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Catalytic Impact of BRI and CPEC on Pakistan's Blue Economy: A Study of the Potential Impact on Local Communities and Economic Growth

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Abstract

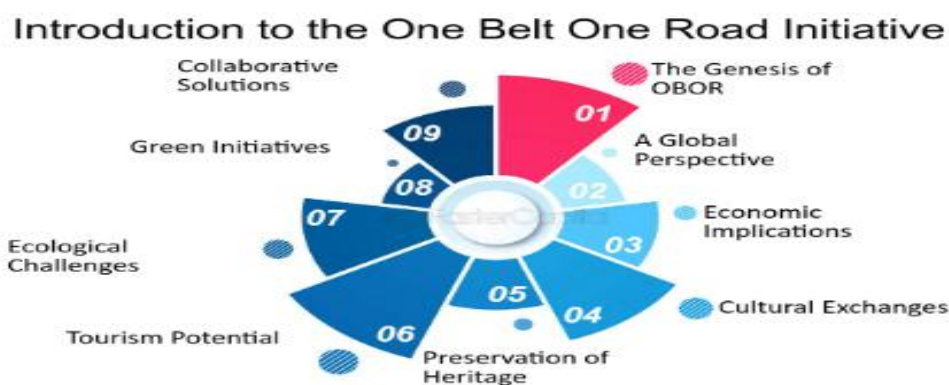
The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) provide vast opportunities for Pakistan's development of blue economy. This chapter analysis explores the role of BRI and CPEC in achieving sustainable development in Pakistan's blue economy, with specific reference to infrastructure development, economic growth, and social effects. It emphasizes the constraints and opportunities in unleashing blue economy potential, such as environmental issues, community participation, and capacity building. The chapter moots an integrated framework of sustainable development with a focus on policy imperatives, public-private collaboration, and inclusive decision-making processes. The proposed framework prioritizes three principal pillars: driving investment capability, nudging public-private sector collaborations, and sponsoring inclusive decision-making. By adopting this framework, Pakistan can unlock its blue economy potential, facilitating sustainable economic growth, social justice, and environmental preservation. This chapter indicates that Pakistan has the potential to harness its blue economy by focusing on investment capacity, encouraging sustainable operations, and providing equitable benefits to local population. By prioritizing people's well-being, including that of local communities, and the environment, Pakistan can leverage the full potential of its maritime sector

towards ensuring economic growth and development of the country.

Keywords: Blue Economy, local Communities, Economic Growth

Background

It is an evident fact that The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and China-Pakistan Economic Corridors (CPEC), are formidable drivers for Pakistan's economy, particularly the blue economy which has multiple dimensions in various sectors like maritime transport infrastructure, fisheries and coastal tourism. The diversity of the subject prompts the Government to emphasize special initiative programs such as developing Gwadar port for economic development and enhancing people's living standards. Additionally, local socio-economic impacts include employment generation and skill development, which are helpful for local people, and potential issues containing displacement and those that favor poor socio-economic returns for the local population. In addition, the unavoidable rising issues of depleting environment and natural resources, including water pollution, habitat loss & degradation, and the overexploitation of natural resources & ecosystem services, like mangrove afforestation and use of renewable energy. This chapter analyzes existing data to highlight development possibilities and challenges and provide policy direction for sustainable development. Among them are formulating a blue economy policy, increasing community engagement, expanding environmental laws, and improving public-private partnerships to achieve proper integration of economic development accompanied with the sustainable environment and society to assure harnessing of blue economy potential within the BRI and CPEC frameworks targeting blue growth and economic prosperity.



Source: <https://fastercapital.com/topics/introduction-to-the-belt-and-road-initiative.html>

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is the Chinese political and economic

Megaproject declared by President Xi Jinping in September 2013. One of CPECs most prominent projects is the development of the Gwadar Port in Pakistan, which is connected to Xinjiang, China, through a direct seaway (Butt et al., 2024). Besides, this strategic initiative seeks to enhance regional commerce and boost unrealized economic returns, emphasizing Pakistan's blue economy. Additionally, the blue economy, which mainly calls for the utilization of marine resources and Bringing about economic development and better living standards in conjunction with an upgrade in the status of aquatic habitats, is another relatively uncharted area of activity for Pakistan (Waheed et al., 2024). Due to its extensive coastline of more than 1000 km and rich sea resources, Pakistan has demanded several opportunities in fisheries, export and import by sea, and seaside tourist resale (Hussain et al., 2024b). However, it has not been developed due to structural problems like infrastructural drawbacks, policy constraints, and environmental degradation. These problems can be solved using CPEC's money to invest in maritime infrastructure and connecting the region. Thus, this chapter assesses the catalytic role of BRI and CPEC in the blue economy of Pakistan (). It considers common infrastructural investments, their consequences on the economy and society, and social issues concerning the environment. The following suggestions support concepts of lasting development, where economic progress can be met with social and ecological objectives (Baig et al., 2025).

Overview of Pakistan's Blue Economy

According to research, Pakistan has enormous potential for a blue economy, which influences fisheries, maritime trade, and coastal tourism, thereby enhancing the economic growth and sectors related to the coastal population's standard of living (Hussain et al., 2024a). From a food security and business development perspective, the fisheries sector immediately employs more than 2 million people (Aziz & Naufaldi, 2025). However, this sector has some pullback factors: overfishing, use of outdated techniques, inadequate modern gear and equipment, and poor, insufficient cold storage facilities. Such challenges restrain the growth of the sector and full provision to local and international market demands (Shah, 2025).

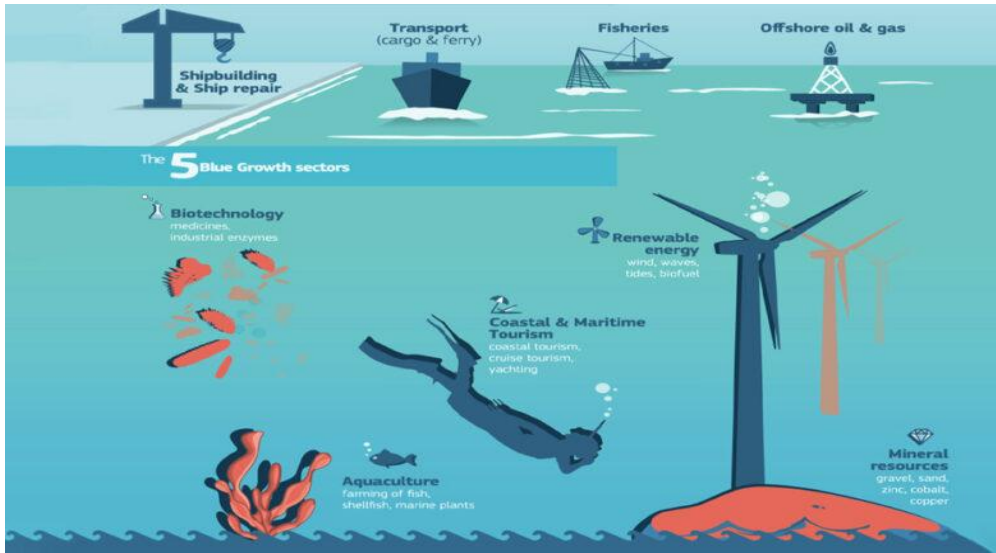


Figure 1: Pakistan's Blue Economy (Walayat, 2023)

Moreover, shipping and seaborne trade is another critical facet of Pakistan's blue economy. Discovering that the country is located at the Strait of Hormuz makes the country rather strategic as a transit of energy and goods to and from other global markets. Despite this advantage, the growth of the maritime trade sector is constrained by poor infrastructure at the ports and a poor internal transport system that needs a lot of improvement to compete internationally (Chu et al., 2025). Similarly, coastal tourism also has very future potential. Pakistan has many opportunities for coastal tourism development with its lovely sandy beaches, archaeological sites and many sea creatures. However, the sector remains shrouded and fragile because of a lack of improved infrastructure, inadequate marketing drive, and investment. By removing these barriers, coastal tourism could become a significant economic saver for coastal areas by creating employment and promoting economic growth (Schulhof et al., 2025).

The Role of Gwadar Port in Pakistan's Blue Economy

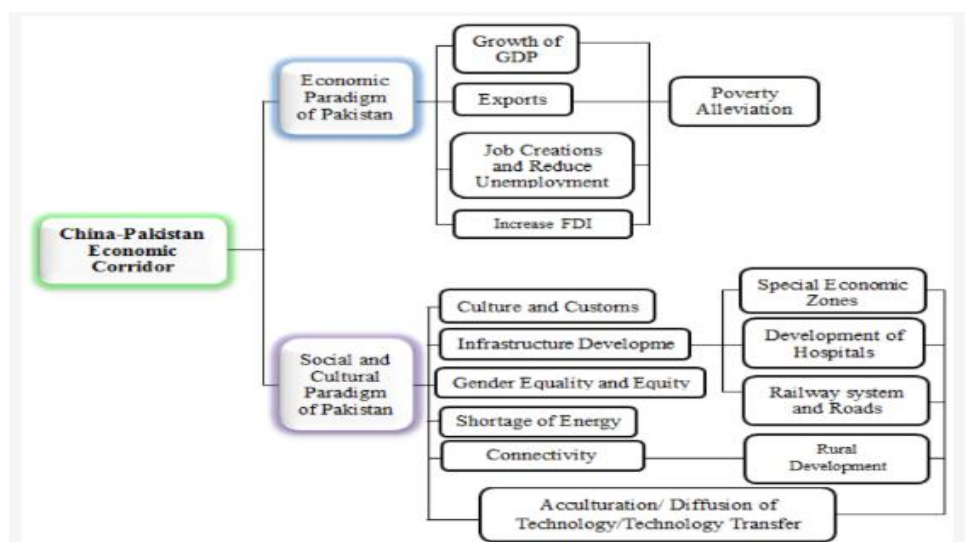
The core of the blue economy in Pakistan is Gwadar Port, which is part of the CPEC plan. Due to its geographical position on the geographical route of most regional trade, Gwadar is a potential hub for trade and commerce (Anwar et al., 2025). These investments, including new terminals and greater capacity for cargo operations, have made Gwadar favorable compared to other regional ports. Large infrastructure projects include the Gwadar East Bay Expressway and railway linkages to enhance the country's transportation of goods within the interior of the country (Iftikhar et al., 2024). Furthermore, the available Special Economic Zones, such as the Gwadar Free Zone, provide tax benefits

and sophisticated facilities for foreigners to invest in. These developments not only envisaged Gwadar as a Strategic link of global maritime connectivity but also auguring the development of economic prosperity, employment generation opportunities, and advancement of the blue economy in Pakistan. To enhance the capacities of Gwadar Port, there are significant social, financial, and environmental benefits by executing the blue economic development strategies envisaged for Pakistan (Bensadi, 2024).

Infrastructure Development

The BRI and CPEC have become instrumental in helping Pakistan diversify its infrastructure development and revolutionize some seriously developing sectors, such as the maritime sector, that significantly contribute to the country's blue economy.

Multidimensional infrastructure-led development leads towards sustainable development in Pakistan



Source: <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/11/21/6143#>

These include programs for upgrades of ports, transportation networks or access, the development of fisheries sectors, and maritime commerce accommodation of coastal tourism sensitive to sustainable development (Schulhof et al., 2025). Additionally, CPEC has brought several infrastructure projects to uplift Pakistan's blue economy by facilitating trade and providing the local population better access to livelihood-related necessities. Over time, the infrastructure multiplies Pakistan's blue economy because new export opportunities are created, domestic economic activities are enhanced, and employment is created, mainly where the facilities are located in the coastal

areas (Bensadi, 2024).

Table 1: Key Infrastructure Projects and Their Impact

Project Name	Investment (USD Billion)	Status	Key Focus	Impact on Blue Economy	Source
Gwadar Port Development	1.62	Phase I Completed	Expansion of port infrastructure, cargo handling	Enhances trade capabilities, global market access	(Survey, 2024)
Gwadar Free Zone	0.63	Operational (Phase I)	Industrial development, foreign investment attraction	Creates job opportunities, boosts local economy	(Investment, 2023)
Gwadar East Bay Expressway & Rail Links	2.00	Ongoing	Improving inland connectivity, reducing transportation costs	Improving inland connectivity, reducing transportation costs	(CPEC, 2024)

Impact on Local Communities and Economic Growth

The spillover effects of BRI and the projects of CPEC on Pakistan's blue economy were felt by local people through employment opportunities, better infrastructure facilities, and better market access. As with most projects geared towards infrastructure development, roads, and connectivity encourage ease of movement of goods and services, creating economic synergy, more so for countries surrounding Gwadar (Waheed et al., 2024). With the increase in trade, local industries, especially fisheries and tourism industries, will transform with better infrastructure trading, improving the region's economy and the living standards of people who depend on the sea for their livelihood (Khan & Bukhari, 2024). These projects are expected to have a long-term impact as they offer a framework that will ensure opportunities for blue economy sectors and job creation to realize the maritime resources of Pakistan for socio-economic development (Aziz, 2024).

Economic Contributions

CPEC has brought about change, especially in Pakistan's blue economy province. The corridor has witnessed significant improvement in physical facilities, transportation linkages, and supply chain efficiency, resulting in

considerable development in core economic activities, including sea transport and fishery. Decided extended plans and infrastructure development like Gwadar port, improved cold storage facilities, and a better transportation system at Tyrians significantly increased Pakistan's capacity to trade and export (Li et al., 2024).

The sea borne trade which is an essential part of the blue economy of the country of Pakistan has remarkably improved. CPEC investments have also enhanced the capacity of ports, which has increased port throughput and trade share and placed Pakistan strategically on the maritime map of the region. The fisheries sector has also expanded similarly through enhanced storage and port facilities that have enhanced exports and local market penetration. It has not only helped increase the GDP but also helped in increasing the income prospects of many regions relying on these sectors (Anwar et al., 2025). Also, CPEC has played an essential role in the stabilization effect through employment generation and creating a better supply chain infrastructure. This has improved the foreign trade relations for Pakistan and reciprocally given sustainable economic growth for the blue economy and the local societies (Chu et al., 2025).

Table 2: Economic Contributions of CPEC to Pakistan's Blue Economy

Sector	Contribution to GDP (USD Billion)	Annual Growth Rate (%)	Source
Maritime Trade	6.8	7.6	(Bank, 2024)
Fisheries	1.2	5.4	(FAQ, 2024)

Socioeconomic Impact

Under the roof of BRI and its flagship project, CPEC, a radical change has been observed in transforming Pakistan's blue economy, creating avenues of socio-economic uplift for locals. CPEC has initiated several social sector enhancements by the other part of BRI, primarily related to blue-economy strategic sectors such as maritime trade and fishery industry (Deng et al., 2024).

In the context of BRI, CPEC has also brought about the quantitative improvement of infrastructure investments, particularly in the maritime ports and transport network systems and energy supply chain, including the development of Gwadar Port and overhauling of the port operation system. These improvements have made Pakistan more influential in the region as a maritime power, which is suitable for the increase in marine business and benefits the community right from the shore. This has also given birth to thousands of employment opportunities for locals in port activities, transport,

and construction, especially those living near the ports and coastal areas (Khan & Ahmed, 2024).

Furthermore, vocational training programs associated with CPEC projects have improved technical training in sectors related to the blue economy, like the maritime sectors. Therefore, local communities benefit from increased employment chances, resulting in less poverty and improved living standards (Mehmood & Cousins, 2024). Transportation and energy and utility sectors through infrastructural development made possible by CPEC under the BRI provide connectivity to the foreign markets, especially in fisheries. This has led to economic growth and improved access to other financial opportunities in local societies (Deng et al., 2024).

However, the loss of local populations to infrastructure and developmental projects, the low standards of paying those affected, and the inability to incorporate women into the labor force have also contributed to the problem. Furthermore, ecological factors, together with habitat loss as a result of big projects, are some of the challenges to the sustainability of the blue economy of Pakistan (Aziz & Naufaldi, 2025). Summing up, BRI and CPEC have played their part in forming extensions to the Pakistani blue economy, improving trade liberalization, infrastructural development, and local progression. It is high time to consider the issues of balanced distribution, social factors, and ecological concerns that are multi-crisis for these projects sustainable benefits for everyone (Butt et al., 2024).

Environmental Implications

a) Key Environmental Concerns

Significant issues arise from maritime infrastructure's fast-paced growth under BRI and CPEC. Several environmental problems affect the coastal as well as marine environment of Pakistan (Hussain et al., 2024a).

b) Marine Pollution

The transportation sector has grown rapidly due to the construction of new maritime infrastructure under the CPEC project, and port construction has resulted in increased oil spills and waste discharge. Such pollutants threaten various species and badly affect the balance of the marine ECM in the ocean and seas (Khan & Ullah, 2024).

c) Coastal Erosion

Flood-prone areas and uncontrolled construction along Pakistan's coastal belt have led to higher rates of coastal erosion. This degradation of favorite coastal

zones raises dramatic risks for local communities and ecosystems due to natural events like storms and floods. The above challenge is significantly compounded by the emergence of many coastal cities for urbanization resulting from CPEC projects (Sajjad et al., 2024).

Overfishing

Excessive fishing techniques have put much pressure on the future supplies of various fish species in the region. The prohibition of fishing in protected areas and the use of destructive fishing gear threatens the lives of marine organisms and the local fishing community. These unsustainable practices further decline the health of Pakistan's blue economy (Khan & Ahmed, 2024).

Mitigation Efforts

Efforts to preserve the environmental impacts triggered by the development of Pakistan's blue economy under BRI and CPEC include several undertakings for a green economy (Schulhof et al., 2025).

a) Mangrove Reforestation

Attempts to reclaim these forests have been made to preserve the coasts and promote wildlife. Reforestation of mangroves serves to reverse the problem of coastal erosion, sustains fish breeding grounds, and enhances the well-being of coconut-producing areas of villages that depend on the sea and its resources (Butt et al., 2024).

b) Renewable Energy Integration

Renewable power solutions such as solar and wind energy are being integrated to minimize the use of fossil energy in the marine business. Besides reducing carbon emissions, integrating renewable energy in port activities also enhances the sustainability of Pakistan's blue economy by making the operation green (Adnan et al., 2024).

c) Eco-Tourism Promotion

Sustainable tourism is being promoted to promote the local economy and reduce environmental pressure. It is carried out to ensure that natural benefits derived from tourism do not compromise the health of marine and coastal ecosystems (Waheed et al., 2024).

Despite their potential effect, such measures have yet to be pursued on a large scale and have to be uniformly implemented to create a lasting impact on the

blue economy and benefit the local populace of Pakistan (Schulhof et al., 2025).

Policy Imperatives for Maximizing the Catalytic Impact Of BRI & CPEC on Blue Economy of Pakistan

The following recommendations are proposed to maximize the catalytic impact of the BRI and the CPEC on Pakistan's blue economy while ensuring positive outcomes for local communities and sustainable economic growth (Waheed et al., 2024).

Comprehensive Blue Economy Policy Development

Pakistan must formulate a comprehensive policy framework to integrate the blue economy into CPEC and BRI. In terms of content, this policy should focus on sustainability, environmental protection, and economic equity. With the help of standards from the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), this policy can indicate the desirable further development of the maritime industries, fishery and coastal tourism with minimum harm to Pakistan's marine and coastal environment. Such a policy shall also encourage investment in infrastructure sustainability for infrastructure development and capacity building for local communities to ease the growth and protection of the environment in the process (Geng et al., 2024).

Enhancing Participation of Local Communities

For increased social economic impact of CPEC through the blue economy, the community should participate actively in formulation and implementation of the blue economy projects. These include that near the ports, coastal areas, or fisheries that wish to partake in economic activities, they can directly be provided with infrastructure (Iftikhar et al., 2024). To ensure a proper flow of share of the economic rent as a result of resource utilization, there must be efficiency in how the benefits are shared. Particular attention should be paid to the employment of women and other vulnerable groups, to the participation of the rural population in the workforce and local government, and thus, the concept of empowerment and poverty reduction for CPEC (Hussain et al., 2024b).

Building a Skilled Blue Economy Workforce: Capacity Development and Blue Education

Initiatives

For the growth and development of the blue economy, there is a need for a

concerted effort to invest in education and training programs for beneficiaries from the local human resources. This includes vocational and technical training in functions of the maritime industry, fishery resources management, environmental conservation, and ecotourism. That is why it is crucial to develop skilled labor among the local population and to involve communities interested in new opportunities in the sectors connected with CPEC's maritime-related fields. The institutions of the local governments should also undertake training and development to ensure they can assess, coordinate, and promote the sustainable management of the blue economy (Muhammad & Ahmed, 2024).

In addition, Policy imperatives must place a high priority on blue education, with an emphasis on fostering knowledge and skills that meet the changing demands of the marine industry, in order to optimize the catalytic influence of BRI and CPEC on Pakistan's blue economy. This can be accomplished by implementing specialized training programs and courses in subjects like coastal management, marine engineering, and oceanography at all educational levels, from elementary to university. Pakistan can guarantee a consistent supply of qualified workers to propel the expansion of its blue economy by integrating blue education into the curriculum. Additionally, encouraging research and development in industries linked to the blue economy, such as aquaculture, fisheries, and renewable energy, would encourage entrepreneurship and innovation, which will propel economic expansion and job creation. For Pakistan's blue economy to flourish and eventually contribute to the nation's socioeconomic development and global competitiveness, effective policy frameworks must also prioritize capacity building, international collaborations, and public-private partnerships. Pakistan can unleash the enormous potential of its maritime industry, open up new avenues for economic expansion, and establish itself as a major force in the global blue economy by embracing a comprehensive approach to blue education.

Environmental Conservation and Management

With the advancement of the CPEC projects underway, much care needs to be taken regarding environmental conservation. Measures must be implemented to control marine pollution and pollution caused by infrastructure development. Using sustainable technologies, including port and renewable energy solutions for maritime transport, is crucial in ensuring that CPEC minimizes the negative impact on the environment. Also, they should require investment in the rehabilitation and management of critical coastal habitats consisting of mangroves by increasing conservation measures that will support the improvement of habitats and the creation of sustainable sources of income for the people (Adnan et al., 2024).

Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) for Sustainable Development

