expected when local residents perceive these projects as more advantageous. In light of the considerable proportion of the local community perceiving CPEC projects predominantly as economic undertakings, it becomes essential to grasp the perspectives of local residents regarding the impact of CPEC on diverse facets of well-being. These dimensions encompass health, material, community, emotional, and educational well-being. Such comprehension is of paramount significance for government officials, business leaders, and policymakers, as the realization of success in any development initiative is contingent upon the perceptions and endorsement of the local community.

Perceived Impacts of CPEC and its Integration for Regional Development

Numerous previous studies have delineated a direct association between the perceived impact of development projects and the level of support garnered for such initiatives (Kang & Lee, 2018; Luo & Xiao, 2017). It is pertinent to observe that local residents exhibit discernment regarding both favorable and adverse effects attributed to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project. The existing body of literature emphasizes the nuanced nature of the CPEC undertaking, elucidating a spectrum of impacts on the inhabitants of the region (Maqsood, 2018; Nabi et al., 2018).

Previous investigations related to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) have posited a multitude of positive ramifications on the quality of life for local inhabitants, encompassing dimensions such as business prospects, employment opportunities, educational enhancements, and income augmentation (Afzal & Naseem, 2018; L. Ali, Mi, Shah, Khan, & Imran, 2017). Conversely, scholarly discourse has also directed attention to specific adverse outcomes associated with the CPEC initiative, including apprehensions pertaining to security, property valuation fluctuations, alterations in the community's image, and various social impacts (Hussain, 2019; Zia & Waqar, 2018).

Numerous academics and policymakers have emphasized the positive implications of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) initiative (Shoukat, Ahmad, & Abdullah, 2016; Suleri, 2018; Xie et al., 2015). Policymakers, in particular, contend that CPEC endeavors are poised to bring about significant transformations in the socioeconomic landscape of the Pakistani populace (Makhdoom, Shah, & Sami, 2018). Arguing that the CPEC project holds the potential to address issues of unemployment, education, and energy within Pakistan (S. Ali, 2015; Tong, 2014), these studies collectively affirm that the perceived positive impacts play a pivotal role in shaping the attitudes of local residents, cultivating their inclination to actively participate in and endorse the CPEC project.

Prior scholarship and policymaking endeavors have presented evidence indicating that the CPEC project serves to mitigate unemployment by creating a substantial number of employment opportunities (D. F. H. Ali & Qazi, 2020; Chen, Joseph, & Tariq, 2018), catalyzing the establishment of new businesses, and offering fresh investment prospects (Raza, Mohiuddin, Zaidi, & Osama, 2018). Furthermore, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project is acknowledged for presenting avenues for enterprises of both substantial and modest scale (Rehman, Hakim, Khan, & Khan, 2018), thereby contributing to the generation of income for the communities hosting these initiatives (Raza et al., 2018).

Conspicuously, a contemporary undertaking entails the commencement of a bus service originating from Lahore, Pakistan, destined for Kashgar, China, with a unidirectional travel duration of 30 hours, affording scenic vistas of the northern regions of Pakistan. This endeavor not only augments the economic well-being of the local community but also functions as a revenue source, encompassing employment and small-scale business prospects for the indigenous population.

Furthermore, authorities assert that the implementation of the aforementioned bus service is expected to enhance positive sentiments within the host community towards China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) projects, fostering improved amicable relations between the two nations. To summarize, all research findings consistently demonstrate a significant correlation between positive impacts and the attitude of the local community. Despite these positive aspects, it is noteworthy that the CPEC project also entails substantial adverse effects on the region. For instance, the establishment of various industrial zones under the CPEC initiative results in carbon emissions, noise pollution, degradation of the natural environment, and contributes to health issues and cardiovascular problems (Bluhm, Berglind, Nordling, & Rosenlund, 2007; Walker, 2012). Furthermore, CPEC projects involving road

infrastructure and transportation give rise to safety concerns for residents in contiguous areas.

Nevertheless, certain CPEC initiatives, such as development of modern infrastructure, including roads and fiber optic networks has significantly enhanced transportation efficiency and communication capabilities contribute positively to the well-being of the local community. The endorsement and support for CPEC projects hinge significantly on the perception of their impact by the host community. If the local community perceives the negative impacts of CPEC as outweighing the positive aspects, opposition to and lack of support for its development may ensue. A prevailing perspective asserts that a positive disposition within the local community toward the impacts of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) enhances the likelihood of garnering support for future developmental endeavors. Conversely, if the host community perceives that CPEC projects yield more costs than benefits and adversely impact the quality of life for local residents, there is a tendency to withhold support for CPEC development initiatives. Specifically, the perception of positive impacts is associated with a more favorable community support compared to the recognition of negative impacts (Gursoy, Milito, & Nunkoo, 2017; Luo & Xiao, 2017). Thus, building upon the aforementioned literature discourse and aligning with the tenets of social exchange theory, which underscores the significance of both positive and negative impacts in influencing support for CPEC development projects, the ensuing hypotheses are formulated.

