



## **One-Day International Conference Report on** **“Enhancing Regional Connectivity for the Betterment of** **Shared Future of Mankind”**



*Jointly organized by*

***Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Women University Peshawar and  
Pakistan Research Center for a Community with Shared Future  
(PRCCSF) in collaboration with Embassy of the People's Republic  
of China to Pakistan on 11<sup>th</sup> June 2024***

***at Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Women University Peshawar***



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## **Aim of the Conference:**

The One-Day International Conference on “Enhancing Regional Connectivity for the Betterment of Shared Future of Mankind,” jointly organized by Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Women University Peshawar, Project Management Unit (PMU) Higher Education Department and the Pakistan Research Center for a Community with Shared Future (PRCCSF) in collaboration with the Embassy of the People’s Republic of China to Pakistan, aims to foster dialogue and collaboration among regional stakeholders to enhance connectivity, promote economic integration, and build a sustainable and prosperous future. By bringing together scholars, policymakers, and practitioners, the conference seeks to identify and address challenges, share best practices, and explore innovative strategies for strengthening regional ties and achieving collective progress for all communities involved.

## **About The Conference**

On 11th June 2024 was held at Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Women University Peshawar. It was jointly organized by Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Women University, Peshawar, and Pakistan Research Center for a Community with Shared Future (PRCCSF), Islamabad in collaboration with the Embassy of the People’s Republic of China to Pakistan.



The conference was moderated by Ms. Wajeeha Khan Lecturer at Department of Political Science SBBWUP and was attended by around 250 students of the Department of Political Science Department of History & Pakistan Studies and students from affiliated colleges of SBBWU at Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Women University. Scholar and researchers from

different universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa attended the event physically while scholars from Lahore, Karachi and Bahawalpur University attended online.

### **Objectives of the Conference:**

The conference's fundamental objective was to explore the various aspects of regional connection and how important it is for advancing the ideas of a community with a shared future. The conference intended to bring together practitioners, academics, policymakers, and specialists from a variety of fields in order to:

- Analyze the state of regional connectivity initiatives in various regions at the moment.
- Determine the advantages and disadvantages of improving regional connectivity.
- Examine innovative approaches as well as best practices for promoting equitable and long-lasting regional connectivity.
- Explain about the possible effects of increased regional connectedness on environmental sustainability, cultural exchange, and socioeconomic development.
- Encourage stakeholders in regional connection projects to collaborate, network, and exchange knowledge.

### **Concepts of the Conference:**

The conference has covered a wide range of concepts related to regional connectivity, including:

**Infrastructure Development:** Assessing the role of transportation, communication, and energy infrastructure in enhancing regional connectivity.

**Trade and Economic Integration:** Exploring the linkages between regional connectivity and trade facilitation, economic growth, and investment promotion.

**People-to-People Connectivity:** Examining initiatives that promote cultural exchange, tourism, educational cooperation, and social integration across borders.



**Policy and Governance:** Analyzing policy frameworks, regulatory mechanisms, and institutional arrangements conducive to promoting regional connectivity.

**Environmental Sustainability:** Addressing the environmental implications of regional connectivity projects and strategies for promoting sustainable development.

**Technological Innovation:** Harnessing digital technologies, smart solutions, and innovation to bridge connectivity gaps and promote digital inclusion.



### **Themes of the Conference:**

The Conference has covered the following themes,

#### **1) Cultural Exchange and Social Cohesion:**

- Promoting cultural understanding and exchange through enhanced connectivity.
- The impact of regional connectivity on social cohesion and peacebuilding.
- Educational and people-to-people exchanges as tools for regional integration.

#### **2) Security and Stability in Connected Regions:**

- Addressing regional security challenges through cooperative frameworks.
- The impact of regional connectivity on mitigating conflicts and fostering stability.

#### **3) Sustainable Development and Environmental Cooperation:**

- Integrating sustainability into regional connectivity projects.
- Trans-boundary environmental issues and regional cooperation for sustainable solutions.

- The role of regional initiatives in combating climate change.
- 4) **Women Empowerment & Entrepreneurship under Regional Connectivity:**
- Role of connectivity in bringing female entrepreneurs together to empower them.

