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Stronger Bonds versus Weaker Perceptions: Job Opportunities to be Created by CPEC and the Pakistan Workforce's Potential to Benefit

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ABSTRACT

China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is an amalgam that addresses employability in Pakistan. The perception of creating millions of jobs in the next few years is vital for strengthening the relationship between China and Pakistan. This economic corridor aims to enhance job opportunities, which may increase the general public's education level and standard of living. This paper aims to estimate the perception of the employability impact of Bahawalpur's solar power project and Sahiwal's coal power plant within a radius of 15km2. This study measures the employability impact perceived by the workers through qualitative and descriptive procedures. The data is collected from employees of both the power plants. This study contributes to the existing literature, explains the negative and positive perceptions regarding CPEC projects, and is concluded in support of CPEC and suggests that uplifting to technical skills of the local labor force should be of utmost priority in such types of projects. The study also recommends developing a linkage between education institutes and industry to make the required skill set available and provide more abundant opportunities for local employees.

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1. Introduction

Employment generation is an essential route to economic development for any country. The poverty of masses in such countries is closely related to unemployment, whereas poverty, unemployment, and non-availability of livelihoods act as a severe constraint to economic growth. Although there had been improvements on several fronts at the macro level of the Pakistan economy, unemployment and underemployment remained significantly unchanged for several previous years. Unemployment has fallen from 6.2 percent to 5.9 percent over the last decade(Federal Bureau of Statistics, 2015). A deeper review depicted that 55% population of the country is below the age of 30 and is rapidly increasing every year. It is a steeply growing workforce; on average, 520,000 unemployed are entering the market annually (Ahmad et al., 2017). During the last decade, another 5.2 million unemployed entered, and the labor force grew by 11 million, from 50 million in 2005 to 61 million in 2015(Federal Bureau of Statistics, 2015). The projects incepted under CPEC will provide an opportunity to the local employees. The indirect benefits of these projects will be providing employment opportunities to the youth bulge and economic growth in the country. However, power projects under CPEC have addressed a significant concern to providing uninterrupted power supply to the masses. The study analyzes workers' perceptions of employment opportunities through descriptive analysis and an econometric model.

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The total investment Pakistan will receive under the CPEC project is 20 percent of its annual GDP. Pakistan's economy is growing modestly with a five percent range, steadily increasing domestic demand, and a rising services sector. The enhancement in growth and a further increase in domestic demand are the CPEC project's implicit objectives (Bank, 2017). The steady development of Pakistan's economy and a growing number of unemployed individuals may result in jobless growth. Generally, developing economies suffer four maladies: mass poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, and malnutrition. Amongst these four disorders, the key to the rest of the three is mass unemployment and underemployment. From a social point of view, unemployment means the wastage of precious labor resources in the country. Human resources are considered an essential component of economic development in economics, and different means are globally used to achieve the said goals. Health and education are imperative means in this regard. These targets need a bridge to transform economic development into improved health, education, and vice versa. Employment can also be considered a bridge between these two. Despite contributing to economic growth, employment is also meaningful from a societal point of view. Precisely, employment tends to increase the self-esteem of individuals in society. Pakistan has now participated in an extensive development program involving foreign funding. The first time this happened was in the late 1960s, when the country built Indus water replacement works. It is the second time now that Pakistan is initiating an infrastructure building plan financed by china.

People have apprehensions and queries in their minds for post-construction. CPEC is a connection between economic agents and defined geography(Bank, 2017). The regional connectivity is expressed as a greater south area that includes China, Iran, and Afghanistan and stretches to Myanmar (Tiezzi, 2014). South Asia has experienced high economic growth since the turning of this millennium. The region’s GDP and GDP per capita have improved for many years. The economic pathway is along the transitional route of a boom with a particular focus on Pakistan, showing its growing energy demand. This demand may be in the form of electricity which is expected to increase further for both residential and industrial purposes as the population of Pakistan is growing fast. Access to modern energy, defined by household access to electricity and clean cooking facilities, is remarkably highlighted as an essential tool for developing countries' economic and human development.

Notwithstanding, investigating the modern energy sector portray the creation of jobs and improves energy security, reducing the risk of affecting climate badly. The global human population will likely increase by two to three billion by 2040 (Castellano, Kendall, Nikomarov, & Swemmer, 2015). Parallel to that, several billion people are expected to experience an increase in their per capita income to meet the sustainable development goals agreed upon in September 2005. Energy investment in Pakistan stands vital for growth and prosperity. Therefore, many countries seek ways to obtain social and economic growth through development via the advancement in the energy and renewable energy sector. United Nations’basicaim is universal access to modern energy share in the global energy mine by 2030. It can be realized through the multi-stakeholder partnership of public, private, and civil sector’s mobilization of resources for electricity access programs (Solar, 2014). CPEC is perceived to be a driver for connecting South Asia and East Asia. There are many important players in regional integrity, which is vital in the era of globalization and the paradigm shift from ‘security’ to ‘economics.’ It is the era of economic strength, and the route to it is economic development through various means and models (Khan & Khan, 2016).

The primary objective of the present study is to examine the employability impact of Bahawalpur's solar power project and Sahiwal's coal power plant within a radius of 15km^2. The secondary objective is to record the change in employment-oriented (socio-economic) indicators through the opinion of locals (employees) within a radius of 15km^2 since the completion and operation of the two energy projects. This study was conducted in a short time (14 to 16 weeks), which can be considered a limitation of this study. Another time limitation relates to the impact evaluation of CPEC. Since these projects started just a few years, their far-seeking impacts will take a few more years to be realized. Both energy projects (Bahawalpur and Sahiwal, solar and coal, respectively) are considered in this study. Other energy projects in Pakistan under CPEC may also have pervasive effects, but those energy projects are not included in the scope of this study.

Section 2 reviews the existing and prominent literature on CPEC and its economic benefits for Pakistan's economy. Section 3 provides the methodology, whereas section 4 demonstrates the analysis of the data collected from employees working in Sahiwal Coal Power and Quaid-e-Azam Solar Power projects. These results are discussed in 3 sub-sections, each for characteristics of employees, their perception, and the econometric analysis, respectively. Section 5 concludes the study.

2. Literature Review

Rathore, Khan, and Chawla (2020) highlighted that CPEC is a bilateral project under China's One Belt One Road initiative and is expected to benefit more than 4 billion people across 60 countries. Their study underlined the opportunities and challenges in implementing CPEC from the Human Resource Development (HRD) perspective. Between 2015 – 2030, around 600,000 to 1,000,000 job opportunities are expected to be generated from this project. In realizing the benefits of these job opportunities, a skilled labor force is required that should be equipped with knowledge, skills, and abilities. A holistic policy integrated with HRD is recommended to achieve development goals.

Hassan (2020) discussed the viewpoints of the civilian and military establishment regarding CPEC. The structural issues exist in the economy of Pakistan, and without overcoming those issues, it isn't easy to compete China industry. Moreover, the power struggle between politicians and the military establishment in terms of CPEC Authority can hinder the implementation of CPEC. Considering all the challenges, it is inferred that projects of CPEC having political and strategic importance may be completed in due course of time. Still, the completion of economic zones and industrial parks may be delayed.

Kanwal, Chong, and Pitafi (2019) examined the perception of local citizens regarding the impacts of CPEC on the living standards of local citizens. The results of this primary study showed that the smooth implementation of the project could positively impact local communities' living standards in terms of perceived economic, education, employment, and income benefits. This study recommended the proper commitment to the implementation of the project to garner the fruits allied with CPEC projects. Haq and Farooq (2016) forecasted the net impact of CPEC on the welfare of the masses in several districts of Pakistan. This district-level study estimated a 5.21 percent growth in social welfare in Pakistan, with the highest growth of 6.4% in Balochistan. The net impact in terms of growth in three dimensions of social welfare, i.e., education, housing 8.6%, and health 4.74%, has been indicated.

Ibrar, Mi, Rafiq, and Ali (2019) identified the possible challenges and obstacles in properly implementing CPEC projects and reaping the economic benefits. This study identified that Pakistan's citizens lack the required skills and knowledge to cater to the economic benefits of the said project. The lack of skills was the same in the Chinese investments in African countries, where African citizens did not benefit from the projects due to a lack of skills and the government's commitment. Pakistan's extreme commitment to enhancing human resource development was recommended. A nation-building process is also necessary for institutional reforms, transparency, and less foreign intervention in CPEC. Therefore, the government should take measures to have better coordination and consensus among the provinces (Z. S. Ahmed, 2019).

Kousar, Rehman, Zafar, Ali, and Nasir (2018) discussed the positive spillovers of CPECrather than associated challenges for sustainable development. The study indicated that CPEC is an ambitious project that requires restructuring the economy and the business community's participation to make this project pro-sustainable development. This project is considered a source of foreign direct investment for Pakistan and simultaneously has great trading benefits for China. Local entrepreneurs of the cities connected with CPEC projects have a positive attitude towards implementing CPEC (Kanwal, Pitafi, et al., 2019).

Kanwal, Pitafi, Malik, Khan, and Rashid (2020) examined the behavior of local communities towards CPEC projects and identified that expected benefits from CPEC projects and support from local communities are positively related. Therefore, local people are more willing to support such projects, which have more significant benefits. A. Ahmed, Arshad, Mahmood, and Akhtar (2017) emphasized the importance of human resource development in the local communities. The impacts of CPEC projects can be materialized if proper attention is

made to the human development aspect of the projects. Farooq, Gul, and Khan (2018) identified that women's participation and development are being ignored in CPEC projects; therefore gender gap in such projects is to be reduced by focusing on female participation, especially in small-scale enterprises.

Saad, Xinping, and Ijaz (2019) examined local communities' perceptions of the benefits of CPEC projects. Results of the survey showed that people perceive significant improvements in their lives, reduction in poverty, availability of employment opportunities, access to quality education, and improvements in environmental protection policies. Awais, Samin, Gulzar, and Hwang (2019) proposed a framework to synergize the social, economic, and ecological aspects of CPEC projects to ensure sustainable development. McCartney (2020) pointed out the spillover effects of CPEC construction activities on local construction employment and cement production. Still, Pakistan cannot implement an industrial policy to leverage logistic infrastructure into local industrialization.

3. Methodology of the Study

Since the variability in the characteristics of the respondents was considered to represent all the sampling units. The population and variability have not been determined through the primary survey. Consequently, the guessed variability, which is regarded as 50 percent to have a maximum sample size, the following statistical formula to have a representative sample from the large population is;

$n = \frac{Z^2 V^2}{e^2}$ Where:

Z = normal variate (1.96)

V = guest variability of sampling units which is 50 percent for the maximum sample size

e = deemable error (10 percent)

Considering the value of elements;

$$n = \frac{(1.96)^2 (50)^2}{(10)^2} = \frac{3.8416 \times 2500}{100} = 96.04$$

Say = 100, and for both the projects, the sample size will be 200 respondents. Considering both the site areas of the project, the sample size will be doubled, i.e., 100 x 2=200 (respondents from both site areas).

This study employed the descriptive-analytical narrative methods in the first stage. Then it adopted the OLS estimation procedure to estimate the impact of various relevant indicators on the perception of workers about employment opportunities. Primary data is based upon a structured questionnaire of employees of the projects on sites. The secondary data sources are journals, newspapers, magazines, and research articles. The questionnaire was formulated through an extensive study of the area through repeated visits. It comprises some sections, including an analysis of results and findings, a summary and conclusion, and recommendations. As the study is based on multistage sampling, cluster sampling and then purposive sampling techniques were adapted to collect data. This study will provide a schematic scenario with systematic analysis backed by the opinion of locals (employees) in the clusters around the solar and coal projects of Bahawalpur and Sahiwal, respectively.

4. Results and Discussion

The coal fire project initiated in Chak number 76/5-R in Qadirabad, district Sahiwal, Punjab, and Quaid-e-Azam solar park started in Bahawalpur. Sahiwal coal project is completed and has an operational capacity of 1320 MW with a total cost of US$1802 million. Quaid-e-Azam solar park in Bahawalpur is in progress since it attained a capacity of 300 MW in August 2016 and is connected to the national grid. It is pertinent to add that US$1302 million are spent on it. Bahawalpur and Sahiwal are urban areas of Punjab. Bahawalpur division has a cholistan desert in its territory. It is a sandy area and is exposed to sunlight for long hours around the year. Sahiwal District has multi-dimensional connectivity with road and rail routes towards various industrial centers of Punjab and Sindh provinces.

It is found that the labor employed in the projects are 60 and 330 males in Bahawalpur and Sahiwal energy projects, respectively, which are Pakistani nationals. In contrast, 1 Pakistani national female in each project was employed, totaling 61 in Bahawalpur and 331 in the Sahiwal project. The foreigners are also used in both projects. The male members employed are 19 in Bahawalpur and 219 in Sahiwal (Foreign nationals). The females are also engaged in projects 2 and 8 in Bahawalpur and Sahiwal, respectively. The total foreign national employed members are 21 in Bahawalpur and 227 in Sahiwal projects. All these members are registered by the Ministry of Labor and were working on sites at the survey time. These employees are provided accommodation, food, medical facilities, transportation, an on-site shopping mart, oversees, and local technical training opportunities in the Sahiwal project. Furthermore, lunch allowance, mobile allowance, fuel allowance, laptop allowance, and medical insurance are also provided to employees on the Bahawalpur project site.

4.1 Analyzing Characteristics of Respondents

4.1.1 Classification of the Labor force by Education

Since the labor force employed in both the projects are(locals) literate and illiterate. Classification of the labor force is made based on education. The literate labor force is 74 percent in both Bahawalpur and Sahiwal projects. Consequently, illiterate interviewed respondents remained at 26 percent in both projects.

Table 1 shows the education status of currently working employees in both energy projects.

Table 1: Classification of the Labor force by Education (%)

Project	Illiterate	Literate			
Bahawalpur	26%	≤Matric 43.2	Intermediate 12.2	74% Graduate 9.5	>Graduate & above 35.1
Sahiwal	26%	37.8	16.2	74% 16.3	29.7

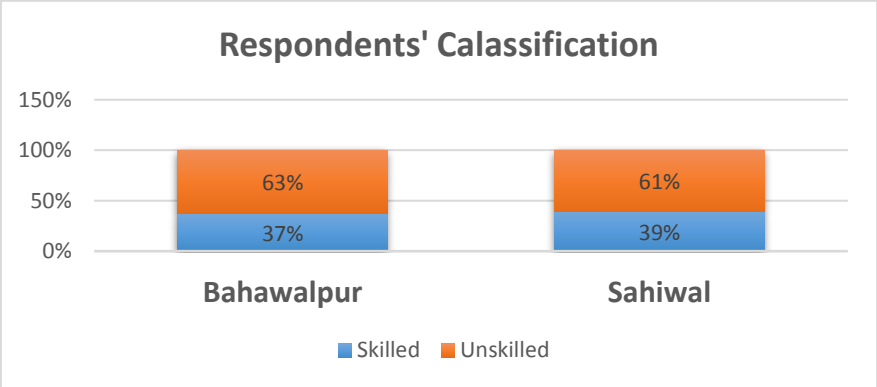
(**Source:** Primary Data)

Amongst the literate employees, the percentage of employees with 14 or more years of education is 35.1 percent and 29.7 percent for Bahawalpur and Sahiwal projects, respectively. This employment segment contains engineers, managers, and persons employed for operations. Employees acquiring intermediate education levels and those who have attained the equivalent diploma (associate engineers) from technical colleges of Punjab are also engaged in both site areas. However, 9.5 percent and 16.2 percent of graduates acquiring 14 years of education are employed in Bahawalpur and Sahiwal projects, respectively. These employees filled the vacancies for middle management. Employees with ten or fewer years of schooling comprise 43.2 percent and 37.8 percent of Bahawalpur and Sahiwal projects, respectively.

4.1.2 Classification of Labor Force by Skill

Figure 1 shows the labor force classification based on skilled and unskilled respondents. The skilled workforce is employed in both energy projects (37 percent and 39 percent for Bahawalpur and Sahiwal, respectively). Two-thirds of employees interviewed from both areas are unskilled, 63 percent and 61 percent for Bahawalpur and Sahiwal energy projects, respectively.

Figure 1: Respondents Classification



4.1.3 Classification of Labor Force by Experience

Table 2 portrays that 43 percent of employed persons in the Bahawalpur project and 37 percent employed in the Sahiwal project do not have any prior experience, While the percentage for experienced employees with a duration of 36 months and above experience (depicted in months) showed the highest rank for the experience of 3 years and above are 45.6 percent and 34.9 percent for Bahawalpur and Sahiwal respectively. These experienced persons are employed in high management ranks and are already acquiring managerial skills. Employees form the second highest category with twelve months of experience which are 17.5 percent for Bahawalpur and 30.2 percent for Sahiwal projects.

Table 2: Classification of Labor Force by prior experience in months (%)

Project	No Experience	Experience					
Bahawalpur	43%	57%					
		<6 Month	<12 Month	<18 Month	<24 Month	<30 Month	<36 Month & above
		12.3	17.5	5.3	10.5	7	45.6
Sahiwal	37%	63%					
		11.1	30.2	6.3	9.5	7.9	34.9

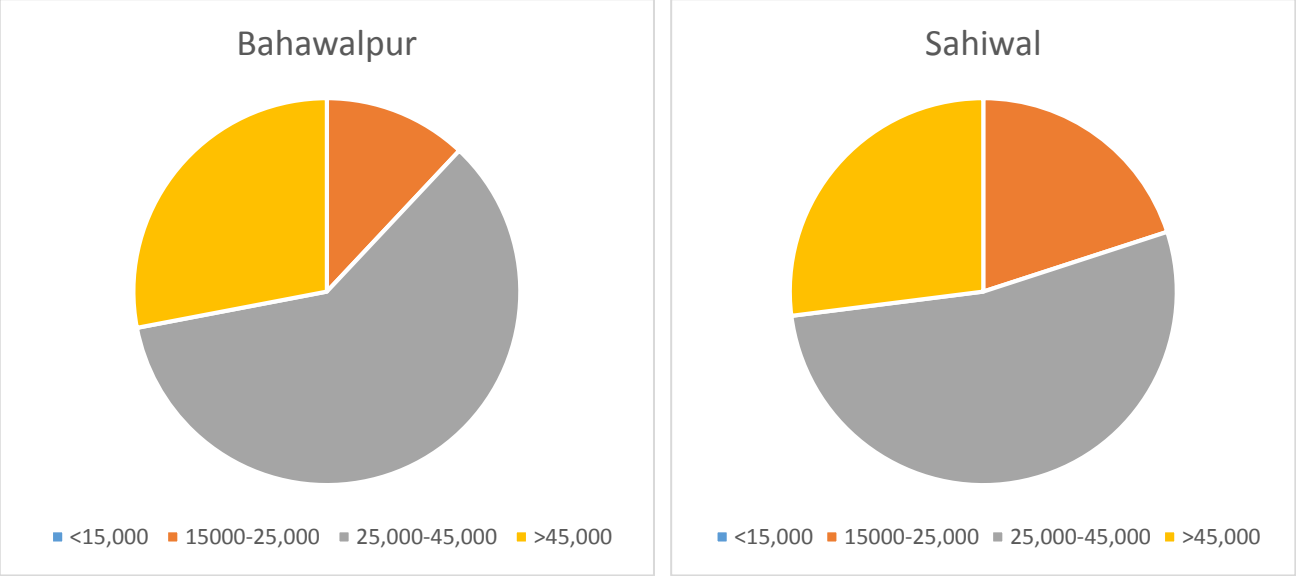
(**Source:** Primary Data)

Common person and the person ever employed in the project for a short duration of (0-3months) are likewise giving unsatisfactory remarks for the employability scenario. Indeed, even now, unskilled and ten years of education acquiring persons are keen to get employment in both power plants as they moderately respond to social infrastructure advancement and jobs for locals. The facilities provided by registered companies were similar for local and foreign employees, but the response rate of satisfaction was relatively lower among local employees.

4.1.4 Classification by Salary

Salary is classified under the lowest segment (less than Rs 15000 per month) while the second group of wages is made with income of less than Rs 25000. The maximum percentage of employees interviewed were getting a salary between Rs 15000 to Rs 25000. Those mainly were primarily skilled with no experience or with a short duration of the experience. They constitute 60 percent and 53 percent of Bahawalpur and Sahiwal projects, respectively. However, other employees are getting salaries more than Rs 45000 and above, which are 28 percent in Bahawalpur solar and 27 percent in Sahiwal coal fire projects. These persons are performing managerial and professional jobs with a minimum of two years of experience and are considered technical.

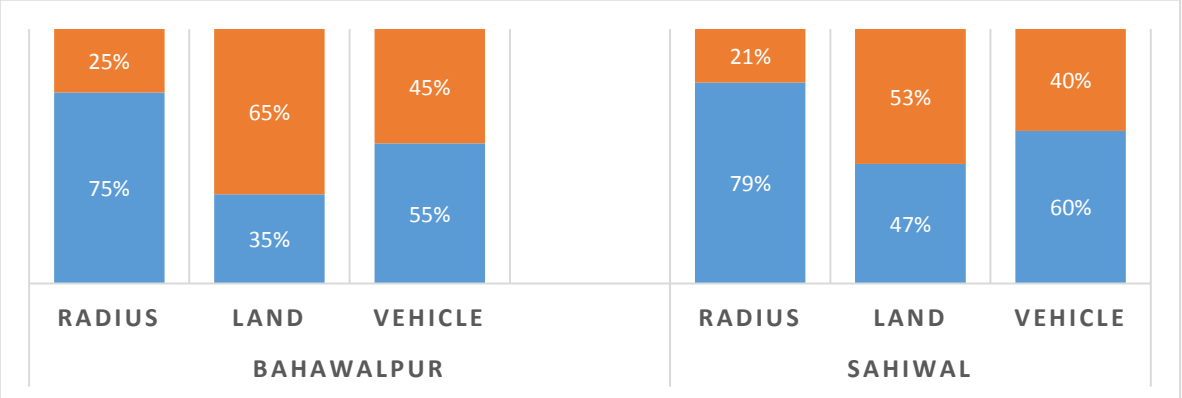
Figure 2: Monthly Salary of Employees



4.1.5 Classification by resident of the area (within 15 km2)

The labor force distribution by a resident of the area within a 15 km^2 radius on both sites is also recorded. The respondents who are not residents of a specified radius are not familiar with the local languages of site areas. They used to use their local languages at home and national language at work for communication. The results are depicted in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Ownership of Assets



The rural labor force is generally classified as land owners or landless people. Those who responded for land ownership by family also answered that they were wholly or partly employed with family members on the farms before getting employment in those projects under study. Most of them are unskilled, uneducated, and residents within a 15km^2 radius in both areas. The study's findings show that 35 percent of the labor force working in the Bahawalpur Solar Project and 47 percent of respondents from the Sahiwal Coal project indicated farm ownership. However, 65 percent and 53 percent of respondents were from landless families in Bahawalpur and Sahiwal energy projects, respectively.

Rural areas of Bahawalpur and Sahiwal district have no infrastructure for owning general vehicles as rural people are poor with a subsistence level of income and could not afford vehicle use and ownership. Labor force showing vehicle ownership are those who purchased the vehicle after getting a job in these energy projects under CPEC. A good number of persons show the purchase of vehicles after getting employment in these projects, 55 percent and 60 percent in Bahawalpur and Sahiwal site areas, respectively. This shows the upward trend of living standards for the employees after getting jobs in these energy projects. Going deep into the line of respondents' socio-economic background, it seemed pertinent to ask about the income of the family head (father). These respondents were disguisedly employed upon the father's farm or were helping in his work before joining the jobs in these projects. Twenty-one percent of employees in the Bahawalpur project and 17 percent of

respondents in the Sahiwal project responded for no income, portraying that father was not involved in economic activity or was late. Amongst those who responded for father income through employment or any other economic training were 41 percent from Bahawalpur and 45 percent from Sahiwal in the total sample. This constituted the major income level group; the recorded father's monthly income was Rs15000 or less. The 17 percent of respondents reflected the second major group of father income in Bahawalpur with Rs 55,000 and above. In contrast, the second major group of fathers' income in the Sahiwal area, with a percentage of 16, had income between Rs 15,000 and Rs 25,000.

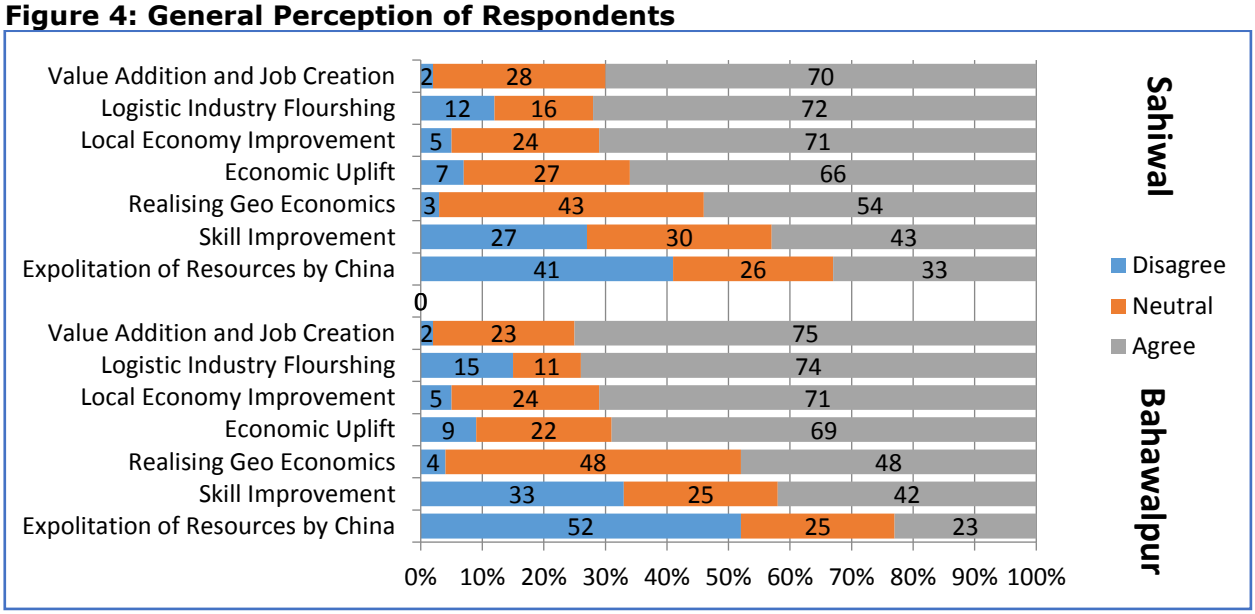
4.2 Employees' Perception about CPEC

Initially, the CPEC initiative focused on energy and infrastructure development. Hence, the concerned respondents collected the employees' general responses concerning project perception. The operational procedures of relevant projects under CPEC differ from conventional investment projects as Pakistan has no experience in undertaking such considerable investments in size and scale (BIPP, 2017). The perception of respondents has been measured with the 5-point Likert scale.

4.2.1 General Perception of Respondents

The response regarding project (CPEC) activity, specifically in these energy projects, possesses a relatively similar perception of respondents for the impacts upon their surroundings that ultimately will affect the local common person's life. The respondents interviewed from both projects believe these will promote rural industrialization and enhance SMEs, etc. The persons interviewed from the Sahiwal Coal fire plant showed more optimistic views in their general remarks. They showed their perceptions in the post-installation, operation, and management phase as well as for the near and far future of the area under the CPEC umbrella. The graph shows that the project has a general concern of economic uplift of the backward areas by adding in the higher economic growth of Pakistan, advancement in logistic industry, local economic development and value addition with employment generation and skill improvement in the employed labor force through new technology. Since similar indicators for the perception of the CPEC project were considered for both sites, the expected response must be identical. The reaction for disagreement was also reported for some indicators like exploitation of resources by China and coal use as capital flight.

Figure 4: General Perception of Respondents

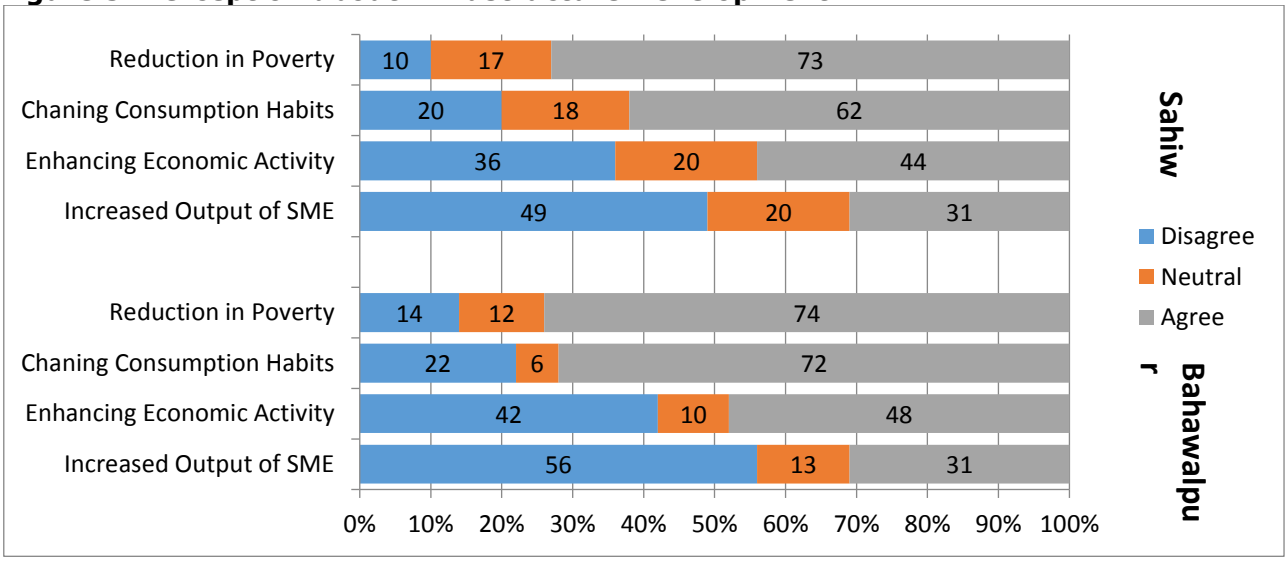


4.2.2 Perception about Infrastructure Development

The development of infrastructure parallel to the project activities is essential to implement the CPEC project successfully. This could increase the level of output and income of the respondent. Such investment to provide infrastructure will reduce the poverty level of the concerned periphery. Consequently, the adequate infrastructure would increase economic activity and impact local communities' consumption habits, which will ultimately increase the level of output and income of the respondents. The small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are

the enterprising foundations of Pakistan. Almost 90 percent of the existing enterprises contribute 80 percent non-agriculture workforce, 40 percent to the annual GDP, and 35 percent to value addition (Pakistan Economic Survey, 2017). The graph indicates the respondents agreed at 74 percent, 72 percent, and 48 percent in the Bahawalpur area. A similar situation concerning response in infrastructure development was reported at 73%, 62% and 44% in the Sahiwal project area. Several respondents reported disagreement and neutral responses in the case of both projects for some indicators.

Figure 5: Perception about Infrastructure Development



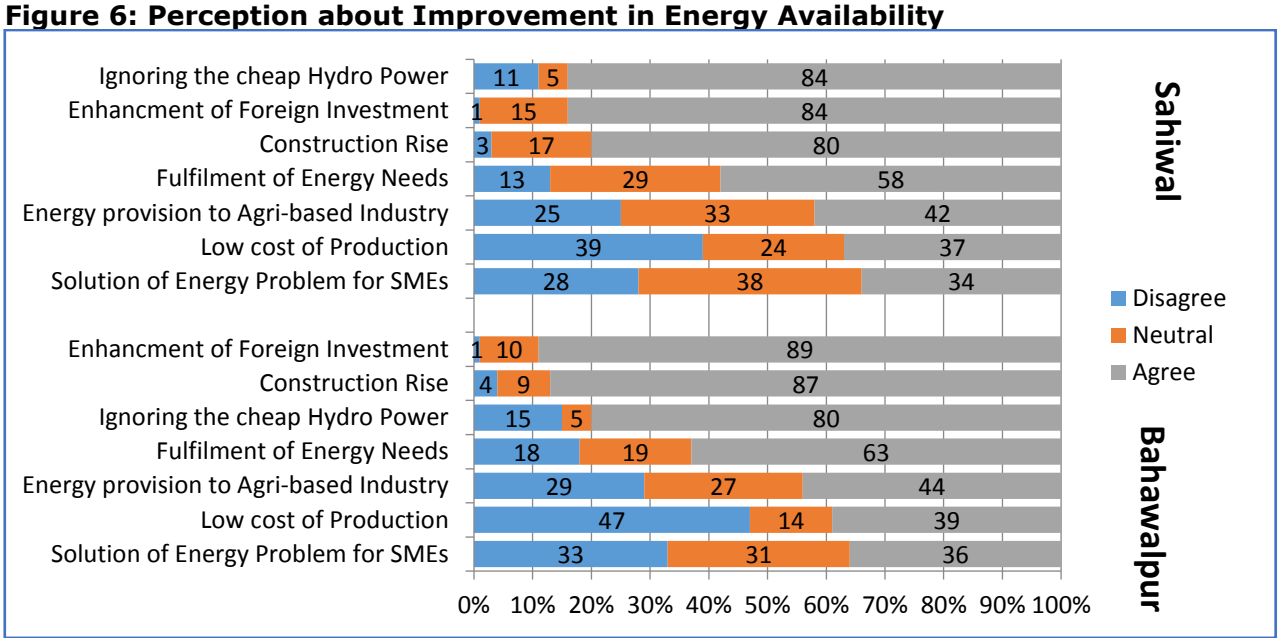
4.2.3 Perception about Improvement in Energy Availability

The lion's share of China's investment ($32 billion constituting 70 percent of investment funds) is allocated to energy projects. The bulk of funds is coming under the CPEC umbrella for solving Pakistan's energy problem. Energy shortage has been a significant hurdle in the country's economic growth for the last many years. If all such investment is made according to plan, about 20 projects of energy will generate nearly 17,000 MW of additional power by 2020. The energy projects are financed by foreign investment under contracts that will create outflows in profit repatriation and fuel imports. And the peak outflows of $3.5 to $4.5 billion will occur by 2025 (IMF, 2017).

The respondents of the project area have shown specific indications on completion of the project concerning the provision of energy and solution of energy-related problems. The provision of energy would increase the establishment of new small and medium industries. This may indirectly attract foreign investment, and betterment in local and agriculture-based sectors may also be realized. China intends to initiate collaborative research in agriculture as agriculture is the most important sector of Pakistan's economy, accounts 19.5 percent of GDP, and employs a 50 Percent workforce (Economic Survey 2017).

The collaborative effort under the umbrella of CPEC will open new ways for growth. It will positively impact the masses' livelihood by creating better jobs for them. There is a setback that CPEC has been ignoring the cheap hydropower projects and focusing on costly fuel for electricity generation. The graph shows respondents' perception of energy improvement, which was 63 percent, 87 percent, 89 percent, and 80 percent for certain indicators in the Bahawalpur project area. Sahiwal respondents reported a slightly lower response for the same indicators. Forty-seven percent disagreed with low-cost production after implementing the CPEC project in Bahawalpur. It shows inevitable fluctuations in respect of response by respondents.

Figure 6: Perception about Improvement in Energy Availability



The interviewed Pakistani nationals showed some similarities and some differences against the same questions of the questionnaire. Among these interviewed persons, 75 percent and 79 percent were locals within the radius mentioned above in Bahawalpur and Sahiwal, respectively, 26 percent of which were illiterate in both areas, and the bracket of literate persons maximum percentage of respondents were matriculated and intermediate(holding associate engineering diploma) made up 55.4 percent in Bahawalpur and 54 percent in Sahiwal project and the percentage of locals employed in both the projects with 10 to 12 years of education is likewise similar.

The next major bracket of Pakistan national employees in both projects is for engineers acquiring 16 years of education are 35.1 and 29 percent in Bahawalpur and Sahiwal projects, respectively. This bracket of employees also contains the persons working in top management positions in both projects. It is a less percentage of local, skilled, and educated persons employed in both site areas. The rest of the unskilled persons are illiterate or a bit literate, earning a salary between Rs 15000 to Rs 25000 per month. Some indicators like spouse employment, spouse education, and income of father (family head) were also inquired from the respondents. A maximum percentage of respondents responded for father income between Rs 15000 to Rs 25000 monthly and the fathers were small land owners (self-employed) or working laborers. The uneducated and unskilled respondents could not provide information about their prior experience. Still, the same respondents reported working on farms with fathers and seemed disguisedly employed (a significant problem in Pakistan).

Many married respondents reported an illiterate spouse with no participation in economic activity. Although these indicators did not directly target the research topic, there overt a clear difference in both districts under study. As Sahiwal is near central Punjab, 18 percent of respondents reported for employed Spouse with a maximum of sixteen years of education, while in Bahawalpur, 10 percent of respondents reported spouse employment which is almost half of the percentage at Sahiwal.

5. Conclusion

China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is an amalgam that addresses employability in Pakistan. The perception of creating millions of jobs in the next few years is vital for strengthening the relationship between China and Pakistan. This paper aims to estimate the perception of the employability impact of the solar power project of Bahawalpur and the coal power plant of Sahiwal within a radius of 15km^2. The data is collected from both power plant employees through a structured questionnaire. The 46% and 50% of workers earned salaries

between Rs. 15,000 and Rs. 25,000 in Bahawalpur and Sahiwal respectively. However, 32% and 30% were earning above Rs. 45,000 in Bahawalpur and Sahiwal projects respectively and were associated with managerial or technical job positions. The study showed that respondents purchased vehicles after getting jobs in the project. This showed an upward trend in the socio-economic standards of locals due to these projects. Between 50% and 70% of respondents perceived that these projects could help job creation, local economy improvement, and the logistics industry. But less than 40% of respondents believed that these projects would not be beneficial to uplift the skill set of locals as major technical jobs were occupied by foreigners. 60% to 74% of the respondents perceived that both projects would reduce the poverty levels and consequently change the consumption habits of the locals. Although, 49% and 56% of respondents from Sahiwal and Bahawalpur, respectively, perceived that these projects could increase the output of the SME sector. But 44% and 48% of respondents from Sahiwal and Bahawalpur, respectively, perceived that both projects would enhance the economic activity in the region. Most respondents (80% - 89%) perceived that although CPEC attracted foreign investment, these projects ignored the cheap hydropower source. Although these projects can fulfill the energy needs, this is insufficient to solve energy problems for SMEs and agro-based industries. This study contributes to the existing literature, explains the negative and positive perceptions regarding CPEC projects, and is concluded in support of CPEC. This study also suggests that uplifting the technical skills of the local labor force should be the utmost priority in such types of projects.

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