

## Role of Trained Women Workforce in China - Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC): A Gender Gap Analysis

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### Abstract

*Pakistan as a developing country is facing critical issues where skilled labour, brain-drain of qualified professionals, lack of technical education and awareness are considered underlying factors for unemployment and underemployment. In the controversial debate about CPEC, the misperception is that it is related to road connectivity and energy projects only. CPEC, beyond this narrow connotation, is about preparing the country to receive not only massive amounts of Chinese investment, but also cross cutting integration of trained personnel and culture. The current picture for trained personnel in the context of CPEC places a huge challenge for Pakistan unless we have a qualified and broad-based human resource in different sectors. This challenge is further aggravated by the lack of qualified and trained women workforce. With economic globalisation, evident through CPEC, there is a call for a comprehensive human resource development policy for women at national level. The paper identifies gaps with regards to training for women in Higher Education sector, awareness of opportunities for women and their participation in small and medium enterprises that come along CPEC inherently such as logistics, services, food processing, and cultural and media related collaborations. This qualitative research is based on data and interviews from women in academia, business and media as primary sources. The findings reveal that educated women need to be given trainings and awareness on CPEC from entrepreneurial, cultural and economic perspectives so that sustainable and positive impact of CPEC is widely reflected in society through women participation.*

**Keywords:** Trained Women Workforce, CPEC, Human Resource, Economic Globalization, Brain Drain, Skilled Labour.

### Introduction

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a cornerstone of China's foreign policy helping it to achieve geo-strategic influence from South China Sea to the Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea. For Pakistan, it is termed as a “game-changer” that would not only revamp its economy, it will expand its influence in the region. *The News* reported that Pakistan would be a larger recipient of China's diplomacy based on its One Belt, One Road (official)

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(OBOR) Initiative in 2018. This would not only be confined to economic dividends, but in diplomatic sphere Pakistan is to be seen central to the execution of this diplomacy as envisaged by the Chinese diplomatic circles (The News, 2018). Pakistan, being central in many respects for achieving China's geo-strategic goals through CPEC, would benefit in real terms provided its human capital is rightly exploited. Its significance has been further realized in the wake of CPEC to utilize this resource in strategic terms.

Similarly, Pakistan's performance in human development shows a dismal state (Kalia, 2015). As an indicator to progress, human resource development is critical to eliminate poverty and human deprivation (Naqvi, 2010). Notwithstanding, CPEC's huge funding is a breakthrough for an energy-starved Pakistan and its deficit-based economy, it has placed a huge challenge for Pakistan to show its human capital capacity to meet upto the technical demands in various fields of mutual benefits. In addition to an array of allied facilities, China is committed to support Pakistan to make CPEC a successful venture, the one that leads to promotion of strategic goal of promoting One Belt One Road (OBOR), outlined in the 13<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan of the Central Committee of Communist Party of China (CCP) to enhance cooperation in various fields of mutual benefits and expand influence by opening up to the East and West in pragmatic terms (Xiguang, n.d).

The development of a country critically depends on its human capital as confirmed from global consensus that human resource needs to be capitalized for the national development of a country. While considering human capital as a strategically important component of development, the role of women as an important component of human capital is also needed to harvest the benefits that come from socio-economic development and progressive economies. However, this is rather a more fragmented concept in developing as compared to the developed countries. Evidence suggests that South Asia lags behind in terms of human development as compared to other regions (Ahmad, et al., 2017).

The role of women in country's progress and development is critical for a fast growing economy. Women development is an alternate term to women empowerment, thus mainstreaming of women requires deliberated measures. Pakistan is no exception to it. Gender participation and equality are proven key drivers for prosperity. According to the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Report 2015, it is an acknowledged fact that if women are given power and authority, they will usefully exploit the nation's human capital. Similarly, minimizing gender disparity increases output and economic growth (<https://reports.weforum.org>) thus, economic development shows a strong and positive correlation with women empowerment in a society. The evidence also suggests that women participation has led to improved governance and economic benefits. A case of Asian –Pacific economies and its dynamic growth specifically with the increased participation of women from 1970-1990 has shown an increase in their annual growth by 35-40 per cent for the region (Kamal & Woodbury, 2016).

Pakistan being a developing country can move on to the path of development if it utilizes the women work force efficiently. In developing countries, this gap is even more

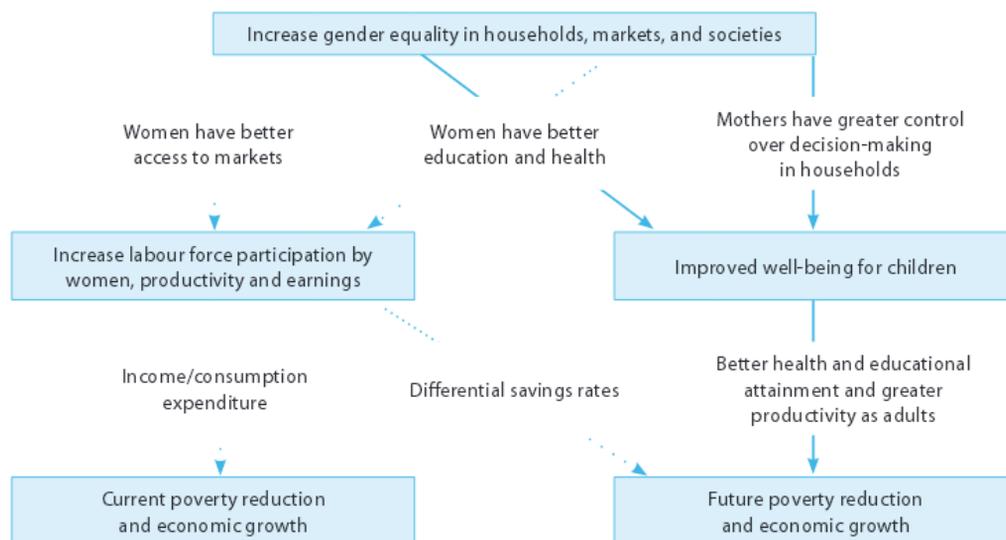
vivid. Reflected by the International Labour Organization, Verick in his report clearly states there is a huge gap in the input of women labour force compared to men in developing countries. This is due to various economic and social factors such as social norms, access to education and economic growth that constrain women to participate and get reflected in a reasonable number. In order to improve women access to quality employment, the report recommends establishing the better access for women in higher education beyond secondary level of education. With reference to Pakistan, the report states that in South Asia, female participation rates range from around 20 per cent in Pakistan to almost 80 per cent in Nepal, which can be explained by differences in social and economic factors even within countries of same region (Verick, 2014).

In addition, Khawar also presents a comparison of GDP per capita for Pakistan that currently stands at \$5,235 is worst than Sudan. The reason for such a sorry state is because women face social and cultural barriers to become active participants in the state machinery (*The Express Tribune*, 2018). Trained women being ready for bringing significant change in society are either not part of any activity outside the wall of domestic life or confined to very limited areas specifically teaching, nursing or medical fields. Although women participation in soft sectors i.e. education and health is evident, it is not countable in hard sectors i.e. economics, infrastructure, and state governance to a considerable level. Similarly, women are paid 23 per cent less than men for similar work and female labour force participation in Pakistan stands at 22 per cent versus that for men at 67.8 per cent. Further, it is reported that only 0.3 per cent women are employed as managers, 6.4 per cent as professionals and 0.9 per cent as technical workers (Labour Force Survey 2014-2015). These limitations emanate from mostly patriarchal set ups such as over-commitments at domestic level for women who even after getting higher education have limited participation in working outside homes; inequitable labour market places and environment; psychological pressures, considered inferior to men when comes a comparative matter of doing labour work, weak security system for working women etc as some visible and invisible constraints preventing trained and productive workforce to become part of economic development. Therefore, mainstreaming of women is lacking vastly in major sectors. The Global Report on Women in Tourism, 2010 (Figure 1) shows a relationship between poverty reduction and increased level of gender equality in a society. Women have a unique perspective as compared to men. If equipped with better education, having good health and provided increased opportunities for earning, the outcome would be increased savings, greater control of decision making and improved well being for children resulting in a better and productive adult population, leading to a prosperous society.

CPEC is bringing lot of opportunities for growth and development for Pakistan and provinces where the route is passing. However, prevailing stereotypical restraints for a trained women workforce are not allowing them to become vibrant members of such a fruitful project. The paper highlights this gap in terms of a very critical question mostly overlooked to examine how CPEC can become a game changer for Pakistani women. Either it would play a key role in women main streaming or worsen an already marginalization of women in Pakistan. The issue becomes more relevant to see the women

role from the perspective where Pakistan stands at the lowest global rankings of gender equality and to understand how CPEC can offer this opportunity and bridge the gap.

**Figure 1**



**Source:** UNWTO. Global Report on Women in Tourism, 2010. retrieved from [wwwhttps://unwto.org](https://unwto.org)

Through CPEC, a number of opportunities have ushered for skilled human resource as well as it has set challenges for the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Through a long list of projects spread across energy, infrastructure, peace and development, connectivity/harmonization/integration of civilizations, diverse investment opportunities, industrial cooperation, financial cooperation, agricultural cooperation, tourism, educational linkage human resource development, health care, people to people contact, increase in livelihood opportunities and enhance security and stability of the region, the projects awarded to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa include Rashakai Economic Zone, M-1, Nowshera, SukiKinari Hydropower Station, Naran, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, KKH Phase II (Thakot -Havelian Section), Gilgit KIU Hydropower, Gilgit KIU Hydropower and Cross Border Optical Fiber Cable as reflected in the official website of CPEC cell. There are other cross cutting areas where chances are for involving an educated populace through people to people exchanges (<https://www.cpec.gov.pk>).

There is a dire need to bring systematic improvement in the participation of women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. According to the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Inclusive Urban Growth Program Report, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa women are socially more constrained, less literate, and economically worse off compared to their counterparts elsewhere in the country. The labour-force participation, therefore, counts at 14 per cent, which reflects that women generally are working, but in informal sectors such as serving in domestic and subsistence sectors. Keeping in view, increase in participation of women working

informally (often at home) has increased from 66 per cent in 2003/2004 to 74 per cent in 2013/14. The report recommends that this informal sector can become a reservoir of skills and experience and could be built upon to improve women's incomes and strengthen their contribution to the economy (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Inclusive Urban Growth Program, TA 8556-REG).

This view is further supported by the USAID's 2012 report that restriction does not apply when women labour is needed by the society as she works in fields, brings water and wood for home needs without male guards. It reflects that society is utilizing women as labour mainly. This discouraging attitude in economic circle is a deliberate effort to cause gross gender inequality. Similarly, women are not incorporated as entrepreneurs in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. It is only 0.1 per cent according to the Labour Force Survey 2012-2013, a highly insignificant number of women in businesses sector of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. *Dawn* also reports this gap with respect to women participation at policy level in CPEC. It says, no statistical evidence is provided by the Planning Commission though it perceives that with CPEC, women, like men, will benefit through jobs and development (Dawn, 2017).

In the given context, there are very few statistics which reflect the engagement of women in different sectors in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. According to the report of International Growth Center on Emerging Opportunities for Women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Growth Sectors, there are four main sectors where four priority growth sectors for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were identified: industry (manufacturing and construction), agriculture and livestock, mining, and tourism. However, the information is very sporadic in terms of statistics and relevance. Women are mostly engaged in some sectors including agriculture and livestock with relatively the highest ratio of participation of women spending 6-7 hours a day in agriculture related doings. Through women participation according to IGC Khyber Pakhtunkhwa growth strategy (p.50), yields could be increased from 3.8 to 6.1 tons per hectare (wheat) and 4.4 to 7 tons per hectare (maize) if women get same level of approach to land and fertilizers. In addition to agriculture, women employment is higher in manufacturing sector such as food processing, pharmaceuticals and textiles. Women have been involved in small medium sized enterprises /cottage industries such as furniture related manufacturing and textiles related activities include sewing, knitting and embroidery. Moreover, tourism is also an emerging sector for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where women can be engaged in managerial positions, in travel agencies, as tour attendants, and providing other services. As far as energy sector is concerned, there is also tremendous potential in this sector for women such as hydro power projects (Kamal & Woodbury, 2016). For CPEC as well, women proportion in policy making would also serve to include women proportionally (Beamen et al. 2011).

## **Methodology**

This study focuses on the gaps with regards to training for women in Higher Education sector, awareness of opportunities for women and their participation in small and medium

sized enterprises that come along CPEC inherently. The study is based on interviews of women representing media, academia and government from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa supported with existing literature where it is realized that statistics are not available regarding skilled women data in different sectors in the province. The qualitative research method has reflected this gap with existing reports from the UN, ILO, Labour Force Survey, USAID and KP Urban Growth Program covering issues on gender inequality, women role in economic and sustainable development.

### **Interpretative Analysis**

With regard to how CPEC and human resource development is related is a fact that cannot be ignored. At par with technically based Chinese workforce, this gap is increasing despite government's emphasis on developing labour skills with the passage of time. Through different perspectives, it is observed that policy level decision for engaging women is critical. This also includes how political decision making is strong and sensitized towards the issue. In this regard, this fact is supported with Toru (2018, personal communication), who stated that the Planning and Development Department of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has sent women scholars from universities to China for learning Chinese language skills. Currently, emphasis is on language skills development, and Chinese language courses are taught in different cities across Pakistan. There is no doubt that language is one of the challenges but stress must be put on developing applied and practical skills of the female students. Importance towards capacity building of local labour has been given rather secondary importance. She further highlights the fact as political worker, there is no thought given to women involvement in CPEC. This might be due to women come as after-thought when priorities are set at policy level. Even there is no such policy at Planning and Development level where CPEC Cell is established.

Dr. Khan (2018, personal communication) said, the Planning Commission has not yet emphasized the potential role of CPEC as a catalyst for enhancing female labour force participation. There is no such policy with respect to CPEC based policy or action plan to minimize the existing economic participation and opportunities in gender gap between the male and female working age population of Pakistan. Dr. Khan said it has to be seen what measures the Government of Pakistan take in encouraging women towards CPEC (2018, personal communication). According the Global Gender Gap Report 2017, Pakistan's score on the Global Gender Gap Index is 0.546 with a ranking of 143 out of 144 countries. Pakistan scored 0.546 on a scale where 1.0 score represents parity and 0 as parity. The country's female/male population sex ratio is recorded at 1.06. The index notes country's widening the gender gap over the decade as it ranked 112 out 115 in the year 2006. In the 2017 index, Pakistan only beats Yemen and the war-torn Syria ranks ahead of Pakistan. The economic activities of CPEC are expected to generate employment opportunities and the gender gap in economic participation between males and females will be narrowed only if a large number of females are trained and skilled to take advantage of the employment opportunities arising from CPEC intervention.

Through policy lens, when asked whether Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has devised any policy for women involvement, Toru said, the Commission's mandate is mainly to serve as a recommendatory body to identify social and economic spaces for women. With respect to providing legislative support to women, flawed women protection law of 2010 was rectified and in 2016, the law was approved with amendments. It is encouraging to note that in 2017, we made district committees for women protection and a monitoring body through committees in 23 districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa which can be equally beneficial for CPEC to identify sectors and work on supply demand framework.

Dr. Khan (2018, personal communication) further states that the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has recently announced its policy guidelines in December 2017 for women empowerment in the province in order to ensure provision of avenues for development of women in the province. The policy aims at improving overall status of women (Toru, N., 2018) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa through their socio-economic, political and legal empowerment. The salient features of the policy include provision of quality health care, reducing gender gap in education, creation of employment and income generation opportunities to encourage equal participation of women in all political processes and to ensure elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls through legislation and its effective implementation. However, the linkage between the creation of employment and income generation opportunities for women with specific reference to CPEC is not well defined.

Mass media in any form is an instrumental tool to reach out to the masses and raise gender awareness particularly in patriarchal set ups. Journalists are a well-informed community of a society who act as advocates and pressure groups as well. As journalists, how much they know about CPEC? what is their perspective on women participation in CPEC and gaps if any at policy level and recommendations for the Government to create awareness among women folk of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to gain benefits from CPEC are certain areas where responses are revealing. The domestic mechanism to promote CPEC is however, different as very few debate over how it challenges the women role that is never raised as priority.

This point is also debated with an in-depth views of a media representative from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa that shows current status of understanding of CPEC, opportunities for people generally and status of women particularly with reference to trained women workforce. Ms. Shah states that generally women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are lacking language skills, technical education and professional or vocation education. They do not seem to be prepared to get any kind of economic benefit from the CPEC (Shah, 2018, personal communication). In light of this situation, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has sent youth including girls and boys to learn Chinese language so that it could ensure the graduates job opportunities (Shah, 2018, personal communication). As a woman journalist, she added, she has as much access to information regarding CPEC as a male journalist and reality that there is not much information available. Even the provincial

government was kept in dark for a long time by the federal government about its share or inclusion in this game-changer mega project.

Ms. Shah emphasized that media in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is very little aware of the information regarding projects and opportunities that they might avail from CPEC. There is a gap between federal and provincial government, so obviously it impacts what share KPK received in CPEC and what it actually would get. Women on the other hand lacking language skills, technical education and professional or vocation education are not prepared to get any economic benefits from the CPEC. The responses from a senior women journalist identify the gaps between Government and media generally and with the cultural context of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The very spirit of media as a channel of informing and educating, besides opinion making, becomes a challenge particularly for advocacy of women participation in such scenario when there is already a communication gap between the Government and media. Until and unless technological and skilled capacities of public and private universities are upgraded, the purpose will not be achieved. This is also applicable to the media students and journalists for specialized trainings (<http://www.technologytimes.pk>). Ms. Shah further states that both Government and media need to highlight the unconventional avenues for women so that they are motivated to opt fields such as crane-operators, engineers and entrepreneurs.

At the level of Higher Education, there is no specific focus for women to become an active actor in CPEC or get ready for playing an effective role in this huge and extensive project. Education sector, similar as other sectors, has failed to focus on women training particularly for CPEC or preparing them to benefit from opportunities this project is brining to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. According to Dr Khan, (2018, personal communication) women role in CPEC is not that significant because it is too early a stage for women working force to focus on participation in CPEC. Moreover, she highlighted that cultural values of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, intangibly, do not allow women to work in projects like CPEC. If any area for women participation becomes a possibility, it will be too later at a stage in this project. She argued that professional women like engineers of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are more interested to work in education sector to become a part of anything like construction activities etc. Additionally, the route of project is conservative and less suitable for women to work.

Dr. Hamid, (2018, personal communication) has also pointed out that there is a no proper preparation of women to exploit the opportunities of CPEC. She added that Pakistan is criticized for not doing its homework regarding CPEC properly. It includes developing institutional set up for women as well. It clearly shows that at higher education level things are too slow in realizing their due role. There is an urgent need for women centers to guide and polish this already trained and educated women force to become a vivid actor of this project.

## Conclusion

CPEC is a reality and an extensive project comprising small, medium and large scale projects. It can prove to be dynamic for trained work force of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This region desperately needs progress and uplift of women if it is to become an important economic player. There are unfortunately gaps such as lack of complete knowledge of CPEC, shortcomings in policies in this issue, less focus in media about the role of trained women in CPEC, unpreparedness at higher education level and consideration that it is “Men is CPEC”. Actually it’s not the case, it can equally be a “Women CPEC”. There should be an end to the fear dilemma that in a conservative set up of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, women are limited to few areas such as teaching, nursing and health sectors, rather they can become a part of avenues i.e., being crane-operators, engineers and entrepreneurs etc. So the fields’ gap has to be curtailed.

Similarly, information gap needs to be reduced between Government and media that need a special focus. If media is uninformed about the details of this project, it cannot highlight women role. Media is an impressive tool in our society and has a great bearing on public opinion building. A strategy in order to enhance collaboration between China and Pakistan, media plays a pivotal role in bringing socio-economic prosperity of the entire region that can promote trained women to provide services in CPEC. Therefore, it is an urgent need for information then awareness and ultimately sensitization regarding this project for the gains in terms of economic uplift for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa which is expected with the upcoming industrialization and China.

Moreover, the district committees can be very instrumental in highlighting potential sectors and opportunities for women. Women of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa would be able to work at par with international economic partners, especially the women professionals of partner institutions. Gender Monitoring Information System can be a model for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa women where a complete data on the status of women is gathered to formulate policy guidelines for engaging women according to their skill sets, leading to women empowerment (<https://www.pcs.wpunjab.gov.pk/gmis>). In this regard, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, women district committees are mandated to recommend areas where trained women of this province can be empowered as by now it is much more significant. Lacking in training of this force would be equivalent to missing the economic opportunities.

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