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**CHINA PAKISTAN ECONOMIC CORRIDOR:
OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR KHYBER
PAKHTUNKHWA**

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Abstract

China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a multi-billion project is considered to be a fate changer not only for Pakistan but for the whole region. It will herald a new era of economic development for different areas including Gilgit-Baltistan, Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). The strategic position of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa plays a vital role in regional peace & stability and serve as a gateway to South Asia for China. The project will turn the relatively undeveloped areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa into more fascinating and favorable destination for investors. In CPEC, eight important project are allocated for KP along with several MOUs signed with the province worth US \$24 billion. These projects comprise of multiple fields including agriculture, energy and communications etc. Due to the enormity of scale, the project will however also face multiple challenges and hurdles in its implementation. CPEC provide many opportunities for the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, coupled with several potential threats and challenges including political unrest, economic crises, security risks and controversies between the center and provincial government. There is a huge need to address those issues which will otherwise negatively affect the implementation of the project. This way the efforts of Pakistan to join the race for economic development and regional connectivity will bear fruit. This study explores the prospects and challenges associated with the implementation of CPEC in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Keywords: CPEC, China, Pakistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, MOUs

1. Introduction

China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a huge investment project, which is considered as a fate changer for Pakistan and is expected to open up new opportunities for social and economic development of the Pakistan including Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. CPEC is a huge investment project of energy, industry, and infrastructure and communication network. It is aiming to improve the relatively backward areas of KP and Baluchistan provinces. The road and railway networks, industrial and economic zones and foreign direct investment (FDI) in KP under CPEC are initiating a strong investment era in Pakistan. The project will enhance the strategic and economic importance of KP. It will also open up KP to both domestic and foreign investment ("CPEC to spell out future development status of KP: Khattak," 2017). The socioeconomic development of the province will bring prosperity for the people and better standards of living with increased employment. The importance of CPEC for KP is very significant as the province has already suffered due to terrorism, extremism and war on terror. War like situation restrict development of regions which was the case of KP. Due to these activities the investment and economic opportunities were equal to none. To ensure swift development and prevents any delays, the KP government has established an advisory committee on CPEC which directly advice and update Chief Minister of KP on the implementations and issues. This development was made possible with collaboration of Board of Investments (BOI) and KP economic zones & management committee. The Govt. of KP organized a successful event titled "KP Investment Road Show" in China in April 2017, the main aim of which was to attract

investors to KP. A special security force has also been established by KP government which will look after the security of CPEC projects only in KP (E. Hussain, 2019). This means there are a lot of economic opportunities for KP under CPEC however, the implementation of CPEC in KP will not be without any constraints and challenges. Multiple challenges and threats will also be faced some of which are known and some unforeseen. This chapter assesses the opportunities i.e. economic and otherwise along with the threats & challenges faced by KP in smooth implementation of CPEC projects. Following sections illustrates details about KP, CPEC cooperation in KP, MoUs signed by KP government and China, Projects signed under CPEC in KP, opportunities and challenges to CPEC in KP and then the conclusions.

1.1. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) is one of the four administrative provinces located in the northwestern part of the country. It shares international border with Afghanistan. The total land area of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is 101,741 km². According to 2017 census, the population of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is 35.53 million having total 34 districts (PBS, 2017). Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is linked with Afghanistan via Khyber Pass.

The province of is geographically divided into two major zones i.e. 1) Northern zones which starts from Hindu Kush and ends to the border of Peshawar basin and 2) Southern zones which starts from Peshawar and ends in Darajat areas.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is encircled by Afghanistan to the west and north. In east its borders are with the Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and Northern areas. In its south the largest province (by population) of Pakistan is located. While to the southwest Baluchistan province is located. The region has both mountains as well as plains encircled by hills. The climate of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa varies with elevation. Amount of precipitation over the region is variable but annually up to 16 inches. The main cities of the province are Peshawar, Mardan, Mingora, Kohat, and Abbottabad. The economy of the province mainly depends on agriculture. The name of the province was officially changed to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2010 from North Western Frontier Province.

The northern areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has been blessed with some of the magnificent sights that could only be imagined. These sights including lakes, thrilling mountain passes and strenuous treks which attract the people of the entire world(Khwaja, Saeed, & Urooj, 2018).

1.2. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and CPEC

The huge investment projects of CPEC will lead to a new era of economic development and prosperity in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Industrial zones built under CPEC will bring economic prosperity in the province and generates jobs opportunities for the people who remained backward due to a myriad of problems such as war on terror, extremism, militancy, etc. The construction of western route which passes through KP, the people of the area will be exposed to new economic opportunities and modern facilities which previously were not available to them. The

development in CPEC will have a very positive impact in terms of foreign investments. Governments and investors who are shy to invest in KP will see the potential and thus it will make the grounds to make KP the main hub of all the trade activities of the regions thus paving its way for more development and economic improvements (Makhdoom, Shah, & Sami, 2018). Furthermore, CPEC will develop the tourism sites of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, ultimately having a positive impact on the economy of the province. The project offers a chance for peace and cooperation in the province and has the potential to act as a catalyst in the emerging maritime security environment.

1.3. CPEC related projects for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

CPEC a mega infrastructure and energy transportation project has the capacity to transform the economy of Pakistan. The whole regions is capable of reaping the benefits of economic developments, regional connectivity, and integration irrespective of their geographical size and population (Rizvi, 2015). Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is the third most populous administrative unit of Pakistan. There is abundance of natural resources and renewable energy in the region. It also have a catchment area of main water bodies of the country. CPEC route passes via Khyber Pakhtunkhwa covering almost 20% area. This has increased the shares of KP as compared to its land and population. KP, Chinese governments and FWO signed many agreements of mega development projects worth of more than US\$ 11 billion including CPEC city on the motorway near Swabi, and model housing town in Peshawar. All these CPEC related projects will be completed in the next three to five years ("CPEC city among four

projects worth \$11bn in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa," 2017). By promoting the strategic importance of KP, CPEC also opening it to both domestic and foreign investments to gain economic stability. CPEC in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa will give a tremendous boost to economic activities in far-flung areas of the province. Among CPEC related projects eight projects are allocated for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa which are discussed below in detail.

1.3.1. Suki-kinari Hydropower station

Suki-kinari hydro power station is a hydro power project having a capacity of 870 MW. This project is being constructed over the Kunhar River which is tributary of river Jhelum in the Kaghan valley of district Mansehra KP. The total estimated cost of the project is US\$ 1.802 million. Executive company and sponsors for the project is Suki-Kinari Hydro (Pvt). Limited and China Gezhouba group of companies Limited. Independent power producer (IPP) is financing the project while the coordinating ministry is the Ministry of Water and Power. The whole project is being supervised by the Private Power and Infrastructure Board (PPIB). Suki-Kinari hydropower project is the pioneer project in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa being executed in the energy sector under CPEC("Suki Kinari hydropower project: Landowners halt work on dam in Rajwal area," 2018).

1.3.2. Havelian Dry Port

In district Haripur, Havelian dry port along with cargo handling facility will be constructed. The estimated cost of this project will be US \$

65 million. The project will be supervised by Ministry of Communications, Government of Pakistan and is proposed by Pakistan Railways. Chinese Government Concessional Loans (CGCL) will be the financing methodology for this project. The project will be awarded using open bidding as per the rules and regulations laid out by Public Procurement Regulatory Authority (PPRA). The port will be constructed in proximity to Balhdhair railway station which is around 5 kilometers from Haripur city. The main aim behind building this dry port is to facilitate and meet the demands of freight traffic between both the countries ("Haripur residents seek market value of land for dry port project," 2018).

1.3.3. Karakoram Highway Phase II (Havelian-Thakot)

A 120 kilometers long highway originating from Havelian and ending at Thakot having estimated cost of US \$1366 million will also be constructed. It is an early harvest project and the implementation phase will soon start after the financial and commercial agreements are finalized. The category of this project is an expressway and access controlled highway. The proposing agency for this project is Ministry of Communications, Govt. of Pakistan while the supervising agencies are National Highways Authority and Ministry of Communications. The executive company and sponsors of the project are M/S China communication construction company Ltd. The project will be carried out through government concessional loan (GCL). This project consists of 105 bridges and 67 tunnels. Completion duration of this project is approximately 42 months. Construction on most of the parts will be done

in risky and dangerous mountains areas("Chinese workers skip lunar new year holidays to work on KKH project ", 2017).