### **Conference Highlights:**

#### **Conference Aims:**

1. Foster Regional Integration: Promote cooperation and collaboration among neighboring countries to strengthen regional ties.
2. Improve Infrastructure: Develop and enhance transportation, communication, and trade infrastructures to facilitate seamless connectivity.
3. Economic Growth: Stimulate economic development through improved regional trade and investment opportunities.
4. Social and Cultural Exchange: Encourage cultural and social interactions to foster mutual understanding and respect among diverse communities.
5. Sustainable Development: Advocate for environmentally sustainable practices and policies that benefit the region and the planet.
6. Bridging Minds: The Psychological Impacts of Enhancing Regional Connectivity for a Shared Global Future.



## Conference Proceedings

Conference was started with the Recitation of few verses from the holy Quran, Ms. Wajeeha Khan the Moderator welcomed all the guests at the venue and formally introduced the purpose of gathering at that day. She gave a brief insight about the purpose of the conference.

## Presentations and Discussions

**Speaker: Dr. Zarmina Baloch Director Regional Connectivity Center and Assistant Professor Department of Political Science at Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Women University, Peshawar**

Dr. Zarmina Baloch expressed her gratitude to several individuals who played a key role in establishing the Regional Connectivity Center. She acknowledged the initial concept and unwavering dedication of Mr. Khalid Taimur, followed by the instrumental support and belief in regional collaboration from the esteemed Vice Chancellor. Appreciation was extended to Dr. Sumaira, the first to join the initiative within the university, and Wajiha for their integral part in shaping the center's direction. Dr. Hamida and Tashfeen were recognized for their expertise and dedication that enriched the team. She concluded by expressing confidence that the center, built on everyone's contributions, will foster regional understanding, collaboration, and development.



**Speaker: Professor Li Huailiang, Dean of the Institute for a Community with Shared Future Communication University of China (CUC), Beijing, China**

Professor Li Huailiang, Dean of the Institute for a Community with Shared Future at Communication University of China, delivered a compelling speech online, shedding light on the fundamental objectives of the program. He highlighted the significance of Community of Shared Future concept. Professor Li appreciated the establishment of Regional connectivity center and encouraged the RCC team to utilize this platform for connecting the region and promote prosperous shared future of the community.



Professor Li expressed that as we convene today, we found ourselves in a world that is experiencing a state of flux like never before. The rapid acceleration of change over the past a century has brought human society to a pivotal time facing challenge. The process of globalization has woven deep and intricate links between the material and spiritual infrastructure and systems and among countries and peoples. Yet, we also grapple with the international political and economic order that remains balanced and just an unsustainable this economy has led to a fragile global economy extirpating by the negative spill out effects of geopolitical conflicts, unilateralism and protectionism.

Further he highlighted that the developing world in particular faces worsening external environment hindering the achievement of sustainable development goals and they leaving much work to be done. In the midst of these tumultuous times, CPEC stands on the historical stage, offering a vision of building a global community with a shared future." This vision has gotten our broad consensus and a powerful momentum towards the creation of a better world serving as a beacon to guide the trend of the times. On the one hand, it has established the new ideas or international relations highlighted the new characteristic



of global governance and created a new pattern of international exchange. Put forward a beautiful vision of building a lasting peace, universal security, and common prosperity, open, inclusive, clear and beautiful world. On the other hand, promoting the globalization of the new economy and leading the world to a path of peaceful development. On the Job, building a new type of international relations and practicing true multi literalism. It emphasizes that by promoting the common values of all mankind, it transcends the narrow historical limitations of the so called universal values and opens up a better tomorrow for human society.

He opined that in the process of the great practice of this concept, China is both an advocate and an activist. The construction of the Belt and Road Initiative, provoke provides practical platform for building a global community with a shared future and provides new ideas and solutions for improving the reform of the global governance system. Present democracy has further articulated this vision through the three initiatives, the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative, and the global civilization initiative. These initiatives are interconnected, showcasing China's dedication to fostering a peaceful evolution of human civilization and sustainable development. Over the past decade, the practice of building a global community with our shared future has made steady progress. From bilateral to multilateral from regional to global, this concept has yielded pioneering and fruitful results.