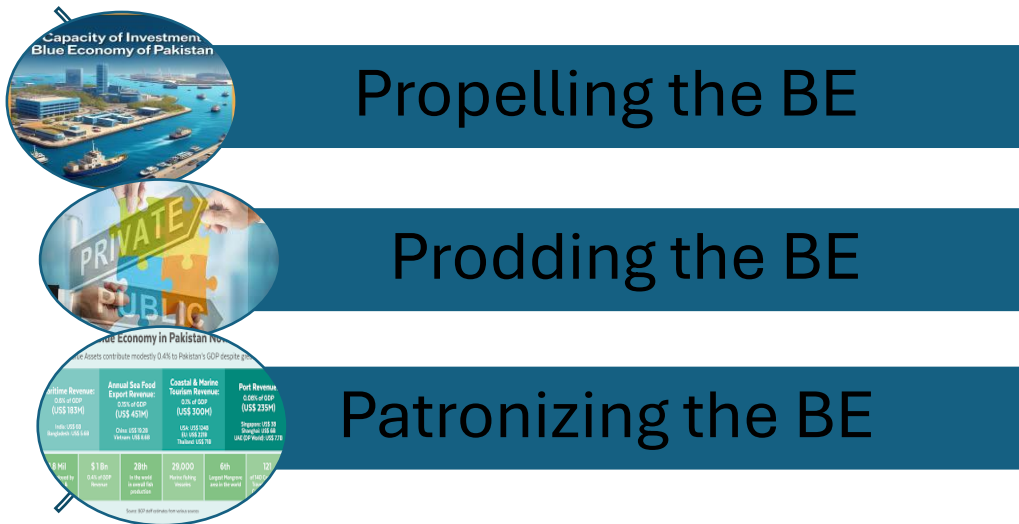
An opportunity that should be harnessed involves using PPPs to mobilize private capital in sustainable activities concerning the blue economy. These solutions imply the cooperation of local authorities and civil servants with the private sector and local communities in financing green infrastructure, renewable energy, and sustainable fisheries (Sajjad et al., 2024). Therefore, these sectors should encourage private investment, and the government plays a crucial role in ensuring that these sectors are developed in terms of economic growth and environmental impact. Together, these partnerships can go a long way in fostering innovation and attaining a sustainable development path under CPEC for Pakistan, particularly the coastal provinces (Waheed et al., 2024).

Thus, it can be argued that BRI and CPEC when considered under the spectrum of blue economy for Pakistan can offer a profound positive economic value addition and open up chances for local stakeholders. By deploying policies, integrating communities, strengthening capacities, protecting environment and engaging in public-private partnerships, Pakistan can work towards the development of a blue economy that will not only be responsible for the sustainable development of the nation's economic sector but will also change the lives of the communities included in the process (Geng et al., 2024).

Despite of all the benefit it offers but it also triggered socio-political alarms in Pakistan, against which the Blue Economy under BRI and CPEC is growing at a startling pace. With an economy growing at 7-8% annually, the authorities have attempted to find harmony between multiple objectives of inclusive developmental and environmental conservation, but the result has led to inequitable benefits and dislocation of the population with adverse impacts on the marine life. Therefore, it is important that these concerns are addressed and that the benefits of BRI and CPEC are distributed between the various stakeholders and at the same time negative impacts of these initiatives on local communities and environment which demands adopting a sustainable and inclusive approach to the development of Pakistan's Blue Economy.

So, there is a dire need to develop effective policies that ensures the safety and security of both, the entire population as well the environmental which assures that the impact of development must be sustainable and inclusive, that's how the real potential of Pakistan's Blue Economy are meaningful. So, it is concluded that there are three key P's that should be prioritized in the development of a blue economy:

3P's Necessary for the Development of Blue Economy (BE)



1st -P: Propelling the capacity for investment in a blue economy.

2nd -P: Prodding public-private partnerships in the development of blue economy and its allies sectors.

3rd -P: Patronizing the inclusive decision-making processes by concentrating on measures that unleash potential of blue economy and sustainable growth for Pakistan.

Therefore, for fostering the blue economy in Pakistan, it is recommended to follow through on three initiatives. First, (Propelling the capacity for investment in a blue economy) fostering investment potential is very significant which includes the use of funds for a sustainable ocean economy. This can be done through innovative financing expansion strategies, and collaboration with international institutions like the Asian Development Bank that offers social and economic developmental loans with accompanying grants and technical assistance, as well as equity investment. Second, (Prodding public-private partnerships in the development of blue economy and its allies sectors) encouraging public-private partnerships is important to maximize their combined abilities towards the building of the blue economy and its related industries. This allows for new investments to be made along with the promotion of sustainable economic growth. Lastly, (Patronizing the inclusive decision-making processes by concentrating on measures that unleash potential of blue economy and sustainable growth for Pakistan)

advocating for the participatory approach towards decision-making is important in guaranteeing that the advancement of the blue economy will be proper equitable, sustainable, and beneficial to all. Concentrating on actions that can foster the blue economy while ensuring environmental sustainability, social equity, and economic development for Pakistan must be undertaken.

Suggested Citation

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