1.3.4. Up gradation of D.I.Khan-Quetta Highway (N-50)

The up gradation of highway from DI Khan to Quetta which is around 210 kilometers will be done in phase-1 at estimated cost of US \$ 195 million. KP and Baluchistan are the two provinces involved in the project. Both the provinces have the opportunity to take benefits and make their regions economically stable. The projects completed in KP and Baluchistan have already transformed the urban and social landscape of these areas and have further potentials to change the economic outlook of both the regions("CPEC is a project of inclusive development in Pakistan: Planning Ministry," 2018).

1.3.5. Optical Fiber Cable Project from Rawalpindi to Khunjab

Along with other project one of the most important project in the telecommunication sector is of Optical Fiber project. It is covering an estimated distance of 820 km starting from Khunjab to Rawalpindi. The project have an estimated cost of US\$ 44 million. Fiber optic will give alternative communication access to people all over the country. The part of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa covered by optical fiber cable is about 287.656 km. The first land-based China-Pakistan optical fiber cable, constructed by Chinese technology giant Huawei, was inaugurated earlier on Friday 13 July 2018 and is expected to be officially put into commercial use this

year ("No espionage in Pakistan-based optical fiber project: Chinese experts," 2018).

1.3.6. Up gradation of ML-I

This project is related to expansion and reconstruction of railway ML-I. It has a length of 1736 km and the estimated cost is US\$ 3,650 million. ML-I is railway track running from Peshawar to Karachi being upgraded under the CPEC. Pakistan railway had planned to upgrade and overhaul the infrastructure of ML-1 under CPEC framework including bridges, tracks, signaling, tunnels, buildings, telecommunication system and track maintenance system. The feasibility study for this project has already been finalized and a framework agreement with China has also been signed. The project is of great importance and the two countries had declared it as a strategic project of CPEC which will help to improve connectivity between the two countries. The estimated completion time of this project is five years(Abbas, 2018).

1.3.7. Joint feasibility study for up gradation of ML-I

Another part of the above mentioned project is a joint feasibility study. It is aimed to build and upgrade high-speed railway track from Peshawar to Karachi under the corridor. The level crossings on the main line will all be alimented. This will be done by constructing underpasses and flyovers. The feasibility report for this project is almost completed.

1.3.8. KKH-III (Raikot- Thakot)

KKH Thakot- Raikot N-35, the remaining portion has a total length of 136 kilometers and estimated cost of US\$ 719.8 million. Approximately 25 % of project construction is completed. The remaining portion, the length of which is 459 kilometers originating from Raikot and ending in Islamabad. It has been divided into three sub-sections i.e. from Raikot to Thakot, then from Thakot to Havelian, and finally from Havelian to Islamabad. The Havelian- Thakot section is already under construction. 90 % of the financial arrangement will be done by China Exim while the remaining financing will be done by Government of Pakistan ("CPEC : KKH upgradation projects status," 2016).

1.4. CPEC: Impacts on Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Relations between China and Pakistan are going through a transition phase from geopolitical to geo-economic relations. CPEC has a dynamic nature. It means the collaboration in CPEC is not limited to the initial investment rather new investment and mutual cooperation will be seen in the near future. It is evident from the fact that initial investment in CPEC was around US \$ 43 billion which was now reached to around US \$ 62 billion. In the times of economic crisis, the project can boost the economy of the Pakistan and revitalize the economy of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Partnership and interest of private sector will have huge economic impacts in KP. The corridor will be able to grow the local economy and reduce the burden by providing employment to the people of

KP (Desk, 2017). One of the major obstacle in uplifting the economy of the country and the region is the lack of available energy. CPEC is aimed to address that. The energy crisis will diminish or reduced with the implementation of CPEC projects in KP(Y. Ali, Rasheed, Muhammad, & Yousaf, 2018). The corridor will have positive impacts of the economies of both the countries. CPEC is also aiming to boost the tourism industry thus contributing to the economy of KP in a positive way. Some remote areas in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have natural beauty and are worth watching. These areas will be accessible to international tourist after completion of CPEC projects thus earning the precious foreign exchange reserves. The project also has many socio-cultural, economic, and infrastructural impacts on northern areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

CPEC also have some social impacts on Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. It includes people to people contact, enhanced security and stability in KP, integration of civilization, improvement of life standard, strengthened relations with neighbors and soft image of Pakistan in the region. The project has the capacity to change the province into an economic hub and attract local as well as foreign investors for business to promote economic growth and make the province prosper and economically stable.

CPEC also has a great role in improving infrastructure, security and safety, information & communication, education, agriculture and aquaculture. All these improvements have a positive impact on terrorism-prone areas of KP. CPEC a mega project has the potential to be one of the huge economic assets for the country in the future, depend on Pakistan to make sure that CPEC becomes a reality. The intercultural communication

between KP and China would increase commerce, technical growth, and cooperation (Niazi, 2017).

1.5. CPEC: Opportunities and Challenges for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

CPEC is a positive step towards regionalization of economy thus paving ways for peace in the region and economic development which is not only meant for Pakistan but for the whole region including China, Iran, India, Central Asia and Afghanistan (Abid & Ashfaq, 2015). CPEC will bring a myriad of opportunities for KP and will become an economic hub and land of opportunities with the smooth implementation of these huge projects. CPEC has the potential to convert the terrorism prone region to an economic hub which has the potential to attract investors ("Opportunities for youth in CPEC discussed," 2018). For decades the province was left undeveloped. For the first time in history, this resource rich region has got the attention of both the governments. This has encourage the investors to come and invest in the province (Buneri, 2017). while there are matchless opportunities and potentials, the smooth implementation is also associated with a variety of challenges (Wang, 2017). The opportunities and challenges of CPEC to KP are discussed in length in the following sections.

1.5.1. Opportunities

CPEC, from all aspect will prove to an economic game changer and will make China a solid stakeholder in Pakistan on many fronts such

as economy, security and stability. The project can bring economic stability in the region and improve the prospects of peace and economic stabilization. KP will become a hub for trade and economic activities in the region. Some of the opportunities related to CPEC are briefly discussed below.

Economic development

Through CPEC, industrialization in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa will help to create job opportunities for unemployed population. This will convert the fiscal burden on economy to a driver of economic development in the province. The project will be able to improve the overall economic situation of KP thus pushing it towards economic development and regional integration. The new regime of economic development in KP will open its door to the external world thus paving ways for investors and tourist to come("CPEC to change fate of KP, GB: Khattak," 2018).

Stabilized and improved security in KP

The infrastructure planned in KP along with other investments has the potential to improve and more importantly stabilize the security of KP. More private sector opportunities can be created and a realistic path of career can be defined for the people rather than involving in illegal activities. The economic development guarantee prosperity which in turns bring stability. This economic development is directly related with the stability and enhanced security of the region(Wang, 2017).

Overcoming energy crises

Smooth and adequate availability of energy is the backbone of industry and commercialization which leads to economic development. The government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is taking serious steps towards the production of energy. Various energy related projects are in progress with Chinese cooperation regarding CPEC. In the energy sector, many projects are completed in 2018 and some are under construction to minimize energy shortfall in KP.

Poverty Eradication and Economic Empowerment

The main aim of CPEC is to provide a complete infrastructure which not only solve issue mentioned above but to also address economic challenges as a whole. CPEC a fate changer for the region will provide an opportunity to help people of the region to improve their living standard through the construction of parks, dams, roads, railways and many other projects. The project will empower the backward and affected areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa through economic development.

Higher Education

Higher education is one of the key priority area and is also necessary for economic development of the country. As mentioned earlier, CPEC is not only a corridor or infrastructure project rather is a cooperation in a multitude of fields which also includes higher education. The establishment of China Study Center (CSC) in University of Peshawar and National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST) can be useful and in the cooperation in higher education under CPEC. The cooperation in academia can bring several results. It can connect

professionals from both sides with the related industry and can improve localized production through advanced research. China study center established in UoP has several academic linkages with different Chinese universities and has developed many links in a short span of time.

China Study Center (CSC), University of Peshawar organized a seminar on China Pakistan relations on 17th July 2019. A delegation from Chinese embassy Islamabad also attended the seminar. Dr. Zahid Anwar, Director CSC said on the occasion that it is an honor for CSC to host the esteemed delegation from China. He stressed on the China Pakistan relations and said that the center is promoting studies on Pak China relations which will ultimately make the relations specifically the people to people contacts very stronger.

Rahimullah Yousafzai, famous journalist hailing from KP also delivered his speech during the occasion. He lauded the friendship of both the countries who supported each other through thick and thin. He discussed the role of traders of KP in CPEC and China-Pakistan relations. He also stressed on the importance of peace in Afghanistan and lauded the role of Chinese government in peace efforts.

1.6. Challenges

CPEC will bring economic opportunity and prosperity in the region by building a huge infrastructure and linking different areas to each other. It will also ensure the smooth flow of trade between several regions of world which otherwise might not be possible. By building highways, energy

infrastructure, and other transportation routes, CPEC aims to rebuild the economy of the region. Although the project has the potentials to boost the regional economy it is faced by a myriad of challenges. These includes political, security and economic challenges. Terrorism is one of the reasons behind weak economy. It has also weakened the security and stability of the country. There are other challenges which will be a barrier in smooth implementation of the project which are explained below.

Being a developing country, the economy of Pakistan is facing many challenges. Some of the reasons behind weak economy is decrease in foreign investments, energy crisis, inflation, current account deficit, poor tax system, overpopulation, low GDP etc. Due to highly weak economic situation the allocation of funds to these projects can become challenging (Mahmood, 2015). This issue will persist in all regions of the country and thus can hinder the development. Such conditions can become barrier in the way of smooth implementation of the project especially in CPEC projects under Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

1.7. Survey Result

A survey was conducted in which the opinion of experts in field was sought. The respondents of the survey were restricted to be experts from the field such academics and high ranking officials from governments privy to developments in CPEC. The survey consisted of a total of eight questions in which 7 questions were on likert scale (from strongly disagree to strongly agree) while the remaining one question was description in which a descriptive answer was sought from the

respondents. Individual questions asked from the respondents along with their response in presented below.

1. Please briefly explain the opportunities and challenges of China Pakistan Economic Corridor to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa? (Descriptive answer)
2. China Pakistan Economic Corridor can uplift the economy of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and contribute to the overall economic uplift. (Strongly agree to strongly disagree)
3. CPEC will reduce the impacts of terrorism, increase development and improve infrastructure of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa thus making it a trade hub. (Strongly agree to strongly disagree)
4. CPEC will bring the backward areas such southern region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa at par with the developed areas. (Strongly agree to strongly disagree)
5. CPEC projects can increase energy and power production and can thus decrease the energy shortage of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. (Strongly agree to strongly disagree)
6. CPEC can have a constructive role in improving the quality and penetration of higher education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. (Strongly agree to strongly disagree)
7. Challenges such as route controversy, unfair resource distribution, political unrest etc. can be barrier in smooth implementation of CPEC projects in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. (Strongly agree to strongly disagree)

8. The overall opportunities of CPEC projects in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are more than the challenges it is facing. (Strongly agree to strongly disagree)

Results of above mentioned questions are presented before.

1. Please briefly explain the opportunities and challenges of China Pakistan Economic Corridor to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa?

Responses

- a) Socioeconomic Development
- b) There are political, security, diplomatic, economic and social opportunities in CPEC. Challenges to CPEC are internal and external.
- c) There are many opportunities as well as challenges. It will be the test of our ability to transform challenges into opportunities
- d) A: Opportunities: i) Regional Connectivity ii) Improved infrastructure (roads, rail, fiber optics) iii) Higher investment leading to higher growth and employment B: Challenges i) Political will and commitment ii) Human resources iii) Law & order situation iv) Peace in Afghanistan.
- e) Opportunities: Energy production and increase connectivity
Challenges: Secret agreements and loans that may hurt Pakistan in the long run. Secondly, CPEC is no more than a political hype.
- f) Opportunities: Connectivity, train manpower workforce, Industrial Setup, Job opportunities, Basic Education uplift and health care

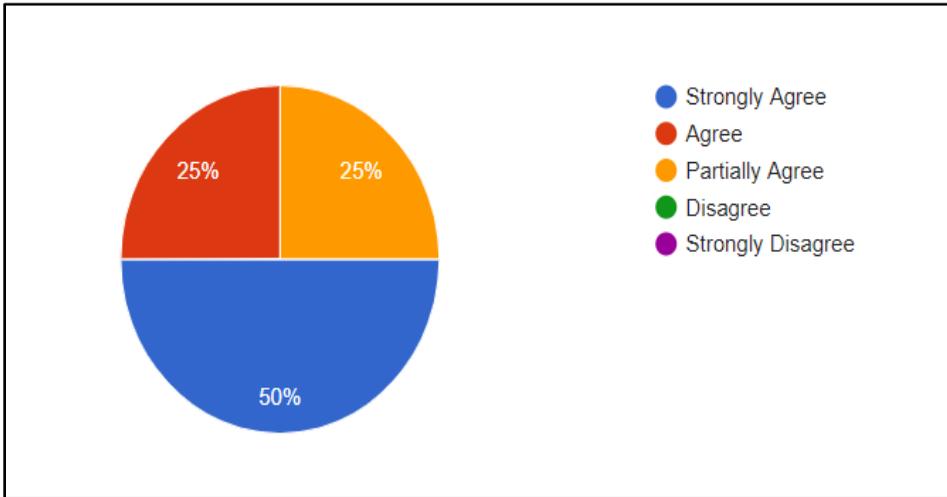
Challenges: Political instability nationally, International pressure, exploitation of the least developed areas of the country, imported labor and skilled workers

- g) Economic: Technology Exchange Cooperation, Academic cooperation, cultural exchange cooperation. Institutional Coordination is Challenges.
- h) For Pakistan CPEC have many opportunities such employment, better social-economic conditions and improved infrastructure. CPEC main challenge to Pakistan is political issue and weak governments.
- i) **Opportunities:** CPEC can make Pakistan a hub of international trade and increase economic opportunities for Pakistan. This can also contribute to peace and prosperity of the country.

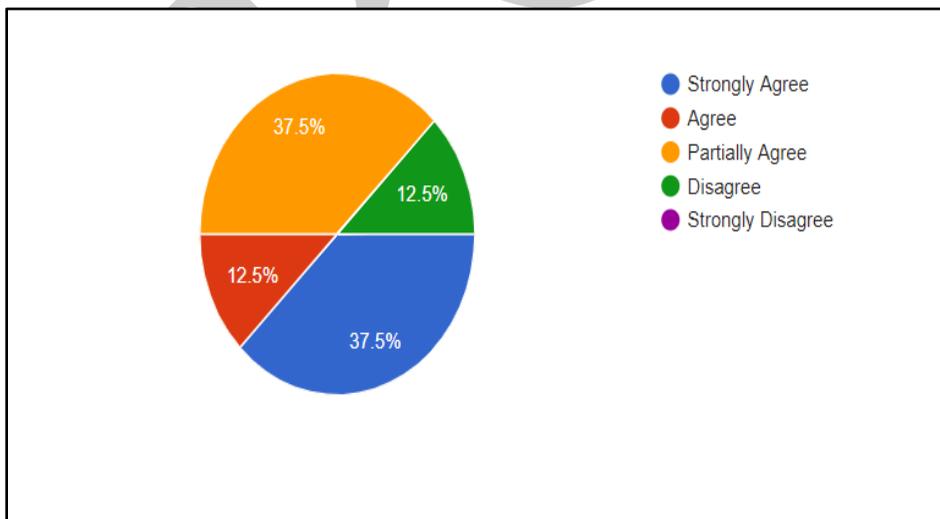
Challenges: Political stability and will is a major challenge for CPEC. Different governments have different priorities which can change the working pace and development related to CPEC

- j) Economically, CPEC will contribute to the country a lot. There are cooperating in multiple sectors such as agriculture, information technology, defense, and food security etc. China and Pakistan both can take benefit from it. There are also multiple challenges. The internal challenges includes government's will etc. while external challenges in which one of the most important is security challenge and situation in Afghanistan.

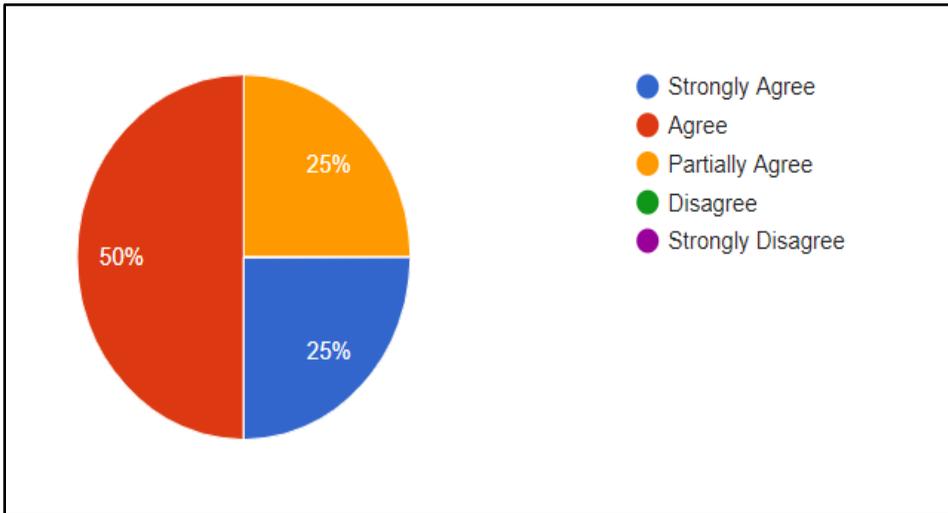
2. China Pakistan Economic Corridor can uplift the economy of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and contribute to the overall economic uplift.



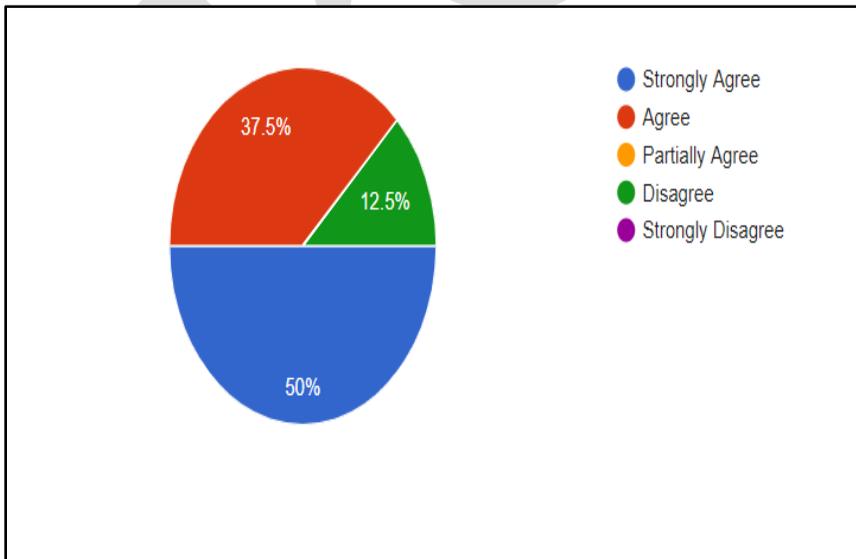
3. CPEC will reduce the impacts of terrorism, increase development and improve infrastructure of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa thus making it a trade hub.



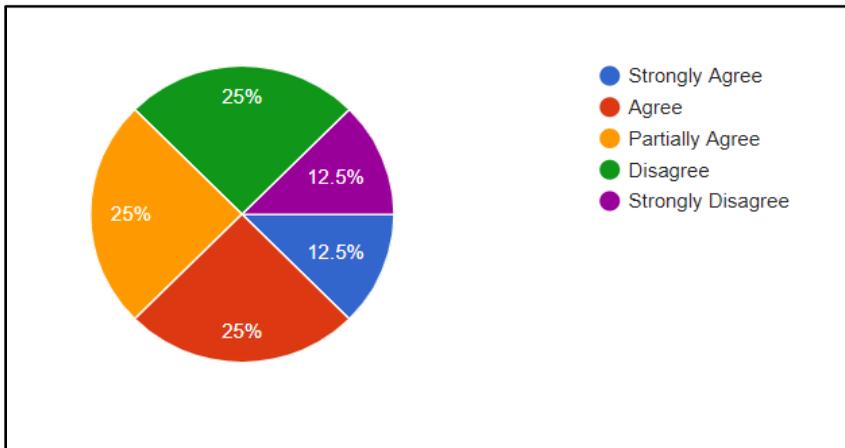
4. CPEC will bring the backward areas such southern region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa at par with the developed areas.



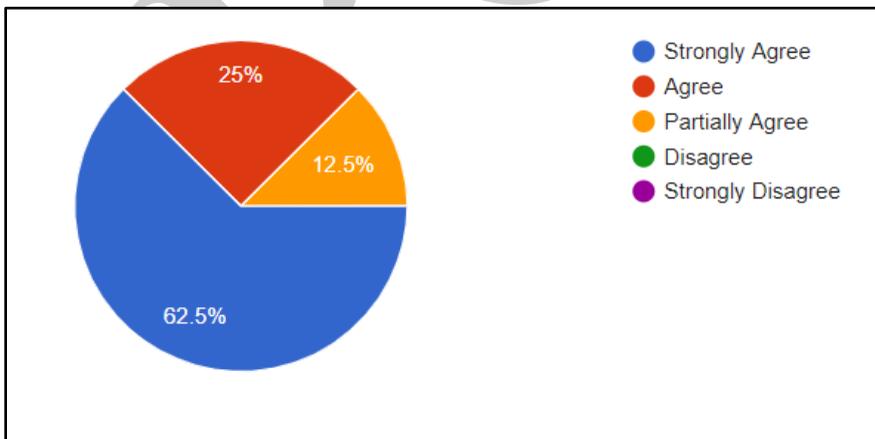
5. CPEC projects can increase energy and power production and can thus decrease the energy shortage of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.



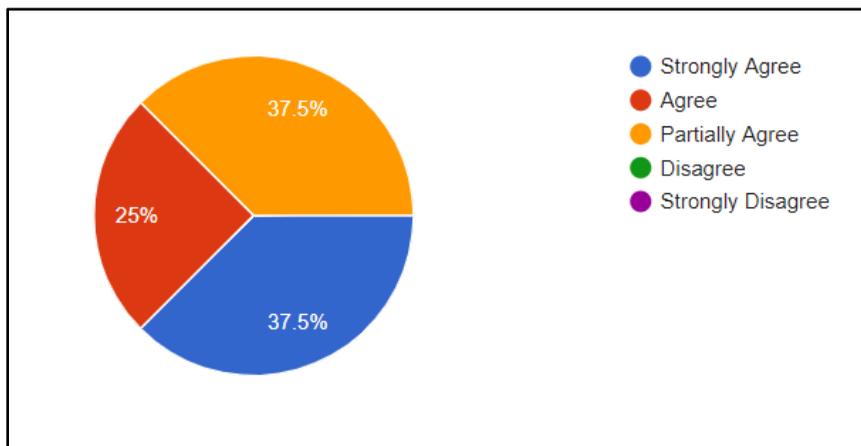
6. CPEC can have a constructive role in improving the quality and penetration of higher education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa



9. Challenges such as route controversy, unfair resource distribution, political unrest etc. can be barrier in smooth implementation of CPEC projects in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.



10. The overall opportunities of CPEC projects in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are more than the challenges it is facing.



The survey was performed to check and validate the benefits of CPEC for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Half of the respondents strongly agreed when they were asked whether CPEC will contribute to the economic development of KP. No one disagreed to that. Another question was whether CPEC will reduce the impacts of terrorism got a mixed response. 37 percent respondents strongly agreed and 12.5 percent agreed. Only 12 percent disagreed to this question. This means expert believes that the impacts of terrorism can be lessened through development related project in KP. Development of CPEC will bring backward areas at par with other developed areas also received positive response. CPEC projects in KP for energy providing and the opportunities of CPEC in higher education also got positive responses in which majority of the respondents strongly agreed that CPEC can decrease the energy shortage and bring positive change in higher education sector. Majority of the respondents believed that the overall opportunities of CPEC projects are more than the challenges to it. This means experts are very optimistic about this

development and believe that CPEC could bring a real positive change to the province and its economic development.

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