

**China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and Strategic Significance of Gojal
Valley: Socio-economic and Cultural Analysis**



**Submitted by
Kainat Habib
01-257241-004**

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Principal Supervisor

Professor Dr. Adam Saud

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences

Faculty of International Relations

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THESIS APPROVAL SHEET

Topic: **China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and Strategic Significance of Gojal Valley:
Socio-economic and Cultural Analysis.**

Name of Student: Kainat Habib

Enrollment No: 01-257241-004

Program: MS (International Relations)

Dr. Adam Saud

Thesis Supervisor

Name: Dr. Syed Aleem Gillani

Internal Examiner

Name: Dr. Sarwat Rauf

External Examiner

Program Coordinator Head of Department

Approval for Examination

Scholar's Name: Kainat Habib

Registration No. 01-257241-004

Program of Study: Master of Science (International Relations)

Thesis Title: China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and Strategic Significance of Gojal Valley:
Socio-economic and Cultural Analysis.

Principal Supervisor's Signature: _____

Date:

Name: Professor Dr. Adam Saud

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Name of student: Kainat Habib

Date: 30-01-2026

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to the resilient people of Gojal, whose strength and spirit inspired this work, to Dr. Adam Saud (my honorable supervisor) whose guidance shaped my academic journey, and to my family whose unwavering support made this thesis possible.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the strategic significance of Gojal Valley within the broader context of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and its socio-economic and cultural implications on the locals of Gojal. China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is one of the most ambitious regional connectivity projects in South Asia. Situated at the northernmost edge of Pakistan and sharing borders with China and Afghanistan, Gojal holds vast geopolitical value. However, despite its strategic position, the region's unique challenges, local perspectives and cultural dynamics frequently remain underrepresented in mainstream CPEC discussions. Through examining how CPEC-related development projects are reshaping the social fabric, economic opportunities, mobility patterns and cultural identity of the people of Gojal. This research aims to fill this gap.

The research employs a mixed-method approach, draws on structured surveys, and qualitative interviews and Focus group discussions conducted with local residents, community leaders and local media representatives. The evaluation highlights both the transformative potential and emerging concerns linked with CPEC. On one hand improved infrastructure has increased trade prospects and enhanced connectivity have opened new avenues for tourism, commerce, and regional integration. On the contrary, locals of Gojal face uncertainties related to environment risks, uneven development, limited participation in planning processes, and the hassle to maintain cultural heritage and rapid change.

The findings show a multifaceted interplay between vulnerability and opportunity. While several locals see CPEC as a pathway to long-term socio-economic uplift, others express caution related cultural dilution, ecological degradation, and the risk of external decision-making overshadowing community needs. The study debates that the success of CPEC in Gojal depends on inclusive policies, transparent governance, and culturally sensitive development frameworks that respect Gojal's indigenous identity.

This research also offers some practical recommendations aimed at ensuring that CPEC's advantages reach local populations equitably while safeguarding Gojal's cultural richness and environmental sustainability.

Key words: China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Gojal Valley, Socio-economic Development, Infrastructure development, Local Perception, Sustainable development

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1) Background of the study:

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is one of the most overambitious and geopolitically important initiatives under China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). It is conceived as a network of highways, railways, pipelines, and industrial zones¹. CPEC targets to connect Gwadar port in southern Pakistan with China's Xinjiang region, strengthening Pakistan's infrastructure and economic growth, and granting China direct access to the Arabian Peninsula². Karakoram Highway (KKH) is the centerpiece of the strategic corridor, the world's highest transcontinental highway. It pervades the remote and mountainous Gojal Valley, guarding the Gilgit-Baltistan region.³

Gojal Valley is nestled on the Khunjerab Pass on the Pakistan-China border. It has been a culturally diverse but geographically isolated region. The local community of Gojal Valley is known for its strong ethnic identity, multilingual practices, and communal resilience⁴. Moreover, with the reconfiguration and uplift of KKH, particularly after the devastating Attabad landslide in 2010, it has encountered extreme infrastructural changes⁵. The construction of tunnels, bridges, and modern technology has been connected to the CPEC projects and has progressively integrated Gojal into the economic realm. However, these developments are mainly celebrated for facilitating trade, tourism, and mobility, they also raise significant questions about the sustainability of these infrastructure projects on local society, culture, and population. Integration of GB in CPEC planning has shaped its strategic

¹ Jacob Mardell. "The BRI in Pakistan: China's flagship economic corridor." Mercator Institute of China Studies. May 20, 2020 <https://merics.org/en/analysis/bri-pakistan-chinas-flagship-economic-corridor>.

² Hussain, Saddam & Sohail, Ali & Yu, Chunjiao & Manzoor, Sadaf & Zahid, Ayesha. (2020). CHINA-PAKISTAN ECONOMIC CORRIDOR (CPEC'S) SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACTS ON PAKISTAN. International Journal of Management & Entrepreneurship Research. 2. 416-436. 10.51594/ijmer.v2i6.176.

³ Samantha Shea. "The road that's the 'Eighth World Wonder.'" September 4, 2023 <https://www.bbc.com/travel/article/20230903-the-karakoram-highway-the-road-thats-the-eighth-world-wonder>

⁴ Zulfiqar Ali Kalhor. "Of an Old Woman, a Dragon and a Saint." The Friday Times. August 9, 2019 <https://thefridaytimes.com/09-Aug-2019/of-an-old-woman-a-dragon-and-a-saint>

⁵ Hassan H.Karrar. "When the Silk Road Vanished." Allegra lab. March, 2020 <https://allegralaboratory.net/when-the-silk-road-vanished-roadsides/>

significance, reshaping what was once a remote mountainous valley into a potential hub of connectivity and economic activity⁶.

CPEC's importance extends beyond infrastructure development but incorporates the embodiments of China-Pakistan diplomatic relation which dates back to the 1950s built on mutual strategic interests, economic cooperation, cultural exchange. Through nation level contributions of scholars and policymakers frequently praise the potential of CPEC, local studies expose a different picture where prospects and challenges coincide and where communities like Gojal Valley achieves economic and cultural changes with global connectivity through such infrastructure projects.

There is diverse literature on CPEC, covering geopolitical, economic and developmental insights. Scholars like Siegfried O. Wolf has noted that CPEC's strategic relevance within the framework of China's global ambitions and Pakistan's pursuit for economic stability.⁷ Empirical studies show that infrastructure development can catalyze employment generation, promote regional tourism, and enhance cross-border trade. Moreover, the advantages of such projects are not equally distributed. Academic debates highlight that peripheral and rural communities often experience delayed or unequal development results compared to urban centers where investments are focused.

Additionally, majority of the existing study is dominated by state-centered macroeconomic evaluations. These researches, though are valuable but overlook the micro-level factors of local participation, cultural negotiation, and identity transformation that happens in regions directly affected by infrastructural transformation. The Gilgit-Baltistan region, and mainly the Gojal Valley remains underexplored in spite of being central to CPEC's northern alignment. Inadequate ethnographic and community-based research has been directed to understand how local livelihoods, institutions, and cultural trends develop under the pressures and promises of CPEC. The absence of grounded empirical evaluation sets up an important research gap.

Controversies regarding CPEC further support the need for localized investigation. On one hand, scholars argue that the corridor brings unparalleled opportunities for economic revitalization, job creation, and regional integration. On the other side, opponents caution that

⁶Javaid, Umbreen. (2016). Assessing CPEC: Potential Threats and Prospects. *Pakistan Economic and Social Review*. 54. 123-142.

⁷Wolf, Siegfried. (2018). China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC): Regional Cooperation in the Wider South Asian Region. 10.1007/978-981-10-5972-8_8.

the flow of external actors, unequal distribution of benefits, and ecological pressures could worsen local inequalities or impend cultural integrity. Critiques have cautioned that the flow of external actors, unequal distribution of benefits, and ecological pressures could worsen local inequalities or recede cultural integrity. Scholars like Liaqat Ali and Syed Jamal shah have raised question over the sustainability of CPEC related development, particularly concerning environmental degradation, social displacement and economic dependency.⁸ Moreover, concerns over resource allocation, taxation policies, and transparency in decision-making have frequently led to local protests across Gilgit-Baltistan, demonstrating that infrastructural change is also a political and social process, not only an economic one⁹.

Gojal Valley provides a unique case study from a socio-cultural perspective. The locals of Gojal are described by its high literacy rates, varied linguistic and ethnic identities, and a strong tradition of resilience and self-help development, are now cooperating with nuanced economic structures and cultural influences initiated through CPEC. The extension of the Karakoram Highway, construction of new border facilities, and development of tourism-related infrastructure have now started changing local trends of mobility, hospitality, and small-scale commerce, while others express concern about the growing cost of living, competition from external labor, and cultural homogenization. The transformation of traditional livelihoods of Gojal such as agriculture and handicrafts into service-oriented enterprises shows comprehensive procedure of modernization and market integration.

Notwithstanding these enduring changes, systematic academic consideration to the Gojal valley remains limited. Majority of the available literature on CPEC aims to aggregate Gilgit-Baltistan as a single administrative region, overseeing the diversity and uniqueness of this region, and also social institutions. Subsequently, there is adequate understanding of how infrastructure projects interrelate with local governance, identity politics, and socio-economic objectives. This study explores to address that gap by conducting an in-depth socio-economic and cultural analysis of CPEC's impact in Gojal Valley.

The goal of this study is to articulate and analyze the nature of CPEC-related projects in Gojal, to study their economic and social implications, and to interpret these changes within

⁸Ali, Liaqat & Mi, Jianing & Shah, Mussawar & Shah, Syed & Khan, Salim & Ullah, Rizwan & Bibi, Kausar. (2017). Local resident's attitude towards road and transport infrastructure (A case of China Pakistan economic corridor). *Journal of Chinese Economic and Foreign Trade Studies*. 11. 00-00. 10.1108/JCEFTS-08-2017-0024.

⁹Nadeem Rumi, "Taxation, TIR and the constitutional crisis in Gilgit-Baltistan" *The High Asia Erald* July 24,2025 <https://thehighasia.com/taxation-tir-and-the-constitutional-crisis-in-gilgit-baltistan/>

the theoretical framework of international relations. Through integrating qualitative and quantitative methods such as interviews, focus group discussions, and secondary data analysis the research will create a nuanced knowledge of how global infrastructure projects are localized in peripheral communities. The insights attained will further contribute to both academic discourse and policy implementation.

1.2) Research gap/rationale

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) a significant part of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), has gained considerable scholarly attention since its inception in 2015. Existing research has predominantly evaluated CPEC from a macroeconomic and geopolitical perspective, focusing on national trade, security alliances and strategic connectivity between Pakistan and China. Academic research provides valuable information into the structural and strategic dimensions of CPEC. However, scholars often overlook its localized socio-economic and cultural implications, mainly in northern regions such as the Gojal Valley in Hunza.

Various studies have highlighted CPEC's potential to strengthen economic growth, industrialization, and foreign investment. In contrast, there is inadequate exploration of how these transformations affect community livelihoods, employment opportunities, tourism development and cultural identity. The Gojal Valley, situated along the KKH serves a crucial connect between Pakistan and China. This part of GB has experienced visible infrastructural and demographic shifts because of CPEC projects. There's least empirical data available on how resident observe and respond to these changes. Lack of micro-level research has created a significant knowledge gap in understanding how global development initiatives change peripheral and culturally unique communities.

1.2.1) Theoretical Gap

Several researchers have worked on the topic of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and its Socio-economic and cultural implications, but scholars like Wolf have used realism as a theory to interpret CPEC's socio-economic and cultural implications. These viewpoints highlight power politics, state interests, and economic expansion but overlook the methods of institutional cooperation and social transformation happening at the local level¹⁰. The existing

¹⁰Wolf, Siegfried. (2018). China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC): Regional Cooperation in the Wider South Asian Region. 10.1007/978-981-10-5972-8_8.

studies lack knowledge of how international cooperation structure and governance institutions work in shaping the enduring sustainability of CPEC projects. Keohane an advocate of institutional liberalism debate that states and actors cooperate even in an anarchic international system concentrating on institutional rules, trust, and mutual benefits. Hitherto, in the subject of CPEC's implementation in Gojal Valley, there has been any theoretical investigation into how institutional frameworks influence equitable contribution, transparency, and local ownership of development initiatives.

In the same way, constructivism has hardly ever been applied to the socio-economic situation of CPEC, regardless of its analytical power in understanding how identities, meaning and cultural perceptions evolve development outcomes. Whereas realist perspective decrease CPEC to a strategic or material transaction, constructivism assists in explaining why communities react diversely to Chinese involvement, based on their historical experiences, social norms and changing identity as borderland societies. In the case of Gojal Valley where cross-border mobility, ethnic diversity and cultural exchange are severely entrenched, constructivism can expose the social transformations associated with infrastructural development. Therefore, this study recognizes a theoretical gap in the interpretation of institutional liberalism and constructivism, as these insights together provide a better-off, multifaceted account of how and why CPEC's infrastructural cooperation yields a diverse socio-economic and cultural results at the community level.

1.2.2) Contextual Gap

Existing Scholarship on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Karakoram Highway (KKH) expansion has primarily relied on state-centered macroeconomic evaluations, emphasizing national trade volumes GDP growth, and strategic connectivity outcomes. While these studies are important at the policy level, they provide inadequate data into how such large-scale infrastructure projects reshape everyday socio-economic realities within peripheral border regions.

This study aims to address a distinct micro-level research gap by examining the localized impacts of improved KKH connectivity on the Gojal-Sost region, focusing on community livelihoods, access to services, mobility patterns, and social interactions. By grounding the analysis in community-based evidence, the research moves beyond aggregate national indicators to reveal how global and regional connectivity initiatives are experienced, negotiated, and transformed at the local level.

1.2.3) Methodological gap/analysis

The Scholarly work lacks mixed-method and community level research that integrates both qualitative and quantitative approaches to study localized socio-economic and cultural impacts within Gojal Valley. Most existing studies on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor have initially implemented quantitative or descriptive methods concentrating on macro-level national data such as trade volume, GDP growth, or infrastructural statistics.

1.3) Problem Statement

Although Gojal valley is a strategic region, it has been underrepresented in the CPEC academic literature. Majority of the scholarly literature on CPEC focuses on the security dimension or instead, the peripheral and political context of the economic corridor. Little is known about how these locals adapt to swift infrastructure change, external engagement and evolving economic dynamics. This study aims to fill this gap by drawing on an analysis of community-based evidence, including the voices of residents, businesses, and youth.

1.4) Research Questions

1. What are the important CPEC infrastructure and development projects implemented in Gojal Valley?
2. How do these projects contribute to economic transformation in the valley, regarding employment, tourism, and trade?
3. What social and demographic transformation have occurred in Gojal because of Chinese involvement and infrastructural change?

1.5) Research Objective

The main objective of this study is to systematically identify the influence of the growing Chinese presence in Gojal Valley, with a specific concentration on two important facets:

1. To examine the impacts of growing Chinese involvement on local cultural practices, heritage preservation and traditional livelihoods in Gojal.
2. To evaluate the economic implications of CPEC on the Valley.

1.6) Research Hypothesis

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor has brought significant socio-economic change and has influenced cultural and demographic pattern in Gojal.

1.7) Significance of the study

Gojal Valley is an important part within the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and is of geostrategic significance due to its proximity to China and Afghanistan. It has been officially recognized as the second Karachukar sub-division within the Hunza district. Gojal is the largest subdivision of Gilgit-Baltistan. Though it's the largest sub-division of GB Gojal remains underrepresented in academic research, primarily about other realms such as environment. Regardless of its importance at both local and national levels, insufficient research has been conducted to analyze the implications of CPEC on the development and transformation of this part of GB. This study aims to bridge the gap by evaluating the socio-economic and cultural impact of CPEC projects on the local community in Gojal.

The significance of this study lies in its capacity to enlighten scholars, academics and policymakers about the important concerns of the local community regarding their economic development as well as the social and cultural transformation of the district as an outcome of CPEC initiatives. Moreover, the study offers empirical evidence of the socio-economic and cultural change brought by these projects. Likewise, this research provides the local community concerns and contributes to the cultural preservation of Wakhi community, an endangered culture recognized by UNESCO. The outcome will also function as a primary source to other scholars fascinated in further exploration of this topic. Finally, the main goal is to bring attention to Gojal Valley, a region within Hunza its existence and identity is often overshadowed, even though it is a strategic location. This study aims to understand how border proximity and CPEC have transformed the area and how the endangered Wakhi Culture stands at the edge of extinction.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW/ THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1) Literature Review

Historical and Geostrategic Significance of Gojal Valley (Upper Hunza)

Gojal has served as a pivotal crossroads on the ancient Silk Road, promoting cultural exchanges and trade between China, South Asia, and Central Asia. Moreover, during the 19th-century Great Game between British India and Tsarist Russia, this region's mountainous landscape and its proximity to the prime empires made it a significant focal point¹¹. Some scholarly literature has argued that Khunjerab, which is located in Gojal valley, is a gateway of CPEC, which provides an opportunity for Chinese access to the Gulf States. It is considered a region of greater scope and higher prospective for Pakistan for its economic extensions¹².

During the Tang dynasty (618-907 AD) Hunza and China had close ties. According to a Chinese historical literature, the Book of Tang considers Hunza as one of the small kingdoms along the Silk Route¹³. Julie Flowerday mentions that Hunza region significantly transferred goods, people, and ideas between East and West. The 19th Century was a transformation phase for Hunza because its strategic location brought the Qing dynasty and British Empire attention to this particular region.¹⁴

In 1970s, with the construction of the Karakoram highway (KKH), a major infrastructure project which connects Pakistan to China through Upper Hunza, regained its historical

¹¹ Ejaz Karim, "Hunza's Forgotten Link to China," Daily Times, July 27, 2018, <https://dailytimes.com.pk/273602/hunzas-forgotten-link-to-china/>

¹² Aziz, Khawaja & Hashmi, Anees. (2021). CPEC Issues and Threatening Cultural Diversity in Gilgit-Baltistan. Journal of the Historical Society. 34. 10.

¹³ Maud Ahmed, "The Mystery of Silk Road through Gilgit-Baltistan," Daily Times, October 8, 2018, <https://dailytimes.com.pk/307443/the-mystery-of-silk-road-through-gilgit-baltistan/>

¹⁴ Julie Flowerday, "Britain and China's 19th Century Stalemate over Hunza-Kanjut," ResearchGate, no.8 2018, 123-160.

strategic and economic importance¹⁵. Moreover, the KKH has become a sign of China-Pakistan friendship and a significant component of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor in recent years. The construction of the Karakoram Highway (KKH) between 1960 and 1978, connecting Pakistan to China, transformed Gojal into a critical corridor for trade and strategic movement. This development not only strengthened economic opportunities but also increased the region's strategic significance in regional politics¹⁶. Ultimately, the KKH was improved and incorporated into the expansive China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), altering it from a bilateral infrastructure project into a significant route for regional trade and development.

2.1.1) Employment and Economic Development

Gilgit-Baltistan's integration into the CPEC structure has led to significant infrastructure development, mainly the upgrading of the Karakoram Highway. This has improved connectivity, facilitated trade and tourism. Moreover, concerns have been raised over the equitable distribution of employment opportunities. Ashmita Rana advocates that the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is intended to modernize Pakistan, while its socio-economic implications remain both positive and negative.¹⁷ Further analyses by Raza Muhammad suggest that increased connectivity between China and Pakistan can lead to cultural exchanges, which can further integrate local and Chinese culture.¹⁸ For example, another study indicates that CPEC has been an important factor in socioeconomic and cultural development in Hunza Valley. In the research paper titled *CPEC: Socio, Cultural and Economic Effects on Gilgit Baltistan*, Awais and Abdul Qadir have identified the optimistic view of the local population regarding CPEC, which wasn't highlighted in the above analysis of other scholars. Moreover, scholars assert that preserving cultural heritage remains an important aspect as Gilgit-Baltistan resumes progress under the control of

¹⁵ Dr. Muhammad Ali Shaikh, "Infrastructure: The Karakoram connection," DAWN, December 01, 2024, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1875950>

¹⁶ Baig, Saranjam. (2021). Project Final Report on CPEC-Tourism-Development Nexus: Using 'CPEC-Tourism' As an Indigenous Tool for Economic Development of Gilgit- Baltistan.

¹⁷ Ashmita Rana, "CPEC: An Assessment of Its Socio-economic Impact on Pakistan," E-International Relations, March 10, 2022, <https://www.e-ir.info/2022/03/10/cpec-an-assessment-of-its-socio-economic-impact-on-pakistan/>

¹⁸ Raza Muhammad & Dr Lubna Abid Ali, "Socio-Economic Impact of CPEC on Pakistan," Margalla Papers, 2019, 1-12.

CPEC.¹⁹ Additionally, initiatives such as community-based tourism have been promoted to ensure that the benefits of tourism are shared equitably among local communities.

Shama Nazneen, along with its co-authors, highlights the mega-infrastructure development project offers easy entrance to notable tourism destinations and keeps attracting tourists. Gilgit Baltistan is at the initial phase of tourism development, and residents support tourism even though tourism costs overshadow the benefits. Also, the the tourism policy of GB concentrates openly on economic sustainability but oversees the socio-cultural and environmental concerns.²⁰ Similarly, the successful accomplishment of CPEC depends on amalgamating CPEC-related policies with SDG targets.²¹ While discussing the opportunities of CPEC, the scholar has also discussed some challenges while addressing the economic and political fragility in Pakistan. The authors have asserted that the government needs to equitably distribute the advantages of CPEC. The CPEC road project has increased the flow of tourists in the region. Scholars agree that infrastructure development and governance of CPEC influence tourism in Gilgit-Baltistan. Although the author contends that CPEC has boosted tourism through improving transportation and other facilities, effective governance is significant for enhancing its advantages.²²

CPEC has also opened doors for local entrepreneurs to sell their products to the Chinese market. According to a study, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor has brought both opportunities and challenges for micro and small enterprises in the northern Areas of Pakistan, mainly in the tourism industry. The author highlights that competition has increased the sustainability threat from medium and large enterprises.²³ Another study agrees that small

¹⁹ Awais Ali Ch & Dr, Abdul Qadir Mushtaq, "CPEC: Socio, Cultural and Economic Effects on Gilgit Baltistan, The Critical Review of Social Science Studies, February 16, 2025, 1-14.

²⁰ Shama Nazneen, Xu Hong, Carson L. Jenkins, Nizam Ud Din, "China-Pakistan economic corridor (CPEC), tourism demand, and environmental concerns: policy implications for sustainable tourism in GilgitBaltistan" *Journal of Public Affairs*, 22(3), Article e2600. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pa.2600>

²¹ Nitza-Makowska, Agnieszka. "China Pakistan Economic Corridor and Sustainable Development Goal Implementation in Pakistan: Fostering Sustainable Connectivity in a Fragile Context?" *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 15, no.3 (2020); 37-82.

²² Saranjam Baig, Somia Zehra. "China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, Governance, and Tourism Nexus: Evidence from Gilgit Baltistan, Pakistan." *Taylor & Francis* 23. No. 23 (2020).

²³ Saranjam Baig, Mir Qasim, Li Xuemei and Khalid Mehmood Alam. "Is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor an Opportunity or a Threat for Small and Micro-Entrepreneurs? Empirical Evidence from Northern Pakistan." *Sustainability* 12, no.5 (2020); 1-19.

farmers and small enterprises share limited benefits of the corridor²⁴. The prospect of export for local agriculture remains stagnant.

Research indicates the implications of CPEC on agriculture and exports in Gilgit-Baltistan. CPEC is predicted to strengthen fruit exports to China. The scholar further highlights a few risks to address for trade efficiency between Pakistan and China.²⁵

2.1.2) Environmental and Cultural Considerations

CPEC has not only boosted Pakistan's economy and transformed infrastructure, but it has also contributed significantly to a few societal changes, like employment disparities, cultural shifts, and environmental degradation²⁶. Few scholars believe that the influx of external workers renews local job placements and enhances business ventures, challenging traditional lifestyles. Another study notes the positive view among the locals over the socioeconomic and educational aspects brought by the project. While agreeing with other scholars, the study emphasizes the importance of improving the environment to obtain the complete well-being of the local community²⁷.

For instance, some academics have verified that religious institutions will have a significant impact on CPEC. In regions like Gilgit-Baltistan where religious institutions act as a dispute resolvers or providers of education. Their involvement can either play its role in smooth implementation of the project by resolving local grievances. Even though religious groups can surge against the project if perceived threats to local customs or religious sites.²⁸

Basit Ali and Sikandar Khan underscore that CPEC has brought linguistic and lifestyle changes in Gilgit-Baltistan.²⁹ Scholars agree that the influence of national and foreign languages in education and commerce has raised concerns about the existence of indigenous

²⁴ Spies, Michael. 2021. "Promises and Perils of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: Agriculture and Export Prospects in Northern Pakistan." *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 64 (7–8): 869–95. doi:10.1080/15387216.2021.2016456.

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Ch Awais, Dr. Mushtaq. "CPEC: Socio, Cultural and Economic Effects on Gilgit-Baltistan." *The Critical Review of Social Sciences Studies* 3, no.1 (2025); 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.59075/2gwwov15>

²⁷ Jaffar Aman, Jaffar Abbas, Guoqing Shi, Noor ul ain, Likun Gu. "Community wellbeing under China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: Role of Social, Economic, Cultural and Educational Factors in Improving Residents quality of life." *Frontiers in Psychology* 12 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.81659>.

²⁸ Dr. Muhammad Iqbal Chawla, "Global Governance in the Context of BRI and CPEC: Heritage Challenges and Opportunities in Pakistan" *AHSS Research Papers*, O-ISSN:2790-6809 [http://doi.org/10.35484/ahss.2025\(6-1\)41](http://doi.org/10.35484/ahss.2025(6-1)41) [472-483]

²⁹ Basit Ali, Sikandar Khan. "The CPEC is expected to have significant socio cultural and demographic effects on the local community of Gilgit-Baltistan." *Research Square* (2024) <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-4794378/v1>

languages like Burushaski, Wakhi, and Shina.³⁰ Moreover, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor has consequently resulted in higher carbon footprints in Gilgit-Baltistan, which is an environmental threat to the local population³¹. A study claims that the Sost Dry port in Gilgit-Baltistan remains operational only during summers, and because of the consistent blockage of the KKH due to floods and landslides, it thwarts trade.³² The author contends that even after the completion of CPEC projects, it will be difficult to manage incessant trade mainly because of growing environmental degradation. Another study demonstrates the impact of rapid urbanization on Gilgit-Baltistan, especially concerning sustainability and ecological degradation³³.

2.1.3) Local Perceptions and Challenges of CPEC

The success of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor isn't only determined by infrastructure development and economic growth at the national level, but also by how residents identify the projects, especially in remote areas like Gilgit-Baltistan. In this context, Karim's study explores the varied perspectives of GB residents regarding CPEC. Few residents see it as a source of economic opportunities, improved infrastructure, and increased trade, particularly in agriculture, others express concerns. While other respondents have shown concern that the project disproportionately benefits external investors and large businesses rather than uplifting the local community³⁴. Likewise, another empirical study agrees with Karim's interview with the residents of GB. The scholar emphasizes that meaningful local engagement is vital for guaranteeing inclusive growth. Although CPEC is considered a sign

³⁰ Ch Awais, Dr. Mushtaq. "CPEC: Socio, Cultural and Economic Effects on Gilgit-Baltistan." *The Critical Review of Social Sciences Studies* 3, no.1 (2025); 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.59075/2gwwov15>

³¹ Ali, Tayyaba Zainab, and Muhammad Usman Askari. 2023. "Impacts of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor on the Natural Environment of Pakistan". *Pakistan Social Sciences Review* 7 (4). Gujranwala, Pakistan:653-63. [https://doi.org/10.35484/pssr.2023\(7-IV\)58](https://doi.org/10.35484/pssr.2023(7-IV)58).

³² Basit Ali. "Climate Crisis and CPEC: Addressing the environmental fallout for Gilgit-Baltistan." September 15, 2024 <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2496384/climate-crisis-and-cpec-addressing-the-environmental-fallout-for-gilgit-baltistan>

³³ Maryam Ahmed, Muhammad Sheharyar Khan, Aurangzeb Nawaz Khan Khan. "Gilgit-Baltistan's Urban Shift: CPEC's Special Economic Zone Challenges." 2023. *Journal of Global Peace and Security Studies (JGPSS)* 3 (2).

³⁴ Deedar Karim. "CPEC: Different Shades of Views in Gilgit Baltistan." *The Geopolitics*, March 14, 2023 <https://thegeopolitics.com/cpec-different-shades-of-views-in-gilgit-baltistan/>

of progress, there is distrust about the project and whether the benefits will reach the locals³⁵. For Instance, a recent study shows that practitioners in GB approve CPEC's prospective for socio-economic development but are concerned about its environmental repercussions, especially in the ecologically sensitive terrains of the region³⁶.

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has been presented as a transformative infrastructure initiative, with significant political control and influence implications. Scholars note that the military's decision-making to build CPEC undermines the civilian oversight and democratic governance system of Pakistan. Ashraf contends that military involvement and control reduce transparency and public trust in the project. Critics have asserted that CPEC has caused limited job opportunities for local workers because most workers working on different projects are Chinese nationals, and environmental concerns and governance issues have emerged because of this initiative³⁷. Another scholar contends that Pakistan's stance to grant Gilgit-Baltistan provisional status mainly fulfils China's objective, which might legitimize CPEC projects, while it will further escalate clashes with India³⁸. While approving this study, another scholarly work notes that anxious locals view this project as a reason for war among the three big nuclear power states: China, Pakistan, and India.³⁹ Osama Ahmed argues that tenacious challenges, comprising political and economic turmoil, institutional weaknesses, and security threats, continue to impede the initiative's success and strain the Pakistan-China relationship.⁴⁰ Some Scholars have addressed the political complications surrounding GB's status within Pakistan's federal structure, further

³⁵Garlick, J. (2020). Book Review: The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor of the Belt and Road Initiative: Concept, Context and Assessment by Siegfried O. Wolf. *China Report*, 56(1), 148-150. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0009445519895600> (Original work published 2020)

³⁶Fehmida, Naveed Abbas, and Saman Ehsan. 2024. "A HARBINGER OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: REFLECTIONS OF PRACTITIONERS ON THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF CPEC ON GILGIT BALTISTAN". *Policy Research Journal* 2 (4):2126-39. <https://policyresearchjournal.com/index.php/1/article/view/250>.

³⁷Ashmita Rana, "CPEC: An Assessment of Its Socio-economic Impact on Pakistan," *E-International Relations*, March 10, 2022, <https://www.e-ir.info/2022/03/10/cpec-an-assessment-of-its-socio-economic-impact-on-pakistan/>

³⁸ Maham Hameed. The politics of the China-Pakistan economic corridor. *Palgrave Commun* 4, 64 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-018-0115-7>

³⁹Ismail, Muhammad. (2021). THE PROJECT OF CPEC: BENEFITS AND DRAWBACKS FOR GILGIT-BALTISTAN. *Pakistan Journal of International Affairs*. 2. 10.52337/pjia.v2i2.64.

⁴⁰ Osama Ahmed. "Ten Years of CPEC: A decade of Disappointments." *Stimson*. August 18, 2023 <https://www.stimson.org/2023/ten-years-of-cpec-a-decade-of-disappointments/>

highlighting that the region's vague constitutional position affects its interest in CPEC-related decisions. This lack of representation can further deteriorate the success of CPEC.⁴¹

However, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is extensively considered as a project of immense strategic and economic significance; its success in regions like Gilgit-Baltistan relies on more than just physical infrastructure or bilateral cooperation. The studies collectively reviewed highlight that inclusive participation, equitable benefit distribution, and environmental sustainability are important features of CPEC's prolonged viability. Insufficient local involvement, political coordination, and failure to deliver the desired outcomes so far. To ensure that CPEC plays a role in development and improves Pak-China relations, local empowerment of policymakers, transparent governance, and conditions for sustainable development need to be prioritized. Merely through addressing these structural and participatory gaps can CPEC accomplish its promise as a driver of prosperity rather than conflict.

2.2) Theoretical Framework

The study is guided by two diverse theoretical perspective institutional liberalism and constructivism. Together, these perspectives offer a complex understanding of how large-scale development initiatives like CPEC affect the social, economic and cultural fabric of border populations, especially Gojal Valley of Gilgit-Baltistan.

2.2.1) Institutional Liberalism

Institutional Liberalism, a main branch of liberal theory claims that cooperation between states is possible and viable when it's followed by international institutions guidelines, shared norms, and mutual interests. This theory recommends that states, instead of being permanent enemies as presented by Realism can achieve peace and prosperity through interdependence and systematic collaboration.⁴² From this perspective, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is considered as an institutionalized structure of cooperation that supports economic development, regional connectivity, and peaceful collaboration between China and Pakistan under the boarder Belt and Road Initiative BRI. In the subject of CPEC the liberal institutionalized their economic and strategic collaboration

⁴¹Racine, Jean-Luc. 2024. "Inside or Outside the Federation of Pakistan: The Gilgit-Baltistan Conundrum." *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 62 (3): 339–354. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14662043.2024.2422634>.

⁴²Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984).

through formal agreements, cooperation commitments and regulatory structures. This, it reduces conflict prospects and stems predictability in their bilateral relations. The structure provides a vivid and organized environment for maintaining shared interests, which links with the liberal concept that economic interdependence leads to peace by making conflict avoidable and cooperation more suitable.

In the context of the strategic Gojal Valley, which holds strategic significance along the northern route of CPEC, institutional liberalism gives a greater lens to comprehend how institutionalized cooperation generates local socio-economic and cultural transformation. The region once remote and unknown and geographically backward, has been swiftly adopted into economic and social networks, offering new opportunities for trade, employment and cultural exchange. This integration acknowledges that liberal thought of cooperation through organized measures brings not only prosperity at the state level but also social support and development. Moreover, the framework of CPEC is promoting people-to-people interactions, educational exchanges, and cultural linkages, which also reflects liberal institutional ideas of soft power and understanding.

Thus, through the lens of institutional liberalism, CPEC can be seen as a cooperative governance and regional practical embodiment, which promotes regional peace and development. It appears that the institutional mechanism formed can effectively manage strategic understanding and at the same time advance local contexts such as the Gojal Valley and socio-economic development. For this, this theory provides a strong framework to explain CPEC not only as a geopolitical entity but also as a liberal institution of shared development and stability.

2.2.2) Constructivism

Constructivism is a social theoretical perspective that accentuates the social construction of reality, emphasizing that meaning, identity, and knowledge are not objective or permanent, but are molded by social interaction, discourse, historical context, and cultural conditions⁴³. Initially originating in sociology and later in international relations and cultural studies, constructivism concentrates on the positive assumptions about how people construct meaning and allocate meaning to their world.

In light of this study, constructivism is applied to analyze the social, economic, and cultural transformations occurring in Gojal Valley, a strategically located region in northern Pakistan

⁴³Charlotte Nickerson. "Social Constructionism Theory: Definition and Examples." SimplyPsychology. February 14, 2024. <https://www.simplypsychology.org/social-constructionism.html>

that is directly affected by the CPEC initiative. The increasing presence of Chinese actors and the Pakistani state in local infrastructure and economic planning has initiated a wave of change that has exceeded economics, transforming cultural norms, social practices, and the authority of the local community. Applying a constructivist perspective on the study investigates how local cultural practices, heritage preservation, and traditional livelihoods are being influenced or altered by the growing Chinese presence in the Gojal district. According to the constructivist lens, development projects like CPEC not only bring material change but also carry symbolic and ideological messages about progress, identity, and modernity. Government needs to designate the district as a geopolitical corridor, and people may develop their identity in terms of indigenous history, trans-border relationships and cultural autonomy.

2.2.3) Theoretical Application

This study uses institutional liberalism and constructivism together to analyze the social, economic, and cultural changes brought about by Chinese involvement in the Gojal Valley under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). These perspectives help create a well-rounded view of both the practical aspects of development and the ideas that shape local meanings and identities. From a constructivist viewpoint, social reality is made by people instead of being fixed. It is shaped through shared ideas, interactions, and interpretations. In this study, constructivism looks at how greater interaction with Chinese people and foreign tourists has affected local cultural practices, traditional jobs, and views on heritage. Development is seen not just as economic change but as a process where communities reinterpret identity, modernity, and tradition in response to outside influences. This view explains how ongoing exposure to new norms and values helps shape changing cultural meanings, mixed identities, and different attitudes toward development and security in Gojal. On the other hand, institutional liberalism highlights the importance of institutions, norms, and cooperative frameworks in managing interconnectedness and encouraging benefits for everyone. In the CPEC context, this theory helps evaluate governance systems like local administrative bodies, development councils, and bilateral agreements that guide Chinese involvement in the area. It shows how effective institutional setups can connect external investment with local priorities, promote inclusive economic growth, and protect cultural continuity. Furthermore, institutional liberalism helps analyze the economic aspects of CPEC, especially how structured cooperation and organization contribute to long-term growth and fair distribution of benefits. By combining constructivism and institutional liberalism, the study includes both the socially built nature of local realities and the institutional processes

that influence cooperation and development outcomes. This combined approach provides a detailed understanding of CPEC's impact in Gojal, showing how outside involvement changes not only economic conditions but also cultural practices, social relationships, and collective awareness.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides the methodological framework implemented in studying the socio-economic and cultural significance of the Gojal Valley within the context of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The research methodology works as the integral structure guiding the interpretation of data and analysis to address the objectives of the study. This chapter presents the research design, philosophy, methodological approach, time horizon, sampling framework, instruments of data collection, and data analysis techniques. The mixed-method approach employed in this study integrates both qualitative and quantitative methods to give a holistic analysis of the study under investigation.

3.1) Research Ontology

Research ontology of the study addresses important questions about either reality is objective and independent of human perception or socially constructed through various human experiences, interpretations, and interactions.⁴⁴ Moreover, ontology explores “what is real” and how reality can be understood in different ways in the context of a study.

The ontological stance implemented in this study is constructivist, asserting that reality is socially constructed instead of objectively discovered. According to Gina and Lincoln (1995), a constructivist ontology asserts that realities are multiple, subjective, and transformed

⁴⁴Hashil Al-Saadi, “Demystifying Ontology and Epistemology in Research Methods” Research Gate, February 2014

through social interaction and shared meaning⁴⁵. This elucidates that communities and individuals interpret their experiences differently, mainly based on their historical, cultural, and social contexts.

In this study, constructivist ontology accepts that the socio-economic and cultural transformations in the Gojal Valley under CPEC projects are subject-dependent realities instead of objective facts. For example, the interpretation of development might differ among many groups like policymakers, it may show national progress and integration, for local residents, it might relate to livelihood opportunities, cultural preservation or displacement worries. Thus, this study approves that multiple realities coincide and interconnect. Development and change are seen as consequences of social negotiation and interpretation, not simply economic processes. The interchange between Pakistan and Chinese institutions as well as local communities create varied perceptions of cooperation and progress. In this study reality is seen as both subjective and co-constructed, particularly influenced by dialogue, culture and institutional engagement.

3.2) Research Epistemology

Epistemology is a branch of philosophy that deals with the nature, origin, and scope of knowledge, indicating how knowledge is acquired, validated, and interpreted⁴⁶. It focuses on what counts as admissible evidence and the relationship between the researcher and what is being studied⁴⁷. In research, epistemology explains how reality (as understood by ontology) can be known and what methods are approved to discover or interpret that knowledge. In this study, interpretivism is the epistemological stance that is consistent with the constructivist ontology. Interpretivism contends that knowledge is subjective, context-dependent, and co-constructed through interaction between the researcher and participants. It is different from positivist epistemology, which explores objective, measurable truths; interpretivism stresses understanding the meanings individuals or groups assign to social phenomena.

In this study, I've have actively participated in interpreting the social meaning constructed by individuals and groups. I co-created knowledge with my interaction with the residents,

⁴⁵Lincoln, Y. S. (1995). Emerging Criteria for Quality in Qualitative and Interpretive Research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 1(3), 275-289. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107780049500100301>

⁴⁶ Creswell, John W. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. 4th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2014

⁴⁷Saunders, Mark & Lewis, P. & Thornhill, A.. (2023). *Research Methods for Business Students*.

women, traders, officials, media representatives, and other customs workers and tourist guides, etc., who offered personal information on the implications of CPEC. The interpretivist stance gives more importance to qualitative data, concentrating on how people view and experience change rather than measuring them. Furthermore, this epistemology acknowledges a contextual and reflexive approach to investigation, where the researcher's knowledge changes with participation in the field. It explains that social knowledge cannot be kept away from human interpretation rather as it represents the interchange between individual insights, institutional practices, and extensive socio-political context.⁴⁸

3.3) Research Approach

A research approach is the overall outline and process for conducting research, which involves extensive assumptions and broad methods for collecting, evaluating, and interpreting of data. It gives a framework for research objectives, guiding the researcher's decision of data collection and analysis methods to achieve make sure the study is valid and reliable. The most common types of research approach are quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods⁴⁹.

I've applied a mixed-methods research approach to the study, which integrates both qualitative and quantitative techniques within a single study to give a comprehensive knowledge of a research problem. The mixed method approach integrates the subjective experiences of residents with objective statistical data on economic and infrastructural development.

According to Creswell, a mixed method approach integrates "involves the collection and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data in a single study in which the data are integrated, connected or embedded"⁵⁰. In the context of this study, quantitative data such as employment statistics, trade figures and tourism growth complement qualitative ideas derived from interviews and observations of local communities affected by CPEC projects.

⁴⁸Lincoln, Y., Lynham, S. and Guba, E. (2011) Paradigmatic Controversies, Contradictions, and Emerging Confluences. In: Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y., Eds., *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Sage, 91-95.

⁴⁹ Khan, Jaffer & Raman, Alamelu & Sambamoorthy, Nithya & Prashanth, Kanniga. (2023). Research Methodology (Methods, Approaches And Techniques). 10.59646/rmmethods/040.

⁵⁰Creswell, John W. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. 4th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2014

The mixed method approach in this study is grounded in pragmatism which emphasizes research questions over methodological purity.⁵¹ Pragmatism supports methodological flexibility permitting the researcher to use whatever tools best address the research questions. This agrees with the study's goal to unfold statistical patterns and contextual interpretations related to CPEC influence in Gojal Valley. Through mixing data types, the study explored to balance the breath of quantitative investigation with the depth of qualitative exploration.

3.4) Research Strategy

A research strategy is essential in providing direction to the study and assists in choosing a suitable approach for data collection. Research strategies are divided into two categories: one of them is quantitative, and the other is qualitative research⁵². Qualitative research includes gathering and analyzing data, which is descriptive in nature. This sort of research aids in understanding concepts, and it can be utilized to collect views and create novel knowledge for the research. Qualitative research also uses observation as an important technique for data collection. The opposite of qualitative research is quantitative research. Quantitative research deals with numerical data, which is used for mathematical operations during research work.

This research is based on a constructivist ontology and informed by growth model development theory, acknowledging both the social validity and objective economic structures of the subject. Therefore, it employs a mixed-methods strategy, combining fact-finding (quantitative) with case studies and narrative inquiry (qualitative) to explore the social, economic, and cultural impacts of CPEC on the Gojal Valley.

The mixed-method strategy gives a multidimensional point of view to complex social phenomena by integrating the strengths of both quasi and qualitative approaches. For this study, quantitative data are crucial for analyzing tangible economic outcomes such as employment rates, income growth or changes and access to infrastructure. Spontaneously,

⁵¹Johnson, R. B., & Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2004). Mixed Methods Research: A Research Paradigm Whose Time Has Come. *Educational Researcher*, 33(7), 14-26. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X033007014>

⁵²Tenny S, Brannan JM, Brannan GD. Qualitative Study. [Updated 2022 Sep 18]. In: StatPearls [Internet]. Treasure Island (FL): StatPearls Publishing; 2025 Jan-. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK470395/>

qualitative data presents the intangible cultural and social transformations, involving shifts in identity, community cohesion and local perceptions of development.

3.5) Research Design

Researcher adopts a research design an (operational plan) to address question credibly. A research design elucidates the type of analysis one should carry out to get the desired outcomes. Moreover, a research design gives the structure for collecting, and interpreting data to address the study's research questions⁵³. This research adopts a mixed-method design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the socio-economic and cultural impacts of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) on Gojal Valley. This approach permits triangulation which improves the credibility, reliability, and validity of the findings.

Research design is of three types: exploratory, explanatory, and descriptive. This study follows an exploratory and descriptive design.

- **Exploratory Research:** This research design is employed when the research problem is unknown or vague. It aims to provide a depth analysis of the study's research questions and its background context before further research⁵⁴.

This study is exploratory because previous empirical research is quite limited on the micro-level impacts of CPEC in Gojal Valley, particularly related to socio-cultural change and local economic transformations.

- **Descriptive Research:** The descriptive research design determines a phenomenon and its characteristics. Instead of studying why or how the phenomenon happens, it seeks to understand what it is. It only summarizes the topic of the research without explaining why it happens⁵⁵. This study follows a descriptive research design as well because it's objective to describe and interpret the persisting socio-economic factors, local perceptions, and cultural changes occurring from CPEC-related developments.

⁵³ senahabi, Bostley. (2019). Basics of Research Design: A Guide to selecting appropriate research design. 6. 76 - 89.

⁵⁴ Saka, Rahmon & Joe, ONONOKPONO. (2023). Exploratory Research Design in Management Science: A Review of Literature on Conduct and Application. International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science. VII. 1384-1395. 10.47772/IJRISS.2023.7515.

⁵⁵ Shinija, Mrs.N.Adlin. (2024). DESCRIPTIVE RESEARCH DESIGN. 10.13140/RG.2.2.19205.36325.

Through assimilating both, the study seeks not only to explore new dynamics of CPEC's local impact but also to describe patterns and trends evident in community responses and quantitative data.

3.6) Time Horizon

Within the structure of a research study, the time horizon determines the duration of the study and creates the temporal condition of the research. A critical factor of research design is the selection of a time horizon that affects the study's depth, acuity and relevance⁵⁶. Time horizons are of two main kinds in research:

- **Cross-Sectional Time Horizon:** A cross-sectional study is conducted out during a very short period of time or at a single point in time. It provides a brief overview of some events at one point in time. It is important for investigating links or features that exist at a specific moment in time.
- **Longitudinal Time Horizon:** For a longitudinal study gathering data requires a lengthy time frame. It makes it possible for either academics to track new advancements, patterns or changes across period of time. It is mainly significant in understanding patterns, dynamics and development of a phenomenon.

This study acquires a cross-sectional time horizon because data were collected at a particular time between July and August 2025 to click the recent socio-economic and cultural impacts of CPEC on Gojal Valley. A cross-sectional approach is best suitable because the primary goal is to identify the existing factors, perceptions and results rather than track long-term transitions.

Nonetheless, to enhance the interpretation, factors or a longer perspective were also mixed through secondary data analysis involving government reports, previous studies, and official statistics from 2015 to 2025 to give a relative understanding of how socio-economic factors have changed since the beginning of CPEC-related projects.

Primarily, the integration makes sure that while the research demonstrates a snapshot of the current scenario but it circumstantially relies on the informed historical and developmental patterns, permitting a more comprehensive analysis of CPEC's short- and long-term impacts on Gojal Valley.

3.7) Data Collection

⁵⁶Matza LS, Boye KS, Feeny DH, Bowman L, Johnston JA, Stewart KD, McDaniel K, Jordan J. The time horizon matters: results of an exploratory study varying the timeframe in time trade-off and standard gamble utility elicitation. *Eur J Health Econ.* 2016 Nov;17(8):979-990. doi: 10.1007/s10198-015-0740-7. Epub 2015 Nov 26. PMID: 26611792; PMCID: PMC5047932.

The process of obtaining information or data to address research questions, test patterns, or to attain comprehension of a problem is considered as data collection. Different techniques and procedures are implemented to gather data, particularly relying on the research objectives, the nature of the research field, available resources and ethical considerations⁵⁷.

In a mixed-methods research design, both qualitative and quantitative approaches are utilized to gather and evaluate data. This integration assisted me to attain both depth and breadth of understanding. Qualitative data give detailed views and explanations, whereas quantitative data elucidate measurable evidence and patterns.

For this study, the data are collected from two main sources: Primary sources and Secondary sources.

Primary sources

Primary sources indicate to original data collected directly from the field or participants for the specific motive of the study. In the subject of this study on China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the Strategic Significance of Gojal Valley; A Socio-Economic and Cultural Analysis, Primary data were collected using both qualitative and quantitative instruments.

- **Qualitative Data**

Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interview and FGDs with local communities, local leaders, business owners, tourist guides, hotel owners, local tourist agency officials and local media representatives and stakeholders of local organizations in the Gojal Valley. These procedures helped me to understand the community perspectives, experiences, and attitudes regarding the socio-economic and cultural effects of CPEC.

- **Quantitative, Data**

Quantitative data were collected through structured questionnaires distributed among the selected households in Gojal Valley. The questionnaire was mainly designed to evaluate important indicators such as income levels, employment rates, CPEC-related job opportunities and access to education and perceptions related to infrastructural development and economic opportunities initiated by CPEC.

⁵⁷Gunaseena, P & Hapuarachchi, T & Ekanayake, U & Rajapaksha, Sandya & Gunawardana, K & Aluthge, P & Alvis, Kapila & Gunathilake, S. (2024). The Crucial Role of Data Collection in Research: Techniques, Challenges, and Best Practices.

- **Secondary Sources**

These sources help in examining and approving primary findings. I have used published research papers, Government and official reports to approve the primary data gathered through thematic analysis survey. Primarily, reports from the Planning Commission of Pakistan, CPEC Authority academic institutions and international development organizations were reviewed. Likely, news articles and online databases were also used to analyze ongoing development and public opinion regarding CPEC and its regional impacts.

Through integrating qualitative and quantitative methods and generating data from many sources. The study gives a comprehensive and balanced information of the socio-economic and cultural transformation occurring in the Gojal Valley under the influence of the CPEC.

- **Sampling Techniques for Quantitative Research**

I have applied a stratified sampling technique for the quantitative part of the study. This method consists of dividing the study area Gojal Valley into different subgroups (strata) based on geographical location, population size or livelihood pattern. I selected a random sample from each stratum to make sure all significant parts of the population were proportionally represented in the study. I opted this sample type because it's reducing sampling bias and fosters representativeness. It also allows comparison between various areas and community groups while providing valid quantitative data on socio-economic factors such as income, employment, education and access to services. The target sample size for the structured survey was around 120 households and individuals, which was effective to ensure statistical accuracy whereas it was also feasible within the time and resource context.

- **Sampling Technique for Qualitative Research**

In this part of the study, I have implemented purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques. The non-probability procedures are suitable for selecting participants who possess abundant, relevant and useful insight regarding the research topic.

- 1. Purposive sampling**

Participants were selected deliberately based on their insights, experiences, or involvement in CPEC related developments. This involved community elders, local business owners, youth representatives, women teachers, and local organizations' representatives. The main motive was to click on different perspectives on the socio-economic and cultural changes occurring from CPEC.

- 2. Snowball Sampling**

After selecting initial participants through purposive sampling, they were asked to suggest or introduce other individuals with relevant experiences or opinions. This approach helped me reach important informants and individuals who were not easily approached through formal channels.

The sample size for qualitative data involved around 20 semi-structured interviews and 4-6 focus group discussions with about 6-8 participants each. The procedure continued till data saturation was gained, that is, when no new themes or information appeared from additional interviews.

3.8) Data Analysis

Data analysis is the method of systematically evaluating and interpreting gathered information to identify meaningful conclusions, to draw patterns and address the research questions⁵⁸. Though I've applied a mixed-method research design in this study therefore both qualitative and quantitative analytical techniques were utilized to provide a detailed understanding of the research problem. The combination of both methods allows for triangulation, comparing and cross-validating findings from various data sources to strengthen the credibility and validity of the outcomes.

1. Quantitative Data Analysis

The quantitative data gathered through structured questionnaires from households in the Gojal Valley were analyzed using statistical tools such as Microsoft Excel. The analysis consists of various important steps, starting with Data coding and cleaning to graphical presentation. In this study I have employed descriptive and inferential statistical evaluation to determine the quantitative data collected through the survey. I applied descriptive analysis to assess and show socio-economic and cultural transformation related insights provided by the survey respondents. I employed different instruments such as frequencies, percentages, means and charts to determine patterns related to income levels, employment, and perceptions of CPEC's impact in Gojal Valley. Further I used Cronbach's alpha formula to evaluate the reliability of the study and the validity of the study was justified through content validity and Construct validity. In order to calculate the EFA I used Kasie-Meyer-Olkin formula and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity to further analyze the survey findings.

2. Qualitative Data Analysis

⁵⁸Dibekulu, Dawit. (2020). An Overview of Data Analysis and Interpretations in Research. 1-27. 10.14662/IJARER2020.015.

The data collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion was evaluated through thematic analysis. This approach involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting repetitive themes and patterns that appeared in the data collection. This involved the following steps:

- Transcription and familiarization with the gathered data.
- Phrasing important notions and statements related to the research objectives was highlighted and assigned codes.
- Codes were then further grouped into broader themes that represented the main finding of the study.
- Interpretation of themes in relation to the theoretical framework.

This analysis provides an in-depth overview of how individuals and communities view, experience, and adapt to the transformation brought about by CPEC influences their region. Data triangulation is carried out to compare statistical findings with interpretive understanding to seek areas of convergence and divergence.

3.9) Research Ethics

Research ethics are the guidelines that a researcher needs to acknowledge and work within, following the principles and rules created by academic institutions. Ethical practices ensure that research is conducted with honesty, transparency, and accountability, protecting both the informants and the integrity of the study. In abstraction, research ethics are desired at protecting the research participants, data, and findings from harm or manipulation, data and findings from harm or manipulation and ensuring the legitimacy and credibility of the study. The ethical considerations undertaken for this research are as follows:

Institutional conformity the study has been strictly conducted in accordance with the rules and ethical standards set by Bahria University. All procedures involving human participants were designed to align with institutional standard for responsible research.

Original Authorship: The research has been accomplished without any help from ghostwriter or third individual. All written manuscripts, analysis and documentation presented in this study are my original efforts.

Plagiarism-Free Work: The study is free from plagiarism. All external sources involving books, journal, articles, reports and online reference have been properly approved and cited according to Chicago referencing style.

Authenticity of Citations: All citations and references included in this thesis have been personally ratified by me to ensure accuracy, reliability and proper acknowledgment.

Authenticity of Data and Findings: The data gathered and the findings showed are authentic and reliable. No falsification, fabrication or manipulation of data has happened during any phase of the research process.

Objectivity and Neutrality: The research has been employed in an unbiased and impartial way. My own opinion, preferences or other institutional influences have not changed the interpretation of data or the demonstration of results gathered from the research.

Contribution and Purpose of the study: The main objective of this study is to contribute new insights into the socio-economic and cultural impacts of CPEC on the Gojal Valley mainly because there is least data available regarding this. The study main reason is to enhance academic understanding and to support informed policy making without any implicit clash of interest or agenda.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS/ RESULTS/ FINDINGS

4.1) Introduction:

In this chapter the primary focus is the analysis of the data collected to see the socio, economic and political aspects of China Pakistan Economic Corridor CPEC in the Gojal Valley of Hunza Gilgit Baltistan. The Gojal Valley range of around 20 villages and has major significance on the above-mentioned aspects. The major objective of this chapter is examining the data based on the qualitative and quantitative method. For this I conducted surveys among the local communities including the major stakeholders, village organizations representatives, local business owners and traders of China and Pakistan and household owners. This mixed methodology helped me get better insight of my research topic and also guided me understanding the socio-economic and cultural impact of CPEC in Gojal Valley.

This chapter is divided into two main sections. The first sections narrate the analysis qualitative data conducted with the help of Quirks Software. This software helped me identifying emerging themes from 20 semi-structured interviews and six focus group

discussions. On the other hand, the second section focuses on the quantitative data analysis, which shows descriptive statistics and numerical trend resulting from compiled survey data on the Microsoft Excel. In addition to it, this chapter evaluated economic changes in Gojal Valley, which includes the change in employment among the locals. Secondly, rise in the tourism trends and local commercial activities and improvement in infrastructure development. Furthermore, the credibility and reliability of the study was enhanced by both sets of findings with the help of triangulation.

4.2 Outline of Qualitative Data:

Qualitative data was collected through around 20 semi-structured interviews and six focus groups discussions conducted in different locations in the Gojal valley with the participants including youths, women, business owners and community organizations representatives and political leaderships. The purposive sampling method helped to ensure that participants characterized diverse realms, involving local business owners, media persons, educational background personalities and NGO officials, to make inclusive socio-economic viewpoints. Moreover, the main objective is to study ways to generate extensive knowledge with the local perceptions, their lifetime experiences and social factors that shaped the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) developments.

Firstly, all the interviews and focus group discussions conducted were audio-recorded, precisely transcribed and entirely analyzed on the Quirkos Software manually. This helped me do a well-organized coding, visualization of trends and categorization of the responses. Secondly, the thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke directed the process through six phases. It starts with familiarization with data then searching a theme and generating initial codes, reviewing themes and naming themes and finally generating the report. From the analysis, three decisive themes emerged, each covering multiple sub-themes:

1. CPEC Infrastructure and Local Perception
2. Economic and Social Transformation
3. Cultural and Demographic Shifts

4.2.1) Theme 1: CPEC Infrastructure and Local Perception

The participants across all the study locations generally agreed to the point that CPEC infrastructure projects have a meaningful impact on enhanced connectivity and accessibility in the Gojal Valley. Some of the important project includes the reconstruction and widening

of the Karakoram Highway (KKH). In addition to it, the construction of new link roads giving easy access to trade centers and trade routes. Plus, the extension of customs and border facilities at the SOST Dry port. These developmental projects are seen as transformative, resulting in reduced travel duration, refining trade efficiency and igniting the sense of integration into national and international economic networks.

A Business owner from Passu stated that: **“A few decades back, we used to project our trade journey weeks or even month before. The reason was lack of easy access roads in Gojal. But after the CPEC projects and reconstruction of Karakoram Highway, it is quite feasible to travel and the travel time has cut to half and trade with China is smoother than ever”**.

Likewise, a media person from the Digital Media **“PAMIRTIMES”** said that: **“The graphic transformation of Gojal is obvious today. The better infrastructure including roads markets and even communication towers have shaped locals’ life for good. They now feel part of something huge, instead of just a remote valley in the North of Pakistan”**.

These opinions emphasize the physiological impact of infrastructure development. As Constructivist theory suggests that individual don’t only react to material changes, they actively interpret them, creating new meanings and social identities. If we keep this theory in mind, the infrastructural developments not only improve a situation of an area but also contribute to a keen sense of connectivity, visibility and agency between the locals and reshape local opinion of progress and inclusion.

According to locals, the newly constructed roads and communication system not only improved the travelling but had also created a feeling of pride and belief in the valley’s potential. Millions of tourists from Pakistan and foreign countries visit Gojal annually. The reason is easily accessible roads and beautiful landscapes. Moreover, the lush green valleys are being explored by tourists and the reason is the easily accessible roads and transport. In addition to it, local participants of my survey aged 23-30 agreed to the point that large projects in their towns changed their way of living. Previously they use to feel isolated but now their living lifestyle has changed and they feel more connected to the rest of the world. In the same instance, A university student from Gulmit commented regarding connectivity across the region: **“Before CPEC, the people of Gojal have suffered a lot. They were entirely disconnected from Gilgit Baltistan and Pakistan. It was because of the Attabad**

disaster on January 4, 2010. This incident entirely disconnected Gojal and eventually we all suffered. But after the CPEC projects of Attabad tunnels and bridges not only we got easy access to rest of Pakistan but it also boosted the tourism in Gojal valley resulting in the employment opportunities for the locals.” Through this we can come to conclusion that infrastructure under CPEC played two major purposes: A physical role that is the infrastructural development and also a symbolic role of involving people in society and politics.

Even though, many participants shared positive aspects of CPEC in Gojal Valley, but few folks expressed concerned about the negative consequences on environment. In this regard a representative from a local non-profit organization KADO stated:

“Our infrastructure has improved, but at the same time it poses threats to people and the wildlife. In addition to it, landslides and frequent Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOF) are all the consequences of these developments in our region specifically Gojal. And the irony is no one appears to be in charge of safeguarding the environment. In addition to it, the wildlife is also at risk. The natural habitat of snow leopard and Himalayan ibex is also affected by the CPEC projects.”

This point of view indicates that a socially created clash between economic progress and protecting the environment. In this regard, Institutional liberalism illustrates that good governance, rules and teamwork in planning are essential for ensuring infrastructure growth is sustainable and also align with the long-term goals of the community.

4.2.2) Theme 2: Economic and Social Transformation:

In the interviews and group discussions, majority of the participants believed there has been significant growth in the Gojal region. Almost all the sectors got boost which includes Tourism, Hoteling, Trade, Transportations, Small local businesses and may more.

A hotel owner from Gulmit claimed: **“In the last five years, our hotel bookings have doubled. Tourists come because the roads are better now and they hear about CPEC on the news. It has made Gojal more visible to the rest of the world.”** On the contrary, a female entrepreneur running a handicraft business remarked: **“Before the realignment of KKH, we had few customers, mostly local visitors, now; we sell to Chinese as well as western tourists and also export small quantities to Kashgar, China. Nevertheless, access to business training and funding is still narrow.** These remarks by the respondents

reveal that though CPEC has increased economic growth, the benefits are unfairly distributed. Those individuals and households with previous business experience or access to capital have gained inexplicably, whereas marginalized groups mainly women and residents of the remote villages continue to face hurdles. Focus group discussions exposed a unique perception: although rising income levels are celebrated, participants expressed concern over the dominance of foreign expertise in high-skilled sectors. A Local customs worker in Sost observed:

“Locals get jobs as drivers, guides or loaders, but the engineers and managers come from outside. Meanwhile our people (People of Gojal) require training programs to compete.”

Apart from economics, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor played a role in the social structure of the local communities. The survey participants consented that healthcare has improved, enhanced mobility, and better educational opportunities enabled by new roads and digital infrastructure. For example, fiber optic networks set up under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor have made online learning easy and accessible. It boosts remote business cooperation and far-reaching connectivity with national and international markets. In addition to it, these developments have given rise to social shifts, as traditional community practices are replaced by market-driven relations.

A local village organization representative revealed, **“There was a time when Gojal and the people of Gojal were so connected with each other. We used to go to everyone’s happiness and sadness, means their wedding events or others demise. But now the situation has changed; the recent generations are busy with their businesses and are cut off from each other. Nowadays, Youth think more like urban dwellers.”**

The above statement supports the constructivist perspective, highlighting the social realities and dynamic connections, and is changing the response to economic and technological transformations. Even though economic expansion enhances material well-being, it also changes the cultural fabric and interpersonal networks that used to sustain community unity.

There was one major concern among the participants that tourism brings both pros and cons. Although tourism has increased a great exposure to local business but at the same time it gives can rise to exploitation and pose risk to the locals living.

4.2.3) Theme 3: Demographic and Cultural Changes:

From the reference of interviews and focus group discussions, demographic and cultural changes are notable in every theme, showing the deep socio-cultural transformation following CPEC's infrastructural developments in Gojal Valley. During the reconstruction of KKH there were wholesome interactions among Chinese workers and Local community. In addition to it, Chinese workers and engineers started learning the local languages Wakhi and Brushaki. On the other hand, the local people started learning Mandarin in order to communicate with the workers. This helped them to do easy trade with the China. For several participants, these interactions are seen as inspiring, creating new learning opportunities and for greater global awareness.

A teacher from Al-Amyn Model School, Gulmit described both concern and appreciation about this cultural unification:

“Many of my students can speak Chinese/Mandarin) and they are quite curious about the festivals celebrated in China. As the ties between Pakistan and China is in good terms. Our school receives many Chinese guests every year and they really enjoy the Wakhi Tajik Culture of Gojal. But I fear that our people will forget their own identity and language if they aren't taught the importance of culture and identity.”

Likely, a young tour Guide from Passu shared her thoughts regarding cultural exposure:

“I know a lot about the Chinese people and their disciplinary nature and their incredible hard work. This thing really fascinates me. I have started learning Mandarin recently and when in future I will get a chance I will surely visit China. Somewhere from our childhood, we have seen them around. Moreover, Mandarin also helps me to easily communicate with my tour members.”

However, many elderly participants expressed their fear and uncertainty towards rapid cultural transformation. They fear that the people of Gojal will lose their identity. One Elder from Ghulkin said that: **“We welcome trade and friendship, but our way of life is transforming rapidly. The respect, simplicity and unity are lacking in this generation and is being vanished.”**

In contrast, younger respondents positively see these interactions, considering them as opportunities for connections and growth. A Bahria University student from Khyber remarked:

“The world is going through a global change. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor makes us realize that even from belonging to remote place like Gojal; we still can connect to the rest of the world. It empowers us that we matter in this flagship project.”

These opposing views highlight the Constructivist name of cultural change. We can assume that the elders and the younger generation see these changes differently. For example, the older locals believe that the external influences as potential threats to their traditional values. Meanwhile, the Gojal youth welcome these changes; they see it as a pathway to modernity and global participation. In addition to it, many participants asked for initiatives to promote cultural tourism, preserve local languages and ensure cross-cultural programs.

PAMIR TIMES founder claimed that:

“Cultural tourism can be a source of strength if institutions support it. But without policy decisions, we might lose the uniqueness of Gojal. Development should not come at the cost of identity.”

The woman in hospitality and handicraft segments also highlights how cultural exchange has reformed gender roles. A café owner in Hussaini said that:

“Women in Gojal are now equally participating in small scale business. Now that more tourists visit, women have small café and guesthouse. It’s a new experience for the women of this region, previously women weren’t in business. We feel more confident and empowered.”

That one thing, that everyone agreed is **“Sometimes tourist expect us to perform our culture for them. We want to share, but not to sell our traditions.”**

Migration pattern show that younger residents aren’t willing to live Gojal, but they want to move to Gilgit or Islamabad or somewhere else. They reason this as opportunity for better educational institutions and better employment choices. Meanwhile, people from rest of GB are settling in Gojal for earning. A store owner talked about this:

“There are new faces in this part of Gojal annually. It is seen that people from other provinces have opened shops and hotels here. It’s good for business purpose but somewhere we are losing control over own market.”

Another participant added to this:

“The valley is getting crowded more and more every year. Prices of basic needs have gone up, and traditional hospitality has become commercialized.”

One local administrator said: **“We need clear policies that protect local land ownership while giving space to new investors to invest in Gojal. Without proper planning, rapid migration and business competition create troubles.”**

It is quite evident that institutional coordination between local governments, community organizations and national authorities is important to overcome social displacement and preserve the community unity. The demographic and cultural changes in Gojal valley are dynamic and multidimensional. Collectively, these changes exemplify how development initiatives not only change the physical landscape but also reconfigure the social and cultural fabric of host communities.

4.3) Outline of Quantitative Data

For this study numerical data were collected through structured survey and Google Form, which were distributed among 120 participants from different parts of Gojal, consisting of Gulmit, Ghulkin, Passu, Khyber, Murkhooon and Sost, each village along the KKH. The main target of my survey were household and individuals working in various segments of tourism, trade, transportation and local administration. To analyze the data collected from the survey I used Microsoft Excel for frequency distributions, percentages, and pie charts and graphical representations to identify emerging patterns. I distributed around 100 survey questionnaires among individuals from the above-mentioned villages most of them were tourism workers. The rest 20 questionnaires were answered on Google form. The 120 questionnaires distributed online and physically I acknowledged around 104 valid and completed, drawing a response rate of 86.6%.

4.3.1) Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

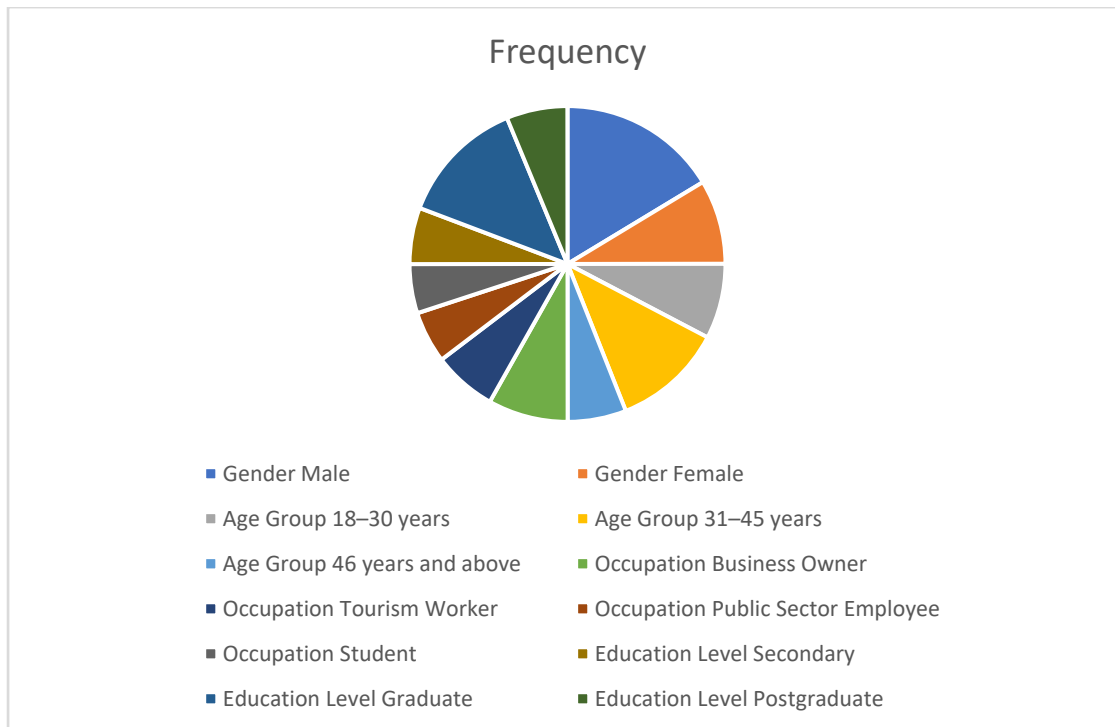


Chart 4.1 reviews the demographic profile of respondents.

The demographic profile of the survey shows a different sample that encompasses several socio-economic groups within Gojal Valley. A significant section of respondents, around 55% had at least graduate degree, presenting a reasonably educated population actively engaged in discussions around development and modernization. The high participation of business owners and tourism workers reveals the economic sectors most affected by CPEC related transformations.

4.3.2) Perception of CPEC Infrastructure Development

Perception of CPEC's infrastructural projects in Gojal Valley were the most important question in the survey. In order to know the population's awareness respondents were asked to rate their awareness involving Realignment of KKH, border facilitation and telecommunication upgrades.

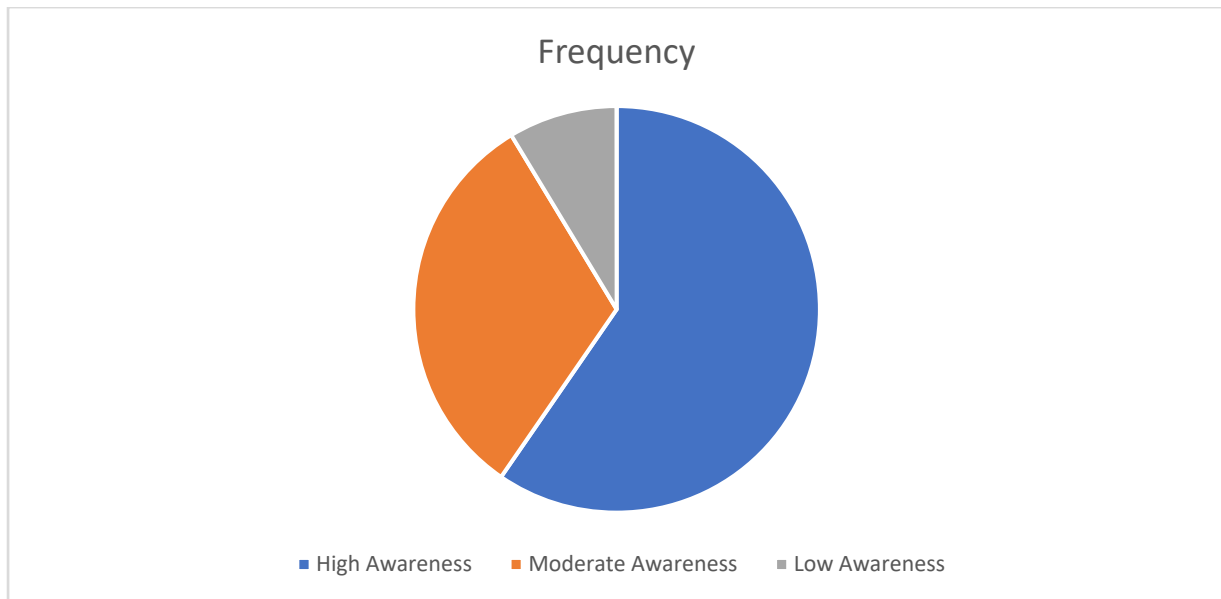


Chart 4.2 shows the distribution of awareness level among the respondents.

Nearly **91.3%** of respondents validated moderate to high awareness of CPEC activities in the region. The extension of the Karakoram Highway (KKH), construction of new link roads, and improvement in cross-border trade facilities were recognized as the most familiar development initiatives.

When asked to rate their satisfaction with these infrastructural improvements on a five-point Likert scale, **67%** reported being satisfied or highly satisfied, quoting improved connectivity and transport reliability as a major advantage. Whereas **22%** expressed neutral opinions, and **11%** showed dissatisfaction, mainly because of environmental concerns and disruptions to local livelihoods during construction phases.

4.3.3) Reliability and Validity Analysis

Reliability counts the internal consistency of the research survey tool, the extent to which the questionnaire items reliably measure the anticipated constructs⁵⁹. To evaluate the reliability of the research instrument, I calculated the Cronbach's alpha while utilizing the responses of 104 survey respondents. The questionnaire was based on various dimensions including economic impact, tourism promotion, cultural exchange and demographic change collectively including a total 30 items. The overall Cronbach's alpha value measured was 0.731, which is

⁵⁹Hossan, Dalowar & Wolfs, Bert & Jesmin, Noor-E-Medina & Petkovic, Milos. (2025). QUESTIONNAIRE VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY: A REVIEW WITH PRACTICAL GUIDELINES. 13. 135-186.

higher than the recommended threshold of 0.70 recommended by Nunnally⁶⁰, demonstrating a good level of internal consistency between items. Now the research is considered reliable for further statistical analysis.

Reliability and validity are important factors in evaluating the quality of research results. Validity means to the level to which a study precisely measures what it plans to measure, securing that the outcomes driver is sound and applicable. It incorporates various forms involving internal validity, external validity and construct validity⁶¹.

In this research I have used content validity and construct validity. To make sure the content effectiveness, initially the questionnaire was reviewed by my supervisor and later it was reviewed by two senior research analysts' familiar with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and the Gojal Valley region. Their feedback assisted me to improve the item clarity of the questionnaire relevance and language consistency.

Exploratory Factor Analysis was utilized to ensure the construct validity of the research instrument.

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy:

The KMO value shows how well all the variables are linked and suitable for grouping into factors. Values range from 0-1 with a value closer to 1 shows greater effectiveness. According to Kaiser (1974), a KMO value above 0.70 is considered good.

The KMO value in this study was 0.783, demonstrating that the dataset had enough correlation between items and was efficient for factor analysis.

Bartlett's Test of Sphericity:

This evaluation determines if the correlation matrix significantly varies from the identity matrix (showing complete independence between the variables). In order to support the application for factor analysis a significant p-value of $p < 0.05$ shows a correlation prevails between the variables. The result of this analysis $p < 0.91$ justifies that strong link exists among the items, it makes the data more appropriate for further factor extraction. After generating the suitability of the data analysis through these two evaluation EFA was operated. The analysis reveals that the items grouped together in a coherent way with the theoretical framework of the research represents that the item's goal at measuring economic, social, cultural and tourism implications undoubtedly connect with these prevailing factors. This

⁶⁰Adamson, Katie & Prion, Susan. (2013). Reliability: Measuring Internal Consistency Using Cronbach's α . *Clinical Simulation in Nursing*. 9. e179-e180. 10.1016/j.ecns.2012.12.001.

⁶¹Andersson, Mira & Boateng, Kofi & Abos, Pro. (2024). Validity and Reliability: The extent to which your research findings are accurate and consistent.

grouping justifies that the questionnaire assesses the construct it was created to analyze, therefore validating the suitability of the tools.

Dimension / Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Reliability Level
Economic Impact	8	0.745	Acceptable
Social Development	7	0.721	Acceptable
Cultural Change	6	0.703	Acceptable
Tourism Promotion	9	0.758	Good
Overall Scale	30	0.731	Acceptable

4.4) Discussion of Major Findings

This section discusses what infrastructure projects have brought socio-economic and cultural transformations in the Gojal Valley. Drawing on both the quantitative results and qualitative discourses. Through the incorporation of constructivist and institutional liberal school of thoughts, the discussion highlights that CPEC's influence translates into material development; however, it also reforms perceptions, norms and institutional relationships that describe how local communities experience transformation.

4.4.1) CPEC Infrastructure Projects in Gojal Valley

1. Attabad Lake Tunnel project

In 2010, a massive landslide blocked the flow of the Hunza River, developed an artificial lake. The rising water flooded villages Ayeenabad, Shishkat, and parts of Gulmit. The disaster also claimed several lives, submerged surrounding villages and displaced around 25000 people of the area. Homes, shops, schools, and Muslim heritage sites were lost beneath the water. Food, medicine, and supplies became scarce as transport routes, even helicopters, were not able to reach these remote villages. After the Attabad disaster occurred for around

five years and nine months, trade between Pakistan and China through the KKH and access of people of the Gojal area of upper Hunza to the rest of the country relied on boat services in the lake. During the period of disaster, the number of containers carrying Chinese imports and export goods dropped to about one-third.

In 2015, a major reconstruction project restored the highway. The project included five tunnels with complete length of seven kilometers, two bridges and 78 culverts. The tunnels have been named as Pakistan-China Friendship Tunnels. Attabad tunnel project not only reduced travel time for the locals but also boosted tourists flow from China to Pakistan.

It was named as “Realignment of Karakorum Highway at Attabad Barrier Lake” the complete cost of this project was around US\$275 million. Within three years, it restored the road link of Gojal Valley with the rest of Gilgit-Baltistan. State run news agency claimed that the project was executed by China Road and Bridge Corporation of China and the National Highway Authority.

Today, Attabad has become a popular tourist point because of its piercing, cobalt-blue waters. It's mainly because of the Attabad tunnels developed in cooperation with China. Despite its tragic origins, the lake has become a unique source of economic opportunity. The Attabad tunnel is a significant part of it; without its construction, Attabad Lake wouldn't have become popular today. A participant from Shishkat expressed her satisfaction with the construction of the tunnels. She stated that **“Attabad Lake is a source of income for various shishkat families, our sons have either opened their boat service or some have opened their traditional jewelry and handicrafts store there.”**

Another Participant running her food shop near the KKH expressed that **“Various female entrepreneurs are selling Handicrafts and food items, and the community is rebuilding itself stronger than ever.**

Shishkat is the only village in Gojal that is adjacent to the Attabad tunnel; thus this part of Gojal has changed drastically after the construction of the tunnels. Many Hotels and resorts and trekking and zipline sites have been opened recently, which has not only brought economic opportunity for the residents of Shishkat but have also changed the landscape of Shishkat. Once this part of Gojal was least developed today this has changed into a tourist spot. Another Participant who was an owner of the Luxus Resort expressed its concerns

regarding environmental changes. He voiced, **“I believe the construction of Attabad has a miracle for us because we lived four years of the Attabad disaster in economic turmoil. Attabad tunnels not only reduced travel time but have also brought various opportunities regarding employment and Education for our youth. If this project was never being implemented, we would have lived in the Stone Age.”**

While tourism has brought new opportunities, traditional livelihoods, particularly agriculture (cash crops like potatoes) in the submerged areas, were heavily damaged. The short-term boat transport system that existed before the tunnels were built also provided a fixed income for several boatmen, a source of income that ended after the road link was restored. Many of my interview respondents demonstrated the intense change in livelihoods following the infrastructural developments and environmental changes brought by the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the formation of Attabad Lake. A local farmer from Gulmit elucidated that before the lake submerged agricultural lands, his family’s main source of income used to depend on farming of cash crops like potatoes. According to the farmer, **“We used to sell our crops in Gilgit and to rest of Pakistan, but when the fields went underwater, we lost not just land, but our way of living as well.”** Underlining the fragility that comes along tourism-based earnings. Likewise, another respondent a former boatman from Hussaini, asserted that how the temporary transport system once linked remote villages across the KKH has provided stable employment for the locals. **“When the tunnels were initiated, that income vanished overnight. But today I’m happy that I’m working as a driver for tourist though I had to start from scratch again.”**

Sost Dry Port

The Sost dry port holds great importance for international trade, as it serves as a key node of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. It works as an important channel for trade between China and Pakistan through the Khunjerab Pass. Sost dry port is a center of commerce from the regular hustle of minor traders to multi-million-rupee shipments. A diverse and enduring system functions here. Young local are unemployed and work in this port as carriers for small-scale goods, leveraging border pass allowance that allow limited baggage for personal use. These goods are passed through Chinese customs legally and are handed over to the real owners in exchange for small per-kilogram or commission. The process is repeated various times since border pass holder are allowed many entrances per year in accordance to the bilateral arrangements.

The Sost dry port is the main source of income for many unemployed youths and for many businessmen. Thus, the Port serves as an important economic center for the locals of Gojal, showing the physical and symbolic connection point for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. Majority of the respondents claimed that Sost Dry Port is main economic driver for Gojal, 50% respondents of the survey claimed that most of the youth are working in the custom or transportation or other services. The majority of the respondents 68% stated that port operation disruptions lead to important changes in local pricing and employment rates and business operations.

Recently, the situation at Sost hasn't been smooth. Trade has been inconsistent and there have been protests because local traders and the government are against each other over the tariff. This represents how unpredictable the economy is since the population depends heavily on trade. No containers got through for weeks, which people kept calling an economic freeze. A trader in Sost stated that: **“The Sost Dry Port is important for our economy. When the container flow stopped, everything slowdown from the truck drivers to the shopkeepers. During the protest, we had no work for weeks. Families who depend on trade were struggling financially.”** This wasn't just a shipping problem; it was about people losing their ability to live. While doing my survey there in Sost during the protest, when I inquired from the local business owners and transport workers, they showed diverse reactions: most of the people have lost their daily pay, some have got deeper in debt and small businesses had to shut down for a short period of time. Majority of the business protestors claimed that they are either using their savings or are borrowing money from others.

Most of people in Gojal used to rely on Agriculture as their main source of income but now the source of income has become diverse. The population of Gojal are not only operating business within Gojal but some are also selling goods to Chinese customers in the Kashagar city of Xinjiang province. When the Sost dry port is operating normally it sees 7000 to 10000 containers a year. Though the port has created income opportunities for everyone but not everyone is getting fair share from this.

The Sost dry port represents how cooperation and agreements can make economies more connected and assist areas connect together. CPEC's infrastructure projects, involving this port are based on the notion that being connected helps everyone by joining remote border economies with bigger markets in the area. The urgency of good system, at local and federal

level can control and keep this connection going. There is a gap between linking economies and making things work well during such sorts of protests over tax arguments.

While interviewing a media reporter: Ahmed Ali Ali a representative of Paamir times stated that **“CPEC gave us attention and business but without good management and collaboration it’s like a machine running without oil. We need local vibes to be heard more when decisions over such projects are decided.”**

The recent state of the Sost Dry Port shows both negative and positive implications of CPEC led changes in Gojal. Trade has started up again after the recent agreement between local traders and government groups, but the situation points out how fragile local economies are when they depend on outside trade. Due to this, some people perceive we require stronger ways for people to be involved in how things operate, while other claim to make things better leaders need to aware of local meanings and how people understand progress.

2. Optical Fiber Cable (OFC)

The optical fiber project is the most transformative project under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) framework, which has effectively shifted the digital and communication infrastructure of Gojal Valley. It’s a joint venture between the Special Communications Organization (SCO) of Pakistan and Huawei technologies China covering approximately 820 kilometres from Rawalpindi to Khunjerab and a 172-km aerial OFC link from Karimabad to Khunjerab. Officially launched in 2016 and inaugurated in 2018, it directed to provide a high-speed communication connection between China and Pakistan whereas expanding reliable broadband services to strategically significant and remotes areas in Gilgit-Baltistan.

Before OFC project implementation, Gojal Valley’s residents experienced acute communication isolation because of geographical limitations and the absence of relatable telecommunication infrastructure. In this part of G-B internet access was inadequate and majorly relied on unstable satellite signals with penetration levels reported to be below 10% in 2015 according to data from the PTA. The initiation of the OFC under CPEC, thus showed a landmark in regional modernization and incorporation into Pakistan’s broader digital network.

The OFC network joins Pakistan at Khunjerab Pass, crossing through Sost, Passu, Hussaini and Gulmit, ultimately linking to the national backbone in Gilgit and Rawalpindi. This OFC link connects crucial mountain areas and increases the flow of data, communication and information between Pakistan and China. Special Communications Organizations (SCO) 2019 technical documentation exposes that the project involved around six repeater stations in Gilgit-Baltistan to enhance connectivity in the mountainous region. Outcomes from 20 interviews, 6 FDGs and 104 survey responses revealed a significant agreement that communication framework has clearly improved since the completion of the OFC project. Around 60% respondents approved significant improvement in network connectivity whereas 40% credited this directly to the CPEC head fiber cable.

A local hotel owner of Moksha resort mentioned that: “Before the introduction of the OFC, sending emails and big files was a challenge. Now we talk to our partners in Karachi and China in real time. It’s a great transformation for our business.”

Another respondent, A teacher of Diamond Jubilee School, Passu, expressed her view regarding the OFC: **“Students can now attend online sessions and can easily download materials from online sources. Now internet is not just a convenience it’s an opportunity for education.”**

Recently, office work has drastically changed before it was a lot of paper work, but because of the OFC the remote areas of Gojal have transformed their office system from data collection on print form to online coordination. According to Schools and health centre workers in Sost and Gulmit they shared enhanced efficiency in communication, file transfers and coordination.

The OFC project has encouraged new forms of economic activity and digital entrepreneurship in Gojal Valley. Improved connectivity has especially benefited tourism operators, small enterprises and digital service providers.

Approximately 55% of survey respondents from business background directed increased online marketing and booking system for their businesses. Many local hotels in Sost and Passu now use online platforms such as Facebook and websites like chkar.com, agoda.com to reach customers.

PTL owner from Passu shared, **“When my father was running this hotel most of guests were walk-ins. Now during this time of connectivity half of our booking comes online. The internet has not only doubled our income but it has also improved our hotel’s visibility.”**

Likely, few local handicraftsvendor’s claims that they use social media to sell their product not only to local residents but to the rest of the country. This digital change has permitted residents of Gojal particularly women and youth to expand their business without leaving their villages. Though the project didn’t directly create long term jobs during construction its economic spillover has generated indirect employment opportunities in areas such as digital marketing, hospitality and logistics.

Educational institutions have also seen a remarkable shift in the post OFC era. Before 2018, majority of schools and community learning centers had no access to online resources. Teachers used to rely majorly on textbooks and occasional printed materials. Since the completion of the project schools in various areas in Gojal like Gulmit and Passu have integrated online content like video lectures and digital collaboration tools into their classrooms. NGO’s such as the Aga Khan Education Service (AKES) and Agha Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP have introduced digital literacy workshops in partnership with local school directed to train youth with IT and online research skills.

Despite of remarkable progress, the OFC project faces continuous challenges. Various respondents complained about weak internet signals and consistent internet blackouts during harsh weather and in winter. Connectivity is unreliable most of the time in various high-altitude villages like Moorkhun, Khudabad in Sost.

4.4.2) Economic and Employment Impacts

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor has reshaped the socio-economic fabric of Gojal. Traditionally relied on subsistence agriculture, livestock and small-scale trade, Gojal’s economy has undergone strict transformation through large scale infrastructure investments under CPEC. Projects like Attabad tunnel, the Sost dry port and the Optical Fiber Cable insertion have not only fostered connectivity but also brought diverse opportunities for livelihoods, strengthened tourism and stimulated cross border trade. In Gojal Valley one of the most prominent and prompt impacts of CPEC is employment creation and livelihood diversification. The survey responses of the research present that CPEC has generated job

opportunities, 58% respondents approved that CPEC has created new job opportunities in segments like logistics, hospitality and transportation. Approximately 24% directed no major change, while 18% of the respondents responded that opportunities were limited to a specific group with connection to the government or to Chinese managers.

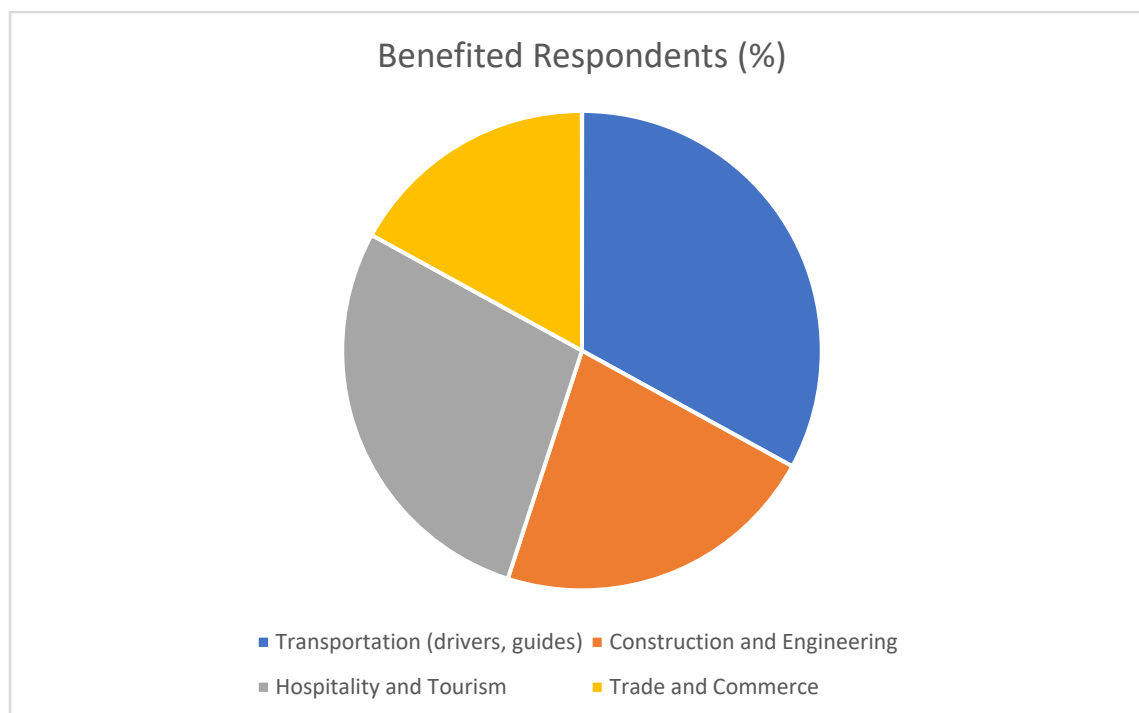


Chart 4.3 highlights the distribution of employment benefits.

However, transportation and tourism sectors have witnessed massive benefits, participants recognized that several technical and managerial positions were occupied by non-locals or Chinese workers. Furthermore, household income data showed that 43% of respondent's family witnessed moderate increase in monthly income since 2018, whereas according to 21% respondents noted significant growth. The rest of 36% noted no change, particularly due to geographical isolation or lack of skill relevant to emerging industries.

Particularly, tourism demonstrated rapid growth. The number of domestic and international tourists visiting Gojal has reportedly increased by nearly **40%** since 2019, based on respondents' assessments. Local guesthouse owners, transporters and craft store owners noted improved infrastructure as the main reason behind this rise in tourist flow in Gojal.

The most obvious and long-lasting effect of the infrastructure development brought about by CPEC in Gojal is tourism. The valley is now accessible to both domestic and foreign tourists thanks to the renovation of the Karakoram Highway the completion of the Attabad tunnels

and improved internet connectivity. Economic Opportunities and the Growth of Tourism. Over 42000 tourists visited upper Hunza (including Gojal) in 2023 a 45 percent increase from the 8000 who visited in 2010 according to data from the Gilgit-Baltistan Tourism Department (2023). Nearly 20% of these were foreign visitors attracted by the increased road safety and internet visibility of places like Khunjerab Pass Passu and Gulmit. According to survey results 43% of participants had started new tourism-related businesses after 2016.

Small hotels guesthouses cafés and tour companies were among them. The OFC project also made online booking and marketing platforms possible, increasing local business owners reach. This was said by a Hussaini guesthouse owner. Before the CPEC, visitors would only come in the summer. We now get reservations all year long via social media.

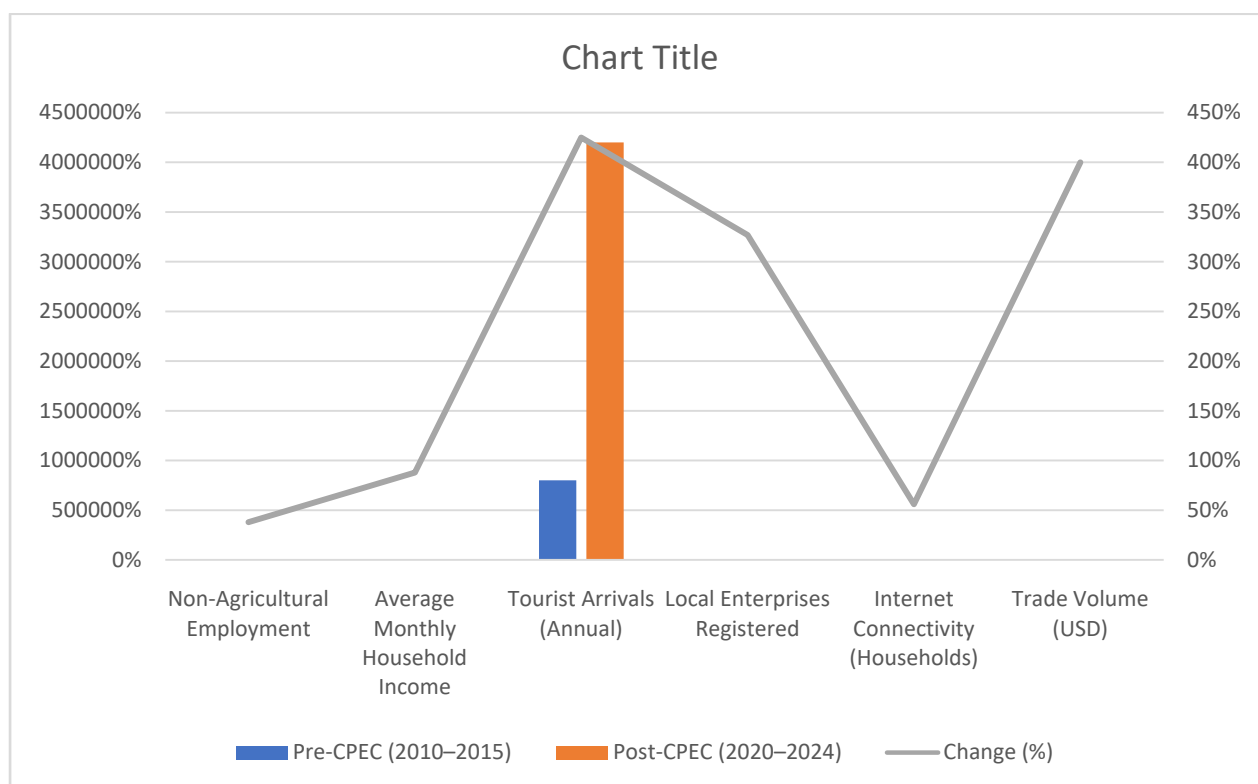
People from Karachi and Lahore can even find us on the internet. Similarly, one young respondent shared: “Our lives have been transformed by the internet and roads. We can now spread the word about Hunza worldwide.” These findings support the statement made by Attaullah Shah and Rehmat Karim that Hunza and Gojal have transformed from remote mountain communities into internationally interconnected tourism economies as a consequence of improved infrastructure and digital connectivity network access brought by CPEC projects.⁶²

Moreover, the tourism boom brought by these infrastructure projects under CPEC also contribute environmental and cultural deterioration. Approximately 64% of survey respondents expressed worries over waste generation, traffic congestion and local traditions commercialization. Focus group participants from Passu and Gulmit noted that increasing pollution along the Karakoram Highway and gave emphasis on inadequate natural resources. A local leader of SAS an education Organization of Gulmit village commented that “We feel proud that people from all around the world are coming to see our land, but unfortunately it’s becoming crowded by vehicles which is not only creating air pollution or other waste pollution it is endangering our traditional lifestyle.”

According to Ahmad and Ali’s work who documented that unregulated tourism growth in GB threatens the region’s ecological balance and cultural authenticity. In addition, local leaders of Passu PDO (Passu Development Organization) emphasizes the necessity for institutional intervention, including better waste manager systems, local tourism training centers and cultural preservation programs. A media representative of PASSU TIMES stated that **“if the**

⁶²Muhammad, Faqeer & Karim, Rehmat & Salman, Abdullah & Shah, Attaullah & Akhter, Javed & Nilofer, Memoona. (2021). Impact of China Pakistan Economic Corridor on Local Economy and Tourism Development: Case of Hunza, Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan. *International Journal of Economic and Environmental Geology*. 11. 14-17. 10.46660/ijeeg.Vol11.Iss4.2020.509.

government can create tourism Sops and assist us with training, we can secure our culture and still benefit from the tourism industry.”



Graph 4.1 demonstrates the economic changes.

In the fiscal year 2023, the Sost dry port collected a record revenue of over Rs. 5.126 billion, and Rs. 5.525 billion in just July-December of 2023 from taxes and duties.⁶³

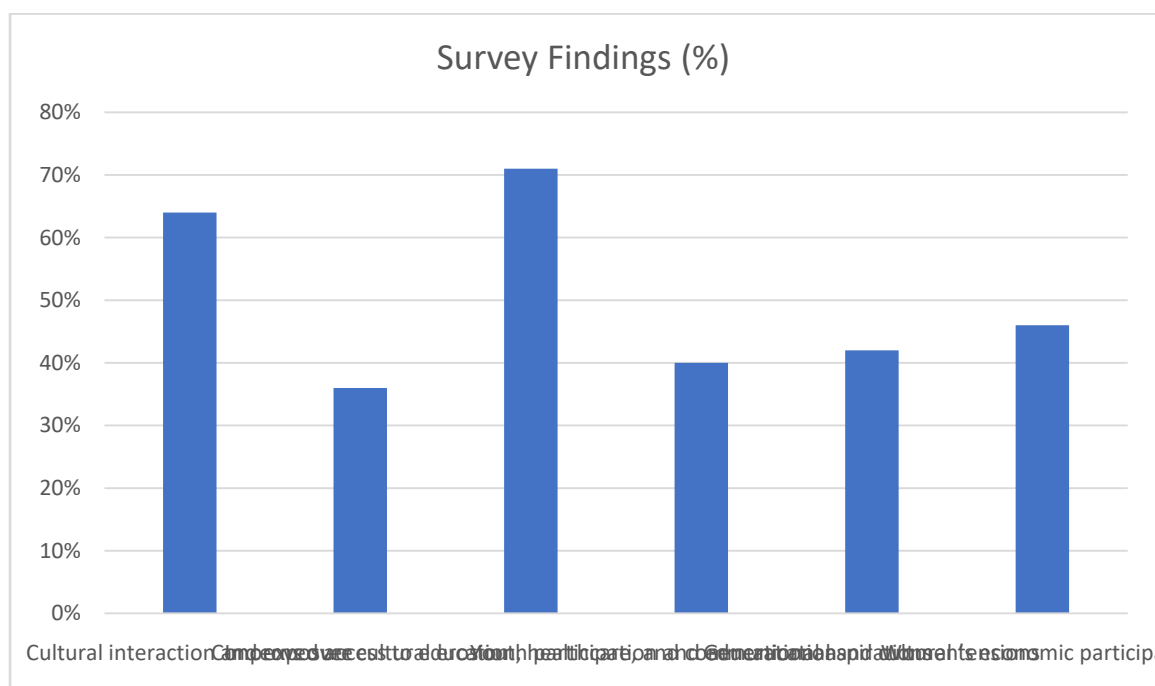
4.4.3) Social and Demographic Changes

The respondents of the survey revealed a notable pattern of social transformation connected with infrastructural development and economic growth under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. The data gathered through the structure survey shows that with material progress in Gojal the region is experiencing on going demographic shifts like majority of the students and families are moving from the region for better employment opportunities and education opportunities to other parts of the country or to other countries mainly to China or other western and Middle Eastren Countries. The survey conducted estimates that around 55% of Gojal’s educated population have settled in different parts of Pakistan. Whereas other workers

⁶³Ministry of Commerce. 2023. Pakistan-China Trade Report. Government of Pakistan.

mainly labors are migrating to this part of Gilgit for employment purpose. Majority of the respondents reported that where the youth is leaving their homes for better education and job purpose but outsiders are migrating here for employment as such as labor and construction worker.

The data presents that with material progress locals in Gojal are experiencing shifts in social norms, intercultural relations, and lifestyle practices. These shifts show the complicated interplay between cultural preservation, modernization and institutional adaptation in Gojal.



Graph 4.2 illustrates the social and demographic changes

Majority of the respondents especially custom workers in Sost dry port and business owners agreed that interaction with Chinese workers and also with other foreign and local tourists have increased their cultural exposure and curiosity about Chinese customs, cuisine, and language. Gojal Valley shares historical link with China especially during the period of KKH construction many workers used to live in different villages of Gojal and they had also built their own hospital in Passu village According to a former businessman from Passu. A Chinese language Graduate from Beijing asserted that “Local school and Village organizations have started to mix factors of Chinese culture in their program, such as language learning and cultural exchange activities. Further he mentioned that “Few years back the local community

of Gojal arranged a cultural exchange program where Around 100 or more elderly from various villages of Gojal travelled to China's Xianjiang Province kashgar city. Gojal Valley and kashgar share a similar cultural background. Especially with the Chinese Tajiks. Nevertheless, 36% respondents of the survey expressed concerns over local cultural identity erosion mainly Wakhi language.

Approximately 71% of the respondents of the survey responded positively to the question whether CPEC has improved access to important services like education, healthcare and communication technology. From a social constructivist perspective, this finding extends beyond material improvement in service provision and illustrates that the social construction of development meanings within the community. The positive responses elucidate that infrastructure expansion and service accessibility. Are being collectively interpreted as symbols of progress, opportunity, and social advancement. Through ongoing interactions, shared narratives, and lived experiences, these material changes are transformed into collective understandings of social reconstruction, shaping community identity, expectations, and aspirations. This shows that how perceptions of change are socially negotiated and embedded within evolving cultural and social frameworks.

The installation of fiber optic connects along the KKH has enhanced mobile connectivity and internet access, allowing faster communication and access to online platforms. This transformation has been significant for students and entrepreneurs, who rely on online resources for either business transactions or learning. Moreover, respondents also expressed inequalities in the distribution of these benefits, respondents from Khyber and Ghulkin reported limited access compared to Sost and Gulmit where infrastructure development is more concentrated this inequality presents the broader structural inequalities that validate infrastructure led development initiatives in peripheral areas.

In addition, 40% of participants indicated that better communication networks and mobility have motivated youth participation in educational and social initiatives beyond the local community. The Gojal youth are highly involved in various universities, online learning platforms, and skill development trainings, resulting in higher education aspirations and professional variance.

The digital connectivity has expanded social horizons and enhanced a sense of belonging to broader national and global level. Moreover, around 42% respondents emphasized that generational tension has developed by growing influence of external media and global cultural flow/ especially elders expressed their concerns that the youth of Gojal are leaving

traditional style and are adopting individualism and consumer-oriented lifestyles, thus its eroding traditional values of collective solidarity and respect for elders. CPEC is also indirectly promoting gender participation it is also an emerging social transformation. Before the initiation of CPEC there were least women entrepreneurs in Gojal now majority of the women are financially independent and most of them have started their own business. Approximately 46% of respondents reported an increase in women involvement in economic activities mainly in handicraft production, tourism services. The construction of Attabad tunnels has increased the influx of domestic and foreign tourists in this part of GB it has created new opportunities for women to market their skills and to contribute in household income. However, cultural limitations and the lack of proper institutional mechanism for skill enhancement attempts to limit women's complete participation in formal sectors. Gender empowerment under CPEC remain gravely informal and requires targeted policies to ensure sustainability and comprehensiveness. From a social constructivist standpoint, these developments are reshaping gender identities and social expectations by redefining women's roles from primarily domestic to economically active agents. Nevertheless, cultural constraints and limited institutional support for skill enhancement continue to restrict women's full participation in formal sectors. Consequently, gender empowerment under CEC remains largely informal, highlighting the need for targeted policies to ensure the sustainable and inclusive reconstruction of gender relations.

4.5) Major Findings of the Qualitative and Quantitative Data Collection

The data collected through a 104 structured survey consisting of 30 items, 20 depth interviews and 6 focus group discussions revealed a multifaceted picture of the socio-economic and cultural transformations occurring in Gojal as a result of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Though CPEC has introduced new ways for development it has also brought new challenges regarding sustainability, cultural preservation and equity. The China Pakistan Economic Corridor has substantially improved infrastructure, connectivity and trade prospects in Gojal. There has been measurable improvement in household income 67% no directly from the CPEC projects related job prospects but mainly because of the road

infrastructure Attabad tunnels and bridges and around 58% job opportunities across different sectors like construction, transport and tourism.

In the Gojal area of Gilgit-Baltistan tourism has emerged as a key economic driver, while it lacks environmental regulation and sustainable planning. Moreover, cultural and demographic shifts are reshaping social relations, demonstrating both global awareness and concerns about identity loss. Although CPEC has transformed the region from a remote area to well-known tourist spot there are also some challenges such as institutional weaknesses such as insufficient local inclusion in contracts and the absence of policy consistency. Together, this study validates the key hypothesis that CPEC has prompted significant socio-economic and cultural transformation in Gojal.

CHAPTER 5

RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

5.1) Introduction

This chapter presents an inclusive balance of the study, summarizing the major findings, drawing central conclusions, and offering practical recommendations grounded in observed evidence and theoretical insights. The research examined the socio-economic and cultural impacts of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor in Gojal Valley, focusing on how infrastructure development, economic transformation, and cross-cultural engagement are transforming the local landscape. The chapter extends practical, theoretical, and policy recommendations objective at ensuring sustainable and inclusive development within the Valley.

CPEC has emerged as a transformative factor in the Northern region of Pakistan, like Gojal Valley, linking this part of Gilgit-Baltistan with the rest of Pakistan through its tunnels and bridge projects. Whereas this transformation has its own shortcomings as well, like irregular development, environmental concerns, cultural dilution, and lack of authenticity in governance, these challenges further demand answers about the sustainability and equity of these projects. Therefore, I have included the lived realities of the Gojal local community, whose experiences contain the connection between material progress and social adaptation under global connectivity.

5.2 Policy Recommendations

1. Enhancing Local Participation and Governance

The majority of my interviews with different stakeholders of local Organizations like PDO and SAS (Passu and Gulmit village, Organization) directed that in the past, important decisions related to these CPEC projects were implemented without their involvement. In order to ensure effective governance, it is vital that locals become active participants instead of passive recipients of CPEC. The integration of local government institutions and community-based organizations like PDO is of utmost importance in all the phases of project planning, implementation, and monitoring. It's vital to institutionalize public consultations, participatory decision-making forums, and GRM (Grievance redressal mechanism) to strengthen accountability and transparency. This approach is related to sustainable development models that highlight long-term capacity building and community ownership.

2. Creation of the Regional CPEC Reform structure for Gilgit-Baltistan

Gilgit is Rich in history, culture, and natural beauty, the region which has historically remained a center of rivalries between the Russian, British and Chinese empires. Gilgit-

Baltistan is considered to be essentially politically neglected in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor-related decision-making process, which is completely achieved at the federal level in Pakistan. CPEC projects in the region are employed under the prevailing governance structure, which involves the GB Assembly (a de facto provincial assembly established under the GB empowerment and self-governance order 2009) and substantial ministries of Pakistan⁶⁴.

Gilgit's tough terrain makes it different from the rest of the provinces of Pakistan; thus, there is a need for a region-specific CPEC policy that guides the locals with the challenges of the mountainous border community. This policy needs to involve different guidelines related to infrastructure development, best suited to a fragile environment, tourism regulation, local employment quotas, and various mechanisms for equal allocation of these advantages with the local population. There have been consistent debates and proposals to give Gilgit-Baltistan to a provisional provincial status within Pakistan, which will give constitutional visibility and potentially more influence in national development projects like CPEC. In remote areas like Gojal CPEC projects primarily concentrate on the KKH realignment. However, though albeit there are demands from the local for inclusions in CPEC project related decision-making process and governance reform, a regional reform devoted to CPEC framework for Gilgit-Baltistan has not been created.

3. Reforms related to Sustainable Development and Environmental Protection

What really deteriorates these environmental concerns is particularly the inadequacy of the current environmental protection and the incapability of local communities to guide the decision-making procedures. According to Salman, the environmental impact assessment employed for CPEC projects have been convenient but not transparent. Initially there need to be transparent environmental impact assessments (EIA)⁶⁵. These analyses require to be conducted in an inclusive way to include the capacity of ecological impact of all the projects based on the insights of the local community as well as the work of independent environmental analysts need to be considered. Furthermore, environmental degradation can

⁶⁴China Pakistan Economic Corridor and Jammu & Kashmir. <https://www.efsas.org/EFSAS-CPEC%20and%20JK.pdf>

⁶⁵Zahid Hussain*, Basit Ali, Mujeeb ul Hassan, Muhammad Ali. Environmental Concerns of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) on Gilgit Baltistan. THE ASIAN BULLETIN OF GREEN MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULAR ECONOMY Vol 5, Issue 2(2025). 10.62019/abgmce.v5i2.156

be significantly reduced by sustainable practices that involve the use of local materials and minimizing deforestation. The carbon footprint reduction project is the green technology solutions that might enhance through the generation of renewable energy and the source of power. The overall human well-being can be advanced without denying the future generations' demands. Through the integration of economic, social and environmental goals, environmental concerns can be addressed efficiently. These policies consist of promoting of technology to vary economic growth and environmental degradation, Local Government decision-making reforms to initiate a more comprehensive impact assessment, the development of international trade and investment to advance global sustainability, and further imposing the price system on the collective cost of environmental degradation. These measures can preserve the natural resources by implementing laws, motivating sustainable procedures in agriculture, and offering incentives for renewable energy are vital.

