中国传媒大學
COMMUNICATION UNIVERSITY OF CHINA

Institute for a Community with Shared Future
人类命运共同体研究院

PAKISTAN RESEARCH CENTER FOR
A COMMUNITY WITH SHARED FUTURE
人类命运共同体巴基斯坦研究中心

Exploring the Blue Economy: The Next Pillar of Pakistan–China Economic Cooperation

By Mr. Muhammad Mohsin, PRCCSF Fellow, Pakistan Research Center for a Community with Shared Future (PRCCSF), Islamabad

Published on 7th July 2026

The word Blue Economy was coined in 2010, but got popularity from the "United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development" held in Rio de Janeiro in 2012. It includes the sustainable use of resources such as fisheries, port infrastructure, offshore energy, and coastal tourism for economic growth, while preserving the health of the ocean ecosystem. Globally, the blue economy generates around US$3 trillion per year and contributes around 3–4% of global GDP. China has been a major player in ocean trade, particularly since the Ming Dynasty. Admiral Zheng He led around seven voyages that significantly demonstrated the importance of oceans in the economy. China is now the global leader in the blue economy, including fisheries, offshore energy, coastal tourism, and large port operations. The total share of the blue economy in China's GDP is approximately US$1.6 trillion, with an annual growth rate of 5.9%. However, in the case of Pakistan, although it is endowed with vast potential in the marine sectors, it hasn't taken as many steps forward.

Pakistan holds remarkable potential for developing the blue economy due to its strategic location at the intersection of South Asia, the Middle East, Central Asia and the Indian Ocean and can play an important role as a maritime hub for global trade. Pakistan has a coastline of approximately 1,046 kilometers with an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of 290,000 square kilometers. It possesses opportunities in fisheries, cargo handling, marine renewable energy, and coastal tourism. The China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) further highlights the importance of Gwadar Port in Pakistan as the shortest route to the Arabian Sea for western China & regional markets. Despite these opportunities, Pakistan's share of the blue economy in total GDP is 1%, due to bad governance, lack of investment, outdated technology, limited marine research, and fewer port-based industries. These problems emphasize the need for greater Pakistan–China cooperation to unlock Pakistan's Blue Economy potential.

The fisheries sector is one of the major parts of the blue economy of Pakistan. According to the data of 2025, Pakistan's total marine fishing was around 590,480 metric tonnes, with a 0.31% to 0.39% share in the total GDP. Pakistan's EEZ is blessed with important fish species such as Tuna which include Yellowfin Tuna, Skipjack Tuna, and Longtail Tuna which are top export quality fish with greater demand in China, Japan, Europe, and the Middle East. Shrimp and crabs are also found in greater number with the greater export demand in East Asia. Pakistan annually catches 50,000–80,000 tonnes of Tuna which is not a satisfying number yet for the country with abundant fisheries potential. The fisheries sector is mostly depending on the local fishermen using traditional methods such as small wooden boats, traditional manual nets, underdeveloped cold storage, and limited fish finding equipment. On the other hand, China has steel fishing vessels, sonar systems, modern hatcheries, and cage aquaculture. The role of China in Pakistan's fishing development is still limited as compared to Pakistan's potential. China is helping Pakistan mainly in infrastructure such as the Gwadar Fisheries Processing Centre, cold storage facilities in the Gwadar Free Zone, and fisheries-related infrastructure around Gwadar. But there are still many other things that are missing, such as modern hatcheries, cage aquaculture, sonar systems, modern AI technology in exploring fisheries, and cold chain logistics. These are some missing parts of Pakistan-China cooperation. Most of China's cooperation is concentrated around Gwadar, while Pakistan's fisheries sector also includes Sindh and Baluchistan. Cooperation between China and Pakistan will not only strengthen Pakistan's export facilities, but it is also helpful for China as well. It can expand overseas investment opportunities and the fulfilment of the Green Belt and Road Initiative (GBRI).

