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Issue Brief

CPEC: Preparing human resource for the future

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China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has kick started the development of multiple projects across the country. The country has not received such a huge influx of investment before and this has caught its labour market short of qualified workers for many projects under CPEC. The lack of training and expertise of local labour force has increased costs and delayed the construction. Chinese companies that are operating in Pakistan have had to train Pakistani graduates in China before bringing them back to work on their projects. In 2015, the Chief Minister of Punjab announced that the provincial government will sponsor the training of Pakistani engineers in China.¹

Pakistan sees its future in economic cooperation with China. In the last Joint Coordination Committee (JCC) meeting in Beijing, more projects have been added under CPEC.² Such positive developments indicate the willingness of Chinese companies to invest in Pakistan and the country expects that this trend will persist. While carrying plenty of optimism, it also places a challenge on Pakistan to adapt and mobilise its human resources.

Addressing the issues of Baluchistan is crucial for long term stability in Pakistan. One of the main contributors of resentment against the state in Baluchistan is the lack of economic opportunities for the local population. Along with Gwadar Port and transportation links, industrial estates and energy plants are also being developed in Baluchistan as part of CPEC. In the coming years, these will create plenty of job openings in the province but there are doubts whether the local population will be able to secure dignified positions. The trend since 1950s shows that skilled jobs in Baluchistan's gas industry have been taken up by people of other provinces.³

The standing of educational institutes in Baluchistan is below standard. The province has a huge potential of creating engineering jobs but lacks the ability to develop its workforce. According to the rankings of the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan, there is not a single university in Baluchistan whose engineering department makes it to top 20 in the country.⁴ There is an urgent need to develop educational institutes that can support progress of the province and its people in the future.

Moreover, efforts in developing education sector have to be extended nationwide. Majority of Pakistan's population falls in youth category. This gives the country a tremendous opportunity to equip an active workforce for development purposes. However, the Human Capital Report released by the World Economic Forum in 2016 ranks Pakistan 118 out of 130 countries in terms of human capital capabilities.⁵ While development of infrastructure is critical, long term growth and economic prosperity can only be achieved if Pakistan's youth is made well educated and adept with modern expertise.

Pakistan should look towards China as a role model for economic development. In the past few decades, millions of people have escaped poverty in China. Education has played a key role in this transformation. As per UNICEF's data, China's adult literacy rate is 95.1% whereas Pakistan's adult literacy rate is 54.9%. When it comes to youth literacy rate, the figures are close to 100% for both male and female in China.⁶ In contrast, Pakistan's male youth literacy rate is 79.1% while female youth literacy rate is 61.5%.⁷ If Pakistan is to replicate China's success, ensuring participation in primary and further education across both genders must become a top priority.

CPEC holds the key to Pakistan's economic progress therefore timely and efficient completion of its projects is necessary. To address the capacity deficiency, local institutes and universities need to introduce new programs and also raise the standard of the existing ones. Stress must be put on developing practical skills of students in order to match the needs of the employers. In this regard, introduction of training programs and collaborations between Pakistani and Chinese universities will be instrumental.

Furthermore, CPEC has to be embraced by all the institutions working for the development of the country. These include universities, relevant ministries and government departments, International Governmental Organisations and Non-Governmental Organisations. The government should work to enhance cooperation between them to make sure a collective approach is taken towards economic development. As CPEC is a crucial long term project for Pakistan, future initiatives should be aligned to match its requirements.

Notes and References:

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- ¹ <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/44545-sahiwal-coal-power-project-to-complete-in-2017-cm>
 - ² <https://www.geo.tv/latest/125504-CPEC-JCC-meeting-ends-several-development-projects-approved>
 - ³ Robert G. Wirsing, *Baloch Nationalism and the Geopolitics of Energy Resources: The Changing Context of Separatism in Pakistan*, 2012.
 - ⁴ [http://www.hec.gov.pk/english/universities/Documents/Ranking_Doc%20\(2015\).pdf](http://www.hec.gov.pk/english/universities/Documents/Ranking_Doc%20(2015).pdf)
 - ⁵ <http://www.dawn.com/news/1275692>
 - ⁶ https://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/china_statistics.html
 - ⁷ https://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/pakistan_pakistan_statistics.html