He emphasized that the Belt and Road Initiative, along with the three initiatives, has delivered sustainable developments in terms of prosperity, stability, and wellbeing for people worldwide. The Global Development Initiative champions sustainable development, striving for common prosperity, eradicating poverty and inequality, and promoting synergistic progress across the global economy, society and the environment. The global security initiative seeks to foster international peace and stability and engage in regional tensions and the protector against the conflict and terrorism through diplomacy and multilateralism. The global civilization initiate here fosters equal coexistence and a mutual understanding among civilizations. Let's take integration of global civilizations

through cultural exchange and education, hereby reducing cultural conflicts. China's proposal for other three initiatives, cause for human society across the globe, cause for human society across the dimensions of development, security, and civilization. They listen they resonate with each other, complement one another and have become an essential foundation for promoting the building of a global community with a shared future. They represents China's approach to addressing the major issues of peace and development facing humanity.

### **Key Takeaways from his Presentation:**

**Community of Shared Future Concept:** Professor Li Huailiang emphasized the significance of the Community of Shared Future concept, highlighting its role in promoting regional connectivity and a prosperous shared future.

**Challenges of Globalization:** He discussed the rapid acceleration of change and globalization, which has created intricate links between material and spiritual infrastructures but also led to a fragile global economy due to geopolitical conflicts, unilateralism, and protectionism.

**Developing World's Struggles:** Professor Li pointed out that the developing world faces a worsening external environment, hindering the achievement of sustainable development goals, with much work still needed.

**CPEC's Vision and Impact:** The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) stands as a beacon for building a global community with a shared future, promoting new ideas in international relations, global governance, and peaceful development.

**China's Initiatives:** Through the Belt and Road Initiative and three interconnected initiatives—Global Development Initiative, Global Security Initiative, and Global Civilization Initiative—China is actively fostering sustainable development, peace, and cultural integration, addressing major global issues of peace and development.

**Speaker: Mr. Khalid Taimur Akram, Executive Director, Pakistan Research Center for a Community with Shared Future (PRCCSF), Islamabad**

Mr. Khalid expressed his gratitude for the Regional Connectivity Center team and appreciated their efforts for the establishment of that center. He said in our increasingly interconnected world, the concept of regional connectivity has never been more relevant. It is through connectivity that we can build bridges, not just between our regions, but across diverse cultures, economies, and societies. This connectivity fosters mutual understanding, cooperation, and prosperity, laying the groundwork for a shared future that benefits all of humanity. At the Pakistan Research Center for a Community with Shared Future (PRCCSF), we are dedicated to promoting these ideals. Our mission is to create platforms for dialogue and collaboration, enabling us to address common challenges and harness collective opportunities. This conference is a testament to our commitment to these goals.



The importance of regional connectivity cannot be overstated. By enhancing our connections, we open up new avenues for trade, innovation, education, and cultural exchange. We create environments where ideas can flourish, economies can grow, and societies can thrive. This is especially crucial in today's world, where the challenges we face—whether they be economic, environmental, or social—are increasingly global in nature.

Speaker Director, KPBOIT Iqbal Sarwar: he expressed his opinions by elaborating the concept of shared future by highlighting that the concept of regional connectivity is not just about linking different parts of a region; it is about building bridges between people,

cultures, and economies. It is about creating pathways for mutual growth, understanding, and prosperity. Today, we gather to discuss how trade can be a powerful tool in enhancing regional connectivity and, ultimately, contributing to a brighter future for all.

In the context of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the broader region, trade has always played a pivotal role. Historically, our region has been a crossroads of commerce, with trade routes that connected the East and the West. Today, we have the opportunity to revive and modernize these connections, leveraging them to foster economic growth and development.



He further emphasized that the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Board of Investment is committed to facilitating this process. Our aim is to create an enabling environment for businesses, both local and international, to thrive. By doing so, we not only boost our own economy but also contribute to the economic vitality of our neighboring regions. One of the key aspects of enhancing regional connectivity through trade is infrastructure development. We need to invest in roads, railways, ports, and digital networks to ensure that goods and services can move efficiently across borders. These investments are crucial for reducing trade barriers and fostering seamless economic integration.