Due to the strategic location of Pakistan at the transit routes, there is an opportunity for Pakistan to earn better capital based on port development. Currently, Pakistan has 3 major ports which include Karachi Port, Port Qasim, and Gwadar. Pakistan moves more than 90% of its global trade through these ports. Karachi Port and Port Qasim jointly handled 99 million tonnes of cargo in 2024–25. To unlock the blue economy potential, it is necessary for Pakistan to modernize its seaports, logistics, and trade. China is significantly promoting the blue economy of Pakistan by investing in the port infrastructure, the Free Economic Zone, and multimodal connectivity. Under CPEC, China Overseas Ports Holding Company (COPHC) is handling the port operations in Gwadar. Under CPEC, China has significantly increased the port infrastructure through the building of berths, roads, utilities, and the Free Economic Zone. COPHC is considering that the Gwadar Port has the capacity to handle around 400 million tonnes of cargo annually, which is currently approximately 547,000 tonnes of cargo in 2025. In Karachi Port, notable examples of port infrastructure are Pakistan International Container Terminal (PICT) and Karachi Gateway Terminal Limited (KGTL). The port infrastructure is also developed at Port Qasim. The major example of this development includes Qasim International Container Terminal (QICT) and Port Qasim Coal-Fired Power Plant. But still there are notable things that are lacking in Pakistan's ports, such as digital systems like those in Shanghai and Shenzhen, such as AI-based container tracking, automated cranes, and digital clearance. While Pakistan's ports have very limited modern cargo handling systems like China.

Another major area of cooperation between China and Pakistan might be offshore renewable energy. Pakistan has a great potential for generating renewable energy through using wind turbines, wave energy, and tidal energy. For wind energy, the major potential areas for Pakistan are Gharo, Keti Bandar, and Thatta, which have the potential to generate around 50 GW of wind energy in Pakistan. Pakistan has taken notable steps to increase wind energy, but those steps are mostly onshore, not offshore. The major steps taken by Pakistan to improve the wind projects are Jhimpir Wind Corridor, Gharo Wind Corridor, Three Gorges First Wind Farm Pakistan, Sachal Wind Power Project, and UEP Wind Power Project. But Pakistan is missing the offshore projects. Similarly, Pakistan significantly possesses the potential for producing wave energy. Notable areas for producing this wave energy include Ormara, Pasni, and Gwadar. For tidal energy, the major areas of potential are Sir Creek and Indus Delta Creeks. China is the major player in offshore renewable energy, significantly having the expertise in renewable energy with a significant market structure. Currently, Pakistan is facing an energy crisis, and at the same time, China is pledged to promote Green CPEC by building infrastructure with zero carbon dioxide emission. To fulfill this agenda, it is necessary for both Pakistan and China to cooperate in this sector. This will not only benefit Pakistan, but it would also be very helpful for the Chinese market expansion. Notable companies such as Goldwind, Mingyang Smart Energy, and Dongfang Electric can invest in Pakistan and export their equipment to Pakistan.

Last but not least, the important sector in the blue economy of Pakistan is marine tourism. Pakistan is currently promoting coastal tourism in Balochistan and Sindh. Major tourism areas are Kund Malir Beach, Astola Island, and Hingol National Park, etc. The Government of Pakistan has taken various initiatives to improve marine tourism such as the Makran Coastal Highway (N-10), the establishment of the Astola Island Marine Protected Area, and also the expansion of hotels and guest houses at large places. But still, there are various things that are missing in Pakistan, such as international-standard beach resorts as compared to China, such as Sanya, Shenzhen, Xiamen, and Qingdao. Pakistan also has very limited infrastructure for yachts and recreational boating, with very limited water sports. China can significantly contribute to this sector of tourism by developing eco-resorts, promoting beach infrastructure, hotel investments, and marina construction. By investing in these initiatives, it will increase the tourism business for Chinese companies. It also expands the Green Belt and Road Initiative, and boosts the people-to-people connection, which is the greater ideology of China since 2013, to build a community with a shared future.

Pakistan has huge potential in the fisheries, maritime trade, offshore renewable energy, and coastal tourism sector in the context of its Blue Economy. The potential is however underutilized due to lack of investment, outdated technology, inadequate port infrastructure, poor marine research and weak policy implementation despite the strategic location and rich marine resources. China has already provided a solid platform for cooperation in CPEC, especially in the development of Gwadar port and related infrastructure. The future of Pakistan-China cooperation should be in the fields of technology transfer, smart ports, modern fisheries & aquaculture, offshore renewable energy, coastal tourism, and marine scientific research. These areas provide a window of opportunity for bilateral cooperation, besides utilizing Pakistan's maritime resources. This cooperation can boost Pakistan's exports, energy sector, and employment. It would also create opportunities for Chinese investment, increase regional connectivity, strengthen the Maritime Silk Road, and support Green BRI.