4. Border Management and Trade Facilitation

The Khunjerab Pass was recently virtually inaugurated for year-round trade and travel between China and Pakistan. Prior it used to open only from April to November because of harsh winters; under a bilateral agreement, the pass will remain operational throughout the year now. It's a transformative step for economic activity, stability, and connectivity with the region. Traditionally, the pass remained open from April to November under the 1985 agreement between Islamabad and Beijing. Moreover, in last December, the two governments agreed to operate the Khunjerab border year-round under Article 2(3) of the 2013 agreement on border ports and their management system.⁶⁶ Though the year-round border operation means promising but there are few challenges at our side, effective management and consistent investment in services and facilities will be important for ensuring that the complete potential of this new development is recognized.

Trade efficiency of Gojal can be enhanced through the Sost Dry Port and Khunjerab Pass, policy steps need to involve investment in storage and logistics facilities, streamlined documentation procedures. Moreover, Collaboration with Chinese leaders for digitalized customs clearance will further minimize delays. These steps have the potential to convert Gojal Valley into a reliable regional trade hub and it can further maximize its economic capability under CPEC.

⁶⁶Khunjerab border opens year-round for the first time-a landmark in Pak-China regional cooperation. China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. April 23, 2025. <https://cpecinfo.com/khunjerab-border-opens-year-round-for-the-first-time-a-landmark-in-pak-china-regional-cooperation/>

5. Preservation of Indigenous Identity and Cultural Heritage

Cultural heritage must be preserved and promoted sustainably and responsibly. Local community participation in cultural heritage preservation and promotion needs to be prioritized, and their interests and rights must be protected. Cultural preservation can also promote cultural tourism. Some people get fascinated by other history and historical buildings like Ondra Poygaa in Gulmit and a cultural heritage site a shrine of Baba Ghundi in Chupursun of Gojal Valley. Through preservation of these cultural practices, GB can create new employment opportunities for locals. Responsible tourism can be promoted by preserving Wakhi and Brushaski cultural heritage through the establishment of community museums, such as Kumpir Khun in Ghulkin (a local Wakhi museum), cultural centers, and heritage trails. To maintain cultural continuity in future generations, it's essential to incorporate local history and traditions into educational programs in schools.

5.3 Economic and Social Recommendations

1. Vocational Training and Skill Development

Though CPEC offers a great opportunity to Pakistan to address poverty, unemployment, and inequalities existing in the underdeveloped parts of the country. Through harnessing two CPEC potentials, such as productive youth engagement and enhancing per capita productivity. Even though Pakistan and China have launched a comprehensive vocational training initiative under CPEC phase II.

Thus, collaboration concentrates on upskilling Pakistani Youth across diverse industries assigned for growth, involving AI, construction engineering, agriculture, and hospitality management. This study recognizes the gap between emerging economic opportunities and prevailing skill sets as a major issue. To address this, it's important to initiate local Vocational training centers that will support residents of Gojal to acquire new skills. Therefore, there is a need for vocational training centers providing courses in tourism management, hospitality, logistics, and language training.

2. Local Entrepreneurship Promotion in Gojal

Pakistan is a developing country, and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are the backbone of our economy. Moreover, these local entrepreneurs face various challenges including limited funding, intense competition, and regulatory difficulties. To address these problems of the local entrepreneurs the government and financial intuitions need to provide more support to small and medium enterprises through programs such as low interest loans,

tax incentives and training initiatives. In addition, promoting local entrepreneurship and advancement in technology can assist develop a favorable business environment. The Government can stimulate economic growth through supporting local businesses like supporting Investments between Chinese and Pakistani entrepreneurs which will further lead to regional diplomacy. Promotion of entrepreneurship in Gojal can help various small businesses like Bread business and handicrafts gain investments and customers while also preserving cultural heritage like traditional handicrafts.

The Government itself hasn't promoted Micro-finance initiatives in the region. Now and in the future the Government needs to introduce micro-finance initiatives, business incubation programs, and cooperative models to support small and medium enterprises in trade tourism and handicraft businesses. Supporting entrepreneurship in the region it will ensure that the economic gain achieved through CPEC remains within the community, strengthening economic resilience. Collaboration with Chinese investors needs to be a key factor that promotes joint businesses with local enterprises instead of exclusive external operations.

3. Inclusion of Women in Business

The local women worked informally before the CPEC advancements, and running a business was non-existent for most of the women residing in remote areas of Gojal, especially. The shift brought by the transformation of CPEC isn't just economic but it's cultural. Though recently, women are participating in the economy for the first time, mainly because of road upgrades that connect them with the rest of the world. Infrastructure transformation under CPEC is attempting to make those failed policy promises possible.

Women in Gojal are already active in different industries like handicrafts and hospitality. The economic expansion of CPEC in Gojal needs to be formalized and scale their inclusion through skill enhancement programs, literacy workshops, and cooperative societies. There needs to be dedicated quotas in employment and vocational training for women will advance both household income levels in the region and also equity. Last year the GB cabinet approved a women-centric development policy objective at gender equality and women empowerment through infrastructure development and other methods. The women-centric development policy aims at empowering women in seven realms, consisting of education and

lifelong learning, economic empowerment and inclusive growth, health, civic participation, climate resilience, human rights and social protection.⁶⁷

4. Development of sustainable Tourism

Sustainable tourism development management and strategies practices are valid to all forms of tourism in all types of destinations, involving mass tourism and the several niche tourism sectors. Environmental sustainability is an important node of a nation's overall economic development structure. Sustainability principles consist of environmental, economic and socio-economic and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development. In order to guarantee its long-term sustainability a suitable balance must be established between these three dimensions.

Infrastructure transformations under CPEC in Pakistan have boosted tourist flow in this part of the country. Additionally, the government must formulate suitable policies so that with the increase in commercial activities in this region, their negative consequences are minimized in the fragile ecosystem of regions like Gilgit.

Local development can be ensured through ecotourism to the mountainous regions like Gilgit. The region has unique biodiversity pockets along the CPEC route, which have their own significance. Moreover, this needs to be taken into consideration while formulating any future long-term policies under the CPEC.⁶⁸ Responsible management of tourism can avoid environmental degradation and cultural dilution. The Government need to implement a Community-Based Tourism (CBT) model where local residents will serve as tour guides, guesthouse owners and cultural ambassadors. This will not only increase authenticity but ensures that tourism revenue is retained locally. There are also some important components of sustainability like setting visitor's limitations, enforcing waste management, and safeguarding ecologically significant places.

5. Connectivity and Infrastructure Maintenance

Gojal Valley is located along the KKH and the road is in continuous danger because of environmental hazards. Though China Pakistan Economic Corridor has brought infrastructure transformation and regional and global connectivity through infrastructure development now

⁶⁷ Jamil Nagri, GB cabinet approves women-centric development policy, DAWN, June 14, 2024
<https://www.dawn.com/news/1840383>

⁶⁸ Nigar, Neelum. (2019). Ecotourism for Sustainable Development in Gilgit-Baltistan: Prospects under CPEC. Strategic Studies. 38. 10.53532/ss.038.03.00145.

these changes need constant maintenance to overcome future emerging disaster. Recently NHA has started the realignment of the KKH at Hassanabad, Hunza to reconnect the section damaged by the erosion of the flood. Infrastructure expansion under CPEC has been successful but regular maintenance and monitoring are significant for prolonged functionality of those transformations bought by CPEC. In order to prevent road erosion, landslides, and transport disruptions in the future, the National Highway Authority and local Government need to cooperate. Moreover, integration of Gojal into the national communication grid is vital through digital connectivity projects.

5.4) Theoretical Implications of the Study

From a theoretical perspective, Institutional liberalism suggests that stable international cooperation is achievable through formal institutions like CPEC that promote mutual gains, rule-based governance, and transparency. The major findings of this study validate this structure by representing that institutionalization of economic collaboration under CPEC has created socio-economic advantages for local communities and enhanced bilateral relations between China and Pakistan.

Moreover, the economic integration seen in the region justifies Joseph Nye's and Robert Keohane's notion of complex interdependence, wherein states' interests converge through economic cooperation and also institutions mediate cooperation by lowering transaction costs and building trust. As an institutional arrangement, CPEC facilitates both material benefits and political stability through mutual stakes in development results.

Additionally, the research findings also present a unique point of view: though institutional structure ensures cooperation, the success of this cooperation relies on the accountability of local governance mechanism and inclusiveness. Gojal lacks strong institutional representation for residents, which has led to unequal benefit distribution and the frequent exclusion of local residents' perceptions. Institutional liberalism needs to encompass multi-level governance that also involves local stakeholders. Thus, it contributes to the theoretical discourse by suggesting that local legitimacy is also required in institutions. The integration of grassroots voices and local institutions into the CPEC structure can enhance its sustainability and equity. The transformation of Gojal under CPEC presents a vivid case of how material projects are simultaneously sites of social reconstruction and identity negotiation. Consumerism and cosmopolitanism are new norms of development exposed to the residents of Gojal under the influx of new economic opportunities, like the influx of Chinese workers and tourists. These changes have caused communities to redefine what progress and development mean in their

social and cultural subject. This connects with Alexander Wendt's statement that **“anarchy is what states make of it,”** which prolongs here to suggest that globalization and cooperation are what societies make of them.

According to the Constructivist perspective, the people of Gojal are active agents reinterpreting modernity through local values. Cultural events, language preservation efforts, and hybrid economic practices show how local actors develop new meanings of identity and belonging from global influences. CPEC's symbolic significance is witnessed through local discourse as a pathway of prosperity and a test of sovereignty, exposing that infrastructure is not only economic but also ideational. It alters geopolitical imagination and collective memory.

Subnational actors and peripheral regions contribute to the construction of international cooperation narratives. CPEC is not only changing the physical landscape of Gojal but also reshaping its social ontology, how people understand their place in the world.

5.5) Limitations of the Study

Research limitations are the simplest level of the weaknesses of the study, based on factors that are often outside of a researcher's control. These factors involve things like time, access to funding, equipment, data, or participants.⁶⁹

This study recognizes various limitations, which are as follows:

- The sample size, sufficient for the main study, doesn't completely represent the villages in Gojal Valley, primarily the remote ones that were hard to reach due to terrain, weather, and security issues.
- The cross-sectional design gives a picture of contemporary situations, while it cannot completely explain long-term changes or cause and effect relationships over time.
- Language and translation difficulties limited the qualitative interview, as some participants spoke brushaski and required interpreters potentially leading to slight errors.
- The study was centered on Gojal Valley, the results might not be applicable to other regions of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, like Punjab and Baluchistan, that have different socioeconomic, geographical and cultural situation.

⁶⁹Derek Jansen, David Phair. Research Limitations & Delimitations. Grad Coach. September 2022. <https://gradcoach.com/research-limitations-vs-delimitations/>

5.6) Directions for Future Research

CPEC is consistently evolving and its long-term implications are diverse future research need to explore other segments of it. Future studies on CPEC could look at:

- To understand spatial variations in development outcomes, future studies need to work on the comparative analysis of socio-economic impacts of CPEC across various regions of GB.
- To assess the sustainability of infrastructure projects long-term ecological monitoring needs to be conducted.
- Future research could examine how traditional and modern values integrate under globalization, providing in-depth information into the construction of identity.
- An empirical assessment of governance mechanisms at the local and regional level is significant for understanding how efficiently institutional structures alter macro-level development policies under CPEC into tangible local outcomes.

5.7) Conclusion

The Gojal case study provides a compelling illustration of how complex interdependence operates in peripheral regions, demonstrating that transnational engagement extends far beyond formal state-to-state interactions to encompass multi-layered socio-economic, cultural, and institutional networks. By examining both material outcomes, such as improved access to education, healthcare, and communication technologies, and socially constructed meanings of development, this study highlights how local communities actively interpret, negotiate, and embed these changes within their lived experiences. From the perspective of Institutional Liberalism, the Gojal case underscores the importance of formal frameworks, norms, and cooperative mechanisms in structuring incentives, fostering trust, and facilitating collaboration between local actors and transnational initiatives such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). At the same time, the findings show that interdependence is not merely instrumental or asymmetrical; it is mediated through local agency, social norms, and collective expectations, illustrating that peripheral communities are not passive recipients of external interventions but active participants in shaping development outcomes. By combining these theoretical lenses, the study advances the understanding of interdependence in several ways. First, it demonstrates that institutional mechanisms alone are insufficient to explain the full dynamics of engagement; they must be interpreted through local social constructions that give meaning and legitimacy to material changes. Second, it reveals that

the social and cultural dimensions of development are central to understanding how interdependence is experienced and sustained over time. Finally, the Gojal experience suggests that peripheral regions can reshape both the practical and conceptual contours of complex interdependence, showing that institutional frameworks and socially negotiated interactions are mutually reinforcing, rather than mutually exclusive. In conclusion, this study contributes a nuanced theoretical perspective, highlighting how the intersection of institutional structures, material development, and socially constructed realities can redefine interdependence in regions often overlooked in mainstream international relations scholarship.

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APPENDIX

Table: Survey Questionnaire Framework

Q#	Variable	Survey Question	Response Type	Response Options
1	Consent	Do you consent to participate in this study?	Single choice	Yes / No
2	Age	Age of respondent	Open-ended	—
3	Gender	Gender of respondent	Single choice	Male / Female / Other
4	Marital Status	Marital status	Single choice	Single / Married / Widowed
5	Education	Highest education level	Single choice	No formal education / Primary / Secondary / Higher
6	Occupation	Occupation of respondent	Open-ended	—
7	Household Size	Total number of household members	Open-ended	—
8	Village	Respondent's village	Single choice	Shishkat / Gulmit / Ghulkin / Hussaini / Passu / Khyber / Murkhoon / Sost
9	Income Source	Main source of income	Single choice	Agriculture / Tourism / Trade / Service job / Other
10	Income Change	Has household income changed since CPEC?	Single choice	Increased significantly / Increased slightly / No change /

				Decreased
11	CPEC Employment	Any household member employed in CPEC?	Single choice	Yes / No
12	Employment Type	Type of CPEC employment	Single choice	Construction / Transport / Tourism services / Retail / Other
13	Tourism Business Growth	Increase in shops/guesthouses	Single choice	Yes / No
14	Market Access	Have local products found new markets?	Single choice	Yes / No
15	Chinese Trade	Do you sell goods/services to Chinese traders/tourists?	Single choice	Yes / No
16	Border Trade	Has cross-border trade at Sost increased?	Single choice	Yes / No / Don't know
17	New Business	Have you started any new business since CPEC?	Single choice	Yes / No
18	Business Type	If yes, specify business type	Open-ended	—
19	Competition	More competition from outsiders?	Single choice	Yes / No
20	In-Migration	Increase in people migrating into Gojal?	Single choice	Yes / No
21	Out-Migration	Increase in locals migrating out?	Single choice	Yes / No
22	Youth Shifts	Are young people leaving agriculture?	Single choice	Yes / No
23	Lifestyle Change	Are young people adopting new lifestyles/values?	Single choice	Yes / No
24	Language Decline	Decline in local languages (Wakhi/Burushaski)?	Single choice	Yes / No
25	Women Participation	Increased participation of women in work/business?	Single choice	Yes / No
26	Community Identity	Do you feel community identity has weakened?	Single choice	Yes / No

27	Population Change	Population trend in your village	Single choice	Increased / Decreased / Same
28	Quality of Life	Has CPEC improved your quality of life?	Single choice	Yes / No / Maybe
29	Decision Making	Are locals included in decision-making?	Single choice	Yes / No / Maybe
30	Concerns	What is your biggest concern about CPEC?	Open-ended	