Speech by Director, Project Management Unit (PMU) Mr Baseer Ali Rehman Khan: Mr Baseer extended his sincere gratitude to the organizers of the conference for bringing all together to discuss such a vital topic. He said one of the key drivers of regional connectivity is education. Educational institutions like Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Women University play a pivotal role in fostering regional cooperation. By promoting academic exchanges, joint research, and collaborative projects, we can create a network of knowledge and innovation that transcends borders.

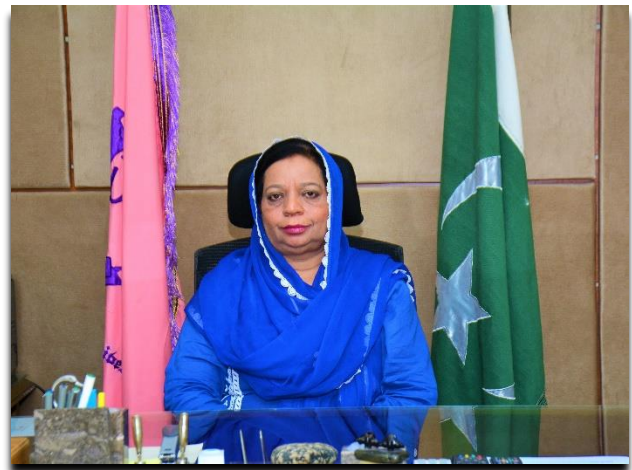


In our pursuit of enhanced connectivity, we must also recognize the importance of inclusivity. It is imperative that all segments of society benefit from these efforts. Women, in particular, must be active participants and beneficiaries of regional connectivity initiatives. Empowering women through education and opportunities is essential for achieving sustainable and inclusive growth.

**Speaker: Professor Dr Safia Ahmad Vice Chancellor Shaheed Benazir Bhutto**

### **Women University Peshawar**

Prof. Dr. Safia Ahmad cordially welcomed all the esteemed guests and the Chancellor of the University Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Kareem Kundi in the Conference. She announced the establishment of the new Regional Connectivity Center at SBBWU which will be a milestone in connecting the



region. She said that this center is a significant milestone in our journey towards creating a more interconnected and cooperative regional community. The center will serve as a hub for academic collaboration, research, and innovation, bringing together minds from diverse fields to address common challenges and explore opportunities for growth.

Focusing on regional connectivity through academia is at the heart of our mission. We believe that by strengthening academic ties and fostering knowledge exchange, we can contribute to the betterment of our region and beyond. Academia plays a crucial role in bridging gaps, building understanding, and driving progress. Through collaborative research projects, joint academic programs, and student and faculty exchanges, we aim to create a network of institutions that work together towards common goals.

She elaborated that In addition to our academic initiatives, we are committed to organizing various conferences and seminars that focus on regional connectivity. These events provide platforms for dialogue, knowledge sharing, and the development of innovative solutions to regional issues. By bringing together experts, policymakers, and practitioners from different sectors, we can foster a collaborative environment that promotes sustainable development and regional harmony. She further added that Our efforts in enhancing regional connectivity are not just about physical infrastructure or technological advancements; they are about building relationships, fostering mutual respect, and creating a shared vision for the future. We believe that by working together, we can overcome challenges, seize opportunities, and create a brighter future for all.

As we embark on this journey, I would like to extend my gratitude to all the individuals and organizations that have supported our efforts. Your dedication, hard work, and belief in the importance of regional collaboration have been instrumental in bringing our vision to life. She concluded that the Regional Connectivity Center will play a pivotal role in enhancing regional connectivity and fostering collaboration across academia and beyond. Together, we will work towards a more connected and prosperous future for all.

### **Keynote Address by:**

#### **His Excellency Faisal Karim Kundi, Governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province**

He extended his heartfelt gratitude to the Regional Connectivity Center (RCC) at Benazir Bhutto Women University (SBBWU) in Peshawar, the Pakistan Research Center for a Community with Shared Future in Islamabad, and the Embