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CPEC on a Ten-Point Scale:

A Case for Gender Mainstreaming



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The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has been a game-changer since its completion in 2023. The CPEC is a long-term project between China and Pakistan to serve as a "gateway of prosperity" for both nations and the region as a whole. The CPEC seeks to open a variety of doors to prosperity, including those for trade and marketing, industrial growth and global value chains, socioeconomic development, and poverty alleviation, agriculture



modernization and marketing, Gwadar Oil City and the blue economy, regional connectivity, and third-party participation. The CPEC reached its tenth anniversary in 2023, at a time when nations are struggling to recover from the effects of climate change, a high rate of youth unemployment, dwindling resources for effectively addressing security challenges, and a disinformation campaign like the one being waged against the CPEC. A rise in fatal terrorist attacks and rising political instability at the start of the year have also presented significant obstacles to overall progress.

Amid all this confusion, gender mainstreaming is also a main concern for CPEC. China is the first country to advocate for this idea, and it may be the best place to start as a country that has acknowledged that women citizens are equal agents of economic change. For any nation to thrive, women must participate. It has demonstrated that despite political or other



instabilities, gender mainstreaming and women's economic empowerment have remained top priorities. Where Pakistan is located today was formerly pre-industrialized China. Although there were many differences, the similarities were immediately apparent. China had a sizable population to contend with in addition to the oppression of women under old laws and strongly ingrained traditional beliefs. China, like Pakistan, lacks the technical and educational institutions as well as the equipment and capital investments required for long-term progress. The governing class did, however, have a keen awareness of the most important component of economic change—its people. It was obvious that economic progress could not be achieved with mere men at the center of the Chinese revolutionary theory. For the country to experience economic progress, a fundamental reform of Chinese society was required. This included the abolition of traditions and organizations that oppress women, such as religious superstition, landholding structures, criteria for admittance to schools, workplace prejudice, and familial norms.

If the CPEC is to promote equitable opportunities, the structural hurdles that make women's labor force participation the lowest in South Asia must be eliminated. Through the CPEC, we hope to create an open, inclusive, and equitable economic and logistical system that will benefit both men and women equally. Improving women's access to services in high-priority industries like transportation and energy, encouraging employment through gender quotas, and putting more of an emphasis on establishing jobs with appropriate working conditions, such as the prevention of sexual harassment, rather than just more jobs. The creation of a gender unit for the CPEC, the requirement that all projects conduct gender

needs analyses, and the development of a framework for involving funders, women, and minorities will all contribute to the project's success. The lives of Pakistani women are changing quickly, so creating an environment where women have access to enough economic possibilities is crucial for a flourishing Pakistan.

Gender mainstreaming, however, is also Pakistan's biggest challenge because misunderstood cultural practices and beliefs confine women to traditional roles and worsen already depressing statistics regarding girls' education, the absence of women's decision-making in family planning, and women's economic and social dependence. An excellent place to start would be for the planning commission and other relevant parties to acknowledge the underlying causes and the need to remedy them, keeping China's example in mind. Pakistanis must be at the forefront of supporting and ensuring the success of CPEC. To believe that CPEC's sustainability and long-term success can be achieved without directly involving Pakistan's inhabitants, especially women, would be misguided and sexist. But inviting women along is not a novel suggestion. Gender mainstreaming is logical, crucial for true economic progress and sustainable development, and of common benefit to all, according to international best practices and clear evidence.





Financially more secure women are more likely to make better financial choices for their families and communities, invest in their children's health and education, and invest in their communities, protecting and improving chances for future generations. Businesses that employ a diverse and inclusive workforce do better than their male-dominated counterparts on a variety of metrics, including innovation and competitiveness, and economically engaged women drive the success of their organizations and nations. For thousands of Pakistani women, such a realization on the part of the high-level stakeholders within the CPEC apparatus would change the game. The support of activists and women's rights groups may prove to be the most important factor in tipping the scales in Pakistani women's favor in this area. Local women are participating in the Thar Block-1 Integrated Coal Mine Power Project, a significant component of the CPEC.

The peculiar history of female labor in China is the one intriguing feature that might set this case study apart from other prior economic partnerships and inspire cause for optimism. The idea that all people, regardless of gender, could contribute to the economy was one of the founding principles of post-revolutionary China. Due to the perception that certain ancient cultural laws prevented women from participating in the economy—many of which are similar to those in contemporary Pakistan—they were abolished. Currently, two-thirds of Chinese women are working. How much of this ideology the Chinese government incorporates into its international economic investments will be the crucial question. A drive like this from the Chinese CPEC stakeholders might go a long way toward ensuring that women get a better deal during this significant economic transformation.



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Given the current situation, it appears that the economic opportunities brought about by CPEC may ignore the female workforce and that gender may continue to be a barrier to thousands of women's access to decent employment chances in the nation.