Subjective Well-Being (SWB)

Subjective well-being is operationally defined as "an individual's cognitive and affective evaluations of their own life" (Diener & Suh, 1997). Cognitive evaluations entail an individual's discernment of the impact a project can exert on their life satisfaction, while affective evaluations encompass an appraisal of the emotions, moods, and feelings that a project can evoke. Consequently, subjective well-being can be comprehended as an outcome shaped by individuals' emotional responses to projects and their cognitive assessments of the satisfaction and fulfillment that these projects may impart to their lives. Subjective well-being incorporates both the emotional and cognitive evaluations individuals undertake regarding their lives, encompassing their conceptualizations of happiness, peace, fulfillment, and life satisfaction (Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2003).

Subjective well-being assumes a pivotal role in individuals' lives, significantly contributing to the attainment of their optimal functional capacity, instilling confidence in the achievement of crucial objectives, and fostering the

motivation and energy required to consistently surmount life's challenges. Psychologists assert that the fulfillment of fundamental human needs, encompassing competence, independence, and relatedness, is imperative for sustaining enduring well-being (Ryan & Frederick, 1997). Moreover, they posit that the failure to meet these three essential psychological needs impedes individual flourishing (Ryan & Deci, 2000). A plethora of studies suggests that engagement in developmental endeavors, such as participation in initiatives like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), can exert a positive influence on well-being (Naidoo & Pearce, 2018). Developmental ventures offer opportunities for the pursuit and realization of intrinsic aspirations and goals, including affiliation, socialization, self-actualization, togetherness, personal growth, and community attachment, directly addressing certain fundamental psychological needs.

Previous research robustly suggests that active involvement in developmental initiatives, exemplified by the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), possesses the potential to markedly augment individuals' happiness and life satisfaction (Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002). For instance, (Packer & Ballantyne, 2011) underscore that engagement in developmental events can wield a considerable positive influence on participants' psychological and social well-being. Moreover, scholarly inquiry indicates that participation in progressive activities with social dimensions, such as attending events associated with development projects in the company of friends, can foster feelings of satisfaction and enable individuals to satisfy various psychological needs. Consequently, these activities may contribute more significantly to enhancing subjective well-being compared to leisure pursuits lacking social interactions (Mingo & Montecolle, 2014; Newman, Tay, & Diener, 2014). In a parallel vein, a study conducted in Korea reveals a positive correlation between economic and cultural activities and socially oriented happiness, highlighting that such activities facilitate social interactions and cultivate a sense of belonging (Jeon, Shin, & Lee, 2014).

In light of the multifaceted psychological needs addressed through these initiatives, encompassing opportunities for entertainment, socialization, and novelty-seeking, they are poised to yield a considerable positive influence on the subjective well-being of participants, thereby potentially eliciting support for the project. The instrument employed for assessing subjective well-being in this study was adapted from the work of (Yolal et al., 2016).

Dimensions of Subjective Wellbeing of Residents

Material Wellbeing (MWB)

Material well-being, as expounded by Andrews, Withey, Andrews, & Withey, (1976), pertains to the contentment derived from essential economic components. White underscores its connection to fundamental necessities such as food, shelter, and economic goods. Meanwhile, (Andrews et al., 1976) adopt a more comprehensive view, defining it as satisfaction with diverse economic aspects, including governmental management of the economy, taxation, household income, and employment-related benefits. According to their perspective, material well-being delves into specific dimensions like financial security, standard of living, family financial dynamics, and aspirations concerning material possessions. In essence, it encompasses the satisfaction derived from one's economic circumstances, spanning from basic needs to broader economic considerations and personal aspirations. This nuanced understanding provides insight into an individual's or community's tangible prosperity across various dimensions.

Community Wellbeing (CWB)

The positive effects of development initiatives on communities have been extensively documented in prior scholarly investigations (Grunwell, 2007; Jeong & Faulkner, 1996). Additionally, research suggests that these initiatives typically necessitate substantial capital investments, concentrating on the development and organization of infrastructure (Litvin & Fetter, 2006). Furthermore, developmental activities are acknowledged for their crucial role in destination marketing, affording opportunities to showcase local attractions within the community (Fredline & Faulkner, 2000). Moreover, these initiatives contribute to the cultivation of a positive community image, act as catalysts for the revitalization of existing attractions, and function as drivers for additional socio-economic development, consequently attracting tourists, investors, and sponsors (Getz, 1991; Quinn, 2006; Richards & Wilson, 2004).

From an intangible standpoint, as underscored by Gursoy et al. (2004), these projects cultivate a sense of community pride and cohesiveness. Beyond the creation of economic opportunities, these initiatives furnish a distinct occasion for residents to express their dedication to their community (Rao, 2001). They also offer avenues for community revitalization and cohesiveness (Ferdinand & Williams, 2013). Furthermore, developmental activities facilitate cultural exchange and understanding among residents and visitors (Besculides, Lee, & McCormick, 2002) by establishing a platform for enhancing tolerance and

understanding between hosts and guests, as the guests are exposed to the host culture.

Moreover, the presentation of one's own culture to external observers not only promotes unity within the community but also enhances identity, pride, cohesion, and support. The interactive nature of socio-cultural activities further solidifies the association between the promotion of culture and the cultivation of social capital (Attanasi, Casoria, Centorrino, & Urso, 2013). As posited by (Arcodia & Whitford, 2013), the execution of a developmental plan heightens awareness of community resources and expertise, fosters social bonds among previously unconnected individuals, and generally reinforces more robust interaction among community organizations. Consequently, these activities contribute to the establishment of strong connections within a community and further fortify social and cultural identity (Gursoy, Kim, & Uysal, 2004).

The preceding discussions emphasize that endeavors like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) possess the capacity to elevate the community's image, serving as a platform to display its unique and distinctive characteristics. Moreover, such projects wield a substantial role in enhancing the well-being of residents by providing economic opportunities, fostering community revitalization, facilitating cultural exchange, and fortifying social bonds. Consequently, community well-being emerges as a crucial determinant influencing the subjective well-being of local residents, thereby exerting a positive influence on the support for initiatives such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Educational Wellbeing (EDWB)

Research indicates that initiatives like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) offer unique opportunities for the educational development of communities (Getz, 2004). (Dwyer, Mellor, Mistilis, & Mules, 2000) contend that projects and festivals create forums for the exchange of ideas among residents and visitors, functioning as educational and training venues for local residents. In a similar vein, (Koehler, 2009) observes that development projects serve as educational events, contributing to the cultivation of an educational culture within communities. Therefore, it is imperative to scrutinize development projects, particularly the CPEC, as educational events. Project activities can also facilitate enhanced understanding among community members from diverse ethnicities and cultural backgrounds, serving as foundational elements for community cohesion (Getz, 1991, 2004). Beyond providing educational opportunities for participants, these projects instill a sense of community pride (Mill & Morrison, 2002) and contribute to

the preservation of both the natural and educational environment (Backman, Backman, Uysal, & Sunshine, 1995). Additionally, they assist local communities in crafting their own identity and establishing educational opportunities in collaboration with other participants (Liang, Illum, & Cole, 2008).

Research contends that developmental projects yield advantages not only for the residents of the involved communities but also for individuals engaging with those communities (Besculides et al., 2002). Such endeavors can provide diverse opportunities for participants to satisfy higher-level needs, including learning and enlightenment (Cushman, Veal, & Zuzanek, 2005). Furthermore, various projects, industries, exhibitions, and award ceremonies offer unique experiences for local residents. Similarly, (Lee, Arcodia, & Lee, 2012) observe that cognitive benefits, such as acquiring new knowledge and expanding one's understanding, rank as the second most important motivational factor for attending multicultural events, following transformational benefits. The preceding discussions distinctly indicate that developmental initiatives present numerous educational benefits and opportunities for both local residents and participants. These advantages and opportunities are poised to exert a significantly positive impact on the subjective well-being of both residents and visitors, ultimately enhancing support for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project.

Health Wellbeing (HWB)

The earlier discussions strongly indicate that developmental initiatives provide a range of educational benefits and opportunities for both local-residents and participants. These advantages are poised to exert a positive and significant impact on the subjective well-being of both residents and visitors, ultimately fostering increased support for the CPEC project. Incorporating insights from studies such as those conducted by Welsch, (2007) and the Bano, Khayyam, & Alam, (2019), health well-being is intricately linked to factors such as water quality, pollution, littering, and noise pollution. The detrimental impacts of pollution on both physical and mental health are consistently evident in the literature. Therefore, in this framework, health well-being encompasses the comprehensive physical and mental health of a community, emphasizing the potential risks linked to compromised water quality, increased pollution, and the stress and irritation induced by noise pollution. Consequently, the study of health well-being becomes a crucial dimension in understanding the subjective well-being of local-residents, and it significantly influences the support for initiatives like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Emotional Wellbeing (EWB)

The term "Emotional Wellbeing (EWB)" is employed to characterize an individual's state of wellbeing, emphasizing their awareness of the capacity to effectively manage daily stressors, sustain productivity at work, and make positive contributions to the community. Emotional wellbeing encompasses two fundamental components. Firstly, personal well-being is shaped by social factors, including the extent of available social support and the context in which emotional states manifest. Secondly, mental health necessitates consideration not only of the presence of diagnosable mental health disorders but also various factors such as socio-historical influences, personal choice, values, language, culture, emotional affect, social control, and social values that contribute to distress (Meadows & Foxwell, 2011). Therefore, emotional wellbeing is also regarded as a facet of subjective wellbeing that influences support for initiatives like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Research Methodology

Study Area

The selection of the Gilgit-Baltistan province for this study was motivated by several considerations. Firstly, the CPEC initiative holds particular significance for the Gilgit-Baltistan province of Pakistan as it serves as the gateway for CPEC. The widening and enhancement of the Karakoram Highway (KKH) are expected to augment connectivity with both the down country and China. Secondly, the Gilgit-Baltistan province in Pakistan faces developmental challenges, and the CPEC initiative is anticipated to bring about transformative changes for the entire communities in Gilgit-Baltistan. Thirdly, certain nationalist groups express opposition to the development of the CPEC initiative due to various political and social concerns. Fourthly, in the Gilgit-Baltistan area, a number of particular projects under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) have been approved and operationalized. These include the Karakoram Highway (KKH) extension, the Gilgit-Chitral land route, energy-related projects such as the Dasu Dam, tactical measures aimed at enabling the Khunjerab Pass to operate year-round, and the development of transport infrastructure in the region. (Babar & Alam, 2022). Data were collected from the four districts (Hunza, Nagar, Gilgit, and Diamer) situated along the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) route within the Gilgit-Baltistan province. Despite being rich in natural resources, Gilgit-Baltistan faces challenges related to insufficient infrastructure and awareness among local residents, rendering it a region lagging behind in development within Pakistan. Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) exhibits significant potential for advancement through trade connections with China, offering favorable conditions for further development in energy, business, fruit handling, and

livestock sectors (Khan, 2013). It is anticipated that this multi-billion-dollar joint venture project traversing the formidable Karakoram and Himalayas in Northern Pakistan will not only stimulate trade and industrial activities in GB but also enhance tourism in the broader region and in Pakistan as a whole.

Data Collection Procedure

To assess the research model of this study, a survey methodology was employed for data collection. The target population comprises residents of the Gilgit-Baltistan province residing in four districts (Hunza, Nagar, Gilgit, and Diamer) along the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) route. During the data collection process, the author and surveyors were assisted by local individuals. Prior to that, they had consulted with the community to discuss the impact of CPEC projects on their lives. Initially, a pilot survey involving fifty-five samples was conducted, and upon confirming adequacy, these samples were excluded from the final data collection. Utilizing a random sampling approach, 450 printed questionnaires were distributed across the four districts along the CPEC route, yielding 390 completed questionnaires with a response rate of 86%. Given the distinct characteristics and limited available information in the population, a random sample approach was recommended by previous studies (Boschini, Dreber, von Essen, Muren, & Ranehill, 2018). Following the evaluation of received questionnaires, those with incorrect or incomplete responses were excluded, resulting in a final sample size of 336.

Table 1 presents the demographic information about the survey participants with respect to their gender, age, education, and domicile district. These variables reflect the involvement of respondents across the four districts situated along the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) route. The survey indicates a higher representation of male respondents compared to their female counterparts. Regarding age distribution, the prevalent age group reported during the survey falls within the range of 36–45 years. Furthermore, most of the surveyed individuals (33.63 percent) held a bachelor's degree or higher. Additionally, a significant portion of the respondents (40.48 percent) originated from the Gilgit district.

Table 1. Demographic information

Demographic Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	233	69.35
Female	103	30.65
Age		
≤25.00	35	10.42
26–35	96	28.57
36–45	148	44.05
≥45	57	16.96
Education		
Illiterate	52	15.48
Primary	78	23.21
Secondary and Higher Secondary	93	27.68
Bachelor's and above	113	33.63
Domicile		
Hunza	104	30.95
Nagar	59	17.56
Gilgit	136	40.48
Diamer	37	11.01

Source: Survey Data

Theoretical Model

The variables in our study were measured based on established methodologies from previous literature. We drew upon the measurement approaches and conceptual frameworks presented by (McGehee & Andereck, 2004; Yoon, Gursoy, & Chen, 2001) for the current investigation. For the present study, a five-point Likert scale was employed, where respondents could indicate their level of agreement on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly oppose) to 5 (strongly support). This widely adopted five-point scale has been validated for similar research contexts, as highlighted by (Gursoy et al., 2017). Every question in the instrument underwent a meticulous review to ensure clarity, appropriateness, and ease of understanding in terms of language and content.

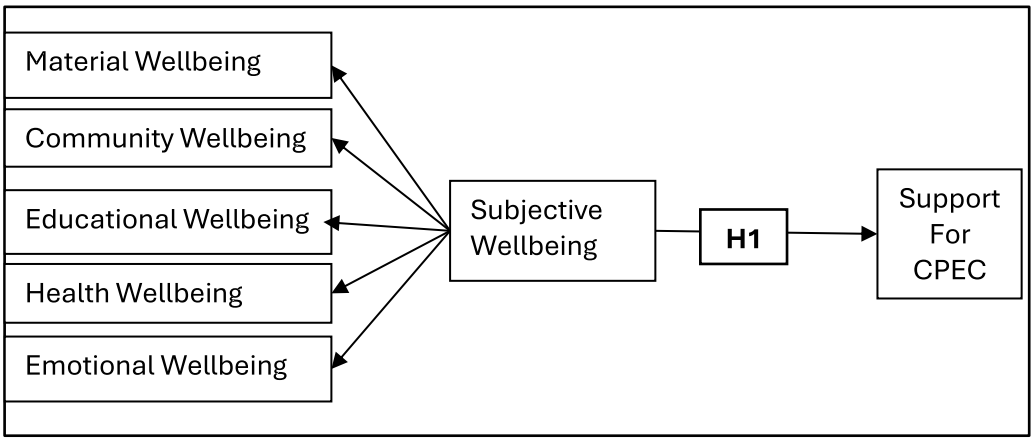

Figure 1: Theoretical Model for subjective wellbeing and support for CPEC

In this study, the hypothetical model breaks down the subjective wellbeing into five dimensions: Health, Material, Community, Emotional, and Educational Wellbeing. This conceptual model, informed by the literature review, illustrates the relationship between support for CPEC development and the Subjective Wellbeing of residents (Fig. 1). Previous research discloses that support for CPEC Development is influenced by the Subjective Wellbeing of residents. The model explores the structural interconnections among the dimensions of wellbeing impacts, the impacts on the subjective wellbeing of residents, and the support for CPEC development. In theory, each dimension of wellbeing impact is postulated to influence the impact on the subjective wellbeing of residents, subsequently affecting the support for CPEC development. The conceptual foundation is rooted in social exchange theory, positing that residents are more inclined to support CPEC development when they perceive potential benefits without facing undue costs (Getz, 1991). The proposed hypothesis is derived from the theoretical model as follows:

Hypothesis 1 (H_1). There is a significant positive relationship between perceived Subjective wellbeing of local residents and support for the CPEC project.

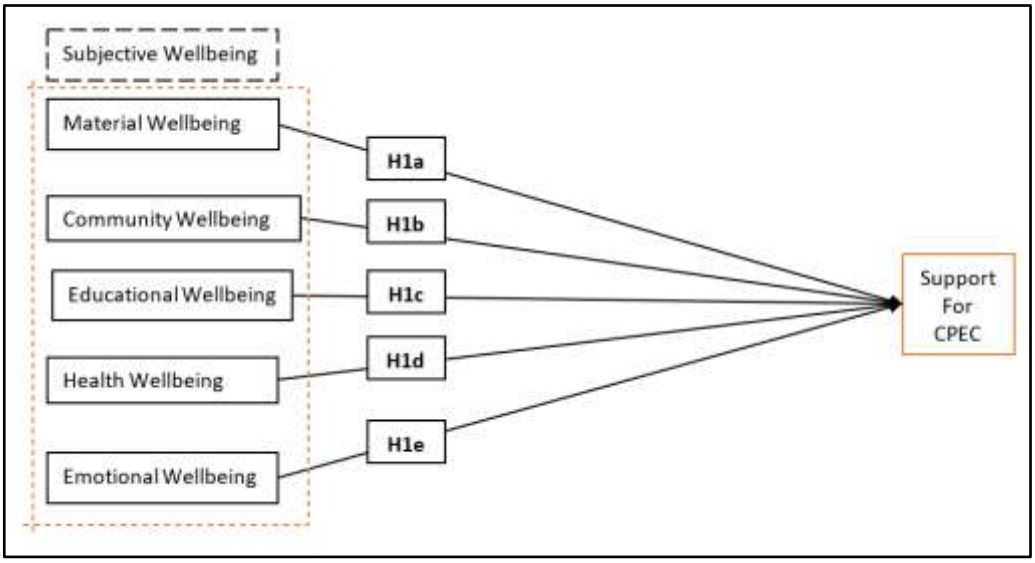

Figure 2: Theoretical Model for dimensions of subjective wellbeing and support for CPEC

However, it is also of great importance to explore the individual direct impacts of all five dimensions of subjective wellbeing by incorporating the perspectives of local residents, on support for CPEC as illustrated in Figure 2. While the 2nd order investigation presents a more parsimonious model, examining the relationship among various dimensions of subjective wellbeing at first order will further our understanding of the role of individual dimensions, making the findings more valuable. Therefore, the following hypotheses are formulated at first order:

Hypothesis 2 (H_1a). There is a significant positive relationship between Material wellbeing of local residents and support for the CPEC project.

Hypothesis 3 (H_1b). There is a significant positive relationship between Community wellbeing of local residents and support for the CPEC project.

Hypothesis 4 (H_1c). There is a significant positive relationship between the educational wellbeing of local residents and support for the CPEC project.

Hypothesis 5 (H_1d). There is a significant positive relationship between Health wellbeing of local residents and support for the CPEC project.

Hypothesis 6 (H_1e). There is a significant positive relationship between Emotional wellbeing of local residents and support for the CPEC project.

4. Data Analysis

The research incorporated a focus group to evaluate the content and face validity of the instrument. Based on the feedback received, certain items were excluded, thereby improving the reliability and comprehensibility of the instrument. Subsequently, quantitative data were collected from residents in four districts situated along the CPEC route in Gilgit-Baltistan. To prepare for analysis, data-cleansing techniques were initially applied.

Upon data collection, a multivariate normality test was conducted using the web-based software available at "https://webpower.psychstat.org/models/kurtosis/," aligning with the recommendation by Cain et al. [Cain et al.] and as applied in a recent study by (Yusliza et al., 2020). The Mardia's coefficient of multivariate skewness was 541.0564 ($p < 0.01$), and kurtosis was 2516.9260 ($p < 0.01$), indicating a departure from normality. Consequently, SmartPLS 3.2.8 [Ringle], a second-generation software for PLS-SEM analysis, was chosen to evaluate the proposed model. Furthermore, PLS-SEM was considered the most suitable approach for intricate structural models involving numerous constructs with multiple indicators. The SmartPLS software simultaneously assesses both models, termed measurement, and structural models [Chin, W.W], while mitigating concerns about multicollinearity (Maghsoudi, Zailani, Ramayah, & Pazirandeh, 2018). To estimate the significance of the structural model, the bootstrapping technique, a robust method for non-normal data, was employed with 5000 subsamples, as recommended in the literature (Peters, Chan, & Legerer, 2018).

Measurement Model

The measurement model was employed to assess the validity and reliability of the constituent constructs, following standard techniques outlined by Hair et al. (2017). Four key assessments were conducted to validate the reflective constructs: indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Indicator reliability was confirmed by evaluating individual item loadings, which ranged from 0.617 to 0.930—exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.430, signifying reliable individual item measurements.

Composite reliability coefficients (CR) and Cronbach's alpha values for all constructs surpassed the minimum threshold of 0.70, indicating strong reliability and internal consistency within each latent construct. Convergent validity was established by assessing average variance extracted (AVE), with all AVE values surpassing the recommended threshold of 0.50. The range was from 0.558 to 0.848, suggesting satisfactory convergent validity across the constructs in the study.

Table 2. CFA Results of the measurement model

Constructs	Items	Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
CPEC	CPEC1	0.795	0.960	0.964	0.558
	CPEC2	0.75			
	CPEC3	0.742			
	CPEC4	0.718			
	CPEC5	0.754			
	CPEC6	0.703			
	CPEC7	0.743			
	CPEC8	0.705			
	CPEC9	0.802			
	CPEC10	0.799			
	CPEC11	0.776			
	CPEC12	0.749			
	CPEC13	0.617			
	CPEC14	0.631			
	CPEC15	0.649			
	CPEC16	0.768			
	CPEC17	0.823			
	CPEC18	0.802			
	CPEC19	0.772			
	CPEC20	0.793			
	CPEC21	0.756			
MWB	MWB1	0.874	0.919	0.938	0.715
	MWB2	0.868			
	MWB3	0.853			
	MWB4	0.888			
	MWB5	0.843			
	MWB6	0.738			
CWB	CWB1	0.834	0.898	0.929	0.767
	CWB2	0.91			
	CWB3	0.918			
	CWB4	0.838			
EDWB	EDWB1	0.901	0.889	0.931	0.819
	EDWB2	0.930			
	EDWB3	0.883			
HWB	HWB1	0.914	0.94	0.957	0.848
	HWB2	0.924			
	HWB3	0.928			
	HWB4	0.917			
EMWB	EMWB1	0.892	0.903	0.932	0.776
	EMWB2	0.876			
	EMWB3	0.906			
	EMWB4	0.847			

This study employed a relatively novel measure, the Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio (HTMT), to assess discriminant validity. The criterion for fulfillment of discriminant validity is met when the obtained HTMT values are below 0.85, as stipulated by [Henseler, J.; Ringle]. Additionally, Franke and Sarstedt [Franke, G.R.; Sarstedt] assert that if a value of 1 is absent in the upper limit of the HTMT bootstrapping values, it signifies discriminant constructs. As demonstrated in Table 3, all the ratios are below the specified threshold of 0.85, indicating differentiation among the measures. The conceptual model of this study defines Subjective Well-Being (SBWB) as a second-order construct characterized by five latent reflective constructs: CWB, EMWB, EDWB, HWB, and MWB.

Table 3. Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) – Matrix

	CPEC	**CWB**	**EMWB**	**EDWB**	**HWB**	**MWB**
CPEC						
CWB	0.843					
EMWB	0.800	0.725				
EDWB	0.846	0.734	0.695			
HWB	0.832	0.723	0.725	0.741		
MWB	0.930	0.825	0.780	0.849	0.837	

Table 4 illustrates the associations among the constructs via the correlation matrix. The correlations between the constructs and other variables are consistently positive, indicating a significant and positive relationship between them. Moreover, Table 4 provides evidence negating the likelihood of multicollinearity, as the independent variables exhibit no substantial correlations with each other.

Table 4. Correlation Matrix

	CPEC	CWB	EMWB	EDWB	HWB	MWB	SBWB
CPEC	1.000						
CWB	0.784	1.000					
EMWB	0.746	0.653	1.000				
EDWB	0.792	0.656	0.623	1.000			
HWB	0.795	0.666	0.668	0.678	1.000		
MWB	0.881	0.751	0.710	0.770	0.780	1.000	
SBWB	0.922	0.853	0.834	0.841	0.878	0.938	1.000

Since SBWB was established as a second order reflective- reflective construct, therefore, its measurement at second order needs to be evaluated separately. The technique employed for constructing the 2nd order was repeated indicator approach which assigns all items from the first-order constructs to the second-order construct, as outlined by (Sarstedt, Hair Jr, Cheah, Becker, & Ringle, 2019). The 2nd order measurement model for SBWB is presented in Table 5, which shows that the validity and reliability are duly established.

Table 5. Measurement of second-order construct

Construct	Items Loading	CR	AVE
	0.94		
	0.85		
SBWB	0.84	0.76	0.94
	0.88		
	0.83		

Structural Model

Once the measurement model is confirmed , the structural model is evaluated to estimate the structural relationships and testing the hypothesis, in accordance with the guidelines provided by (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt, & Ringle,

2019; Koehler, 2009). The results of structural model are presented in Table 5 and 6, corresponding to the models illustrated in Figures 1 and 2.

Table 6. Structural Model One Results and Hypothesis Testing

	Relationship	Std. Beta	Std. Dev	t-Value	R^2	f^2	Q^2	P Value	Decision
H1	SWB -----> CPEC	0.922	0.012	76.95	0.84	5.64	0.84	P < 0.01	Supported

The results presented in Table 6 demonstrate a positive relationship between subjective wellbeing (as 2nd order construct) and support for CPEC, (β=0.922, t = 76.953, p<0.01), affirming the hypothesis 1 (H_1). Hypothesis 2 (H_1a) posited a significant positive relationship between the material wellbeing (MWB) of local residents and support for the CPEC projects. The findings, as shown in Table 6, reveal that the material wellbeing (MWB) of residents positively influences support for the CPEC project (β = 0.385, t = 5.819, p < 0.01), confirming hypothesis 2 (H_1a). Hypothesis 3 (H_1b) hypothesized a relationship between the community wellbeing (CWB) of the local community and support for the CPEC project which is supported by the data (β = 0.179, t = 4.421, p < 0.01), thus confirming hypothesis 3. Furthermore, hypothesis 4 (H_1c) explored the relationship between educational wellbeing (EDWB) and support for the CPEC project. The results reveal a significant positive association between educational wellbeing and support for the CPEC project (β = 0.188, t = 5.559, p < 0.01), hence hypothesis 4 is confirmed. Moreover, hypothesis 5 (H_1d) investigated the association between health wellbeing (HWB) and support for the CPEC project. The findings show a significant relationship between health wellbeing and support for the CPEC project (β = 0.160, t = 3.126, p < 0.01), therefore, hypothesis 5 is substantiated. Additionally, hypothesis 6 (H_1e) examined the relationship between emotional wellbeing (EMWB) and support for the CPEC project. The results of data analysis indicate a significant association between emotional wellbeing and support for the CPEC project (β = 0.132, t = 3.757, p < 0.01), confirming hypothesis 7.

Table 7. Structural model Two results and hypothesis testing

	Relationship	Std. Beta	Std. Dev	t-Value	R^2	f^2	Q^2	P Value	Decision
H1a	MWB -----> CPEC	0.385	0.066	5.819	0.854	0.235	0.879	P < 0.01	Supported
H1b	CWB -----> CPEC	0.179	0.040	4.421	0.854	0.086	0.726	P < 0.01	Supported
H1c	EdWB -----> CPEC	0.188	0.034	5.559	0.854	0.091	0.706	P < 0.01	Supported
H1d	HWB -----> CPEC	0.160	0.051	3.126	0.854	0.062	0.769	P < 0.01	Supported
H1e	EmWB -----> CPEC	0.132	0.035	3.757	0.854	0.052	0.694	P < 0.01	Supported

In order to examine the predictive capabilities of the research model, R^2 effect size f^2 were assessed where the R^2 tuned out to be substantial. The values of f^2 ranged between 0.062 to 0.235, reflecting that the values were small for CWB, EdWB, HWB and EmWB whereas the value for MWB was found to be substantial. Another important value is that of predictive relevance Q^2 (Stone–Geisser criterion) obtained using the PLS Predict feature in SmartPLS 4. This procedure showed that the values for all the constructs are above 1 implying that both the models one and two possess adequate levels of predictive relevance.

Discussion, Implications, and Limitations

Discussion

The results of the structural models provide valuable insights into the relationships between subjective wellbeing dimensions and support for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project. The study utilized a robust research design based on established methodologies from prior research in the field of international project support, drawing upon the work of (McGehee & Andereck, 2004; Yoon et al., 2001). The demographic information reveals the characteristics of the survey participants, providing context for the study's generalizability. The higher representation of male respondents, the prevalent age group falling within 36–45 years, and a significant portion holding a bachelor's degree or higher highlight the diverse perspectives captured in the study. Additionally, the distribution across

districts along the CPEC route ensures a comprehensive understanding of the local context.

The reliability and validity statistics, assuring the robustness of the measurement model. Cronbach's alpha values exceeding 0.70 for all constructs confirm internal consistency, while the heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT) values below 0.85 indicate discriminant validity. Table 4 further supports the absence of multicollinearity, enhancing the credibility of the measurement model. The findings from Structural Model affirm a significant positive relationship between perceived subjective wellbeing of local residents and support for the CPEC project, supporting hypothesis 1 (H_1). This result aligns with the social exchange theory, suggesting that residents are more likely to support CPEC development when they perceive potential benefits without facing undue costs. The high coefficient (β=0.922) indicates a strong association, emphasizing the importance of subjective wellbeing as a predictor of support for large-scale development projects like CPEC. Furthermore, the Structural Model assessing the direct relationship among the subjective wellbeing dimensions and CPEC further explores the distinctive role of the individual dimensions in securing support for CPEC. The results shows that the material wellbeing, community wellbeing, educational wellbeing, health wellbeing, and emotional wellbeing significantly influences the CPEC project. These findings also underscore the multidimensional nature of wellbeing and its role in shaping attitudes toward development initiatives. Additionally, the high values of the Stone–Geisser criterion (Q^2) indicate strong predictive relevance of both the models.

Implications of the Study

The study emphasizes the critical necessity of integrating considerations of multidimensional wellbeing into policymaking, making valuable contributions to relevant theoretical frameworks for policy formulation. By highlighting dimensions such as health, material, community, emotional, and educational aspects, the research enriches theoretical discussions on targeted interventions, particularly in projects like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Furthermore, it advances theoretical discourse on community engagement strategies by advocating for a comprehensive approach that encompasses various dimensions of wellbeing, fostering inclusivity and ownership. Theoretical implications extend to education and capacity building, underscoring their role not only in individual wellbeing but also in shaping attitudes toward development initiatives. The study provides practical insights, suggesting investments in education and skill development

to empower local communities, thereby contributing to both individual wellbeing and positive project perceptions.

From a practical standpoint, the study underscores the tangible benefits of the CPEC initiative for local communities along its route, highlighting aspects such as employment, education, and improved access to cities and markets. CPEC holds the potential to enhance the overall wellbeing of the local population by improving road and transportation infrastructure. The socio-cultural impact is explored, suggesting that CPEC could positively influence social interactions and familial connections. Importantly, the study focuses on residents' subjective wellbeing in the context of socio-cultural effects, providing an opportunity to comprehend how these factors shape individuals within the framework of CPEC projects. The specific implications for the Gilgit-Baltistan region, traversed by CPEC, add a nuanced perspective, emphasizing the potential for trade, industrial activities, and tourism promotion in this underprivileged region. This aligns with CPEC's overarching objective of improving socio-economic conditions in marginalized areas. Ultimately, the study surpasses theoretical discussions, offering practical insights into the tangible benefits of CPEC for local communities and its potential to positively impact socio-economic conditions and overall wellbeing.

Limitations and Research Horizons

The study, despite yielding valuable insights, possesses inherent limitations that necessitate consideration when interpreting findings. The reliance on cross-sectional data confines the investigation to a specific moment in time. To capture the dynamic evolution of attitudes and perceptions, future research could benefit from the utilization of longitudinal data, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the development of these relationships over time.

Acknowledging the potential influence of unaccounted contextual factors, future research should investigate deeper into regional economic conditions, political events, and cultural shifts to unveil nuanced influences on the association between subjective wellbeing and support for development projects. The utilization of self-reported public opinions introduces the risk of social desirability bias or other perceptual distortions. Enhancing validity in future studies could involve the integration of objective measures or triangulating data from diverse sources to ensure a more accurate representation of community sentiments.

The adoption of a longitudinal approach empowers researchers to monitor changes in subjective wellbeing and support for development projects over time. This approach may reveal trends, causal relationships, and potential intervention points for policymakers. To enhance the generalizability of findings, researchers should consider employing diverse sampling techniques, such as stratified or random sampling, to capture a more representative cross-section of the population along the CPEC route.

Further exploration of contextual variables, encompassing regional economic conditions, political events, and cultural dynamics, would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the factors shaping residents' attitudes towards development projects. Integrating objective measures alongside self-reported data can provide a more robust assessment of subjective wellbeing and project support, possibly involving the incorporation of data from official records, administrative sources, or expert evaluations.

The introduction of new variables, such as the religious sentiments etc. impacts of the CPEC, would offer a more holistic understanding of the multifaceted influences on project support. This expansion of variables has the potential to facilitate a more nuanced analysis of the diverse factors at play.

In conclusion, the acknowledgment of these limitations presents opportunities for refinement and expansion in future research endeavors. Addressing these issues and exploring new avenues will contribute to a more understanding of the social dimensions inherent in large-scale development projects, such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

Conclusion

This study contributes valuable insights into the relationship between subjective wellbeing and support for the CPEC project. The multidimensional nature of subjective wellbeing, encompassing health, material, community, emotional, and educational dimensions, plays a crucial role in shaping residents' attitudes toward CPEC development initiatives. The findings highlight the importance of considering diverse aspects of wellbeing in the planning and implementation of such projects. The study's reliance on established methodologies, meticulous instrument development, and robust data analysis using SmartPLS strengthens the credibility of the results. The demographic information ensures the study's relevance to the population along the CPEC route, while the measurement model's reliability and validity provide a solid foundation for drawing meaningful conclusions. This result aligns with the social exchange theory, suggesting that residents are more likely to support CPEC development when they perceive potential benefits

without facing undue costs. The results show that material wellbeing, community wellbeing, educational wellbeing, health wellbeing, and emotional wellbeing significantly influences the CPEC project. These insights have practical implications for policymakers, project developers, and community stakeholders involved in CPEC and similar international development projects. Understanding the impact of different dimensions of subjective wellbeing can inform targeted interventions to enhance community support and overall project success.

Suggested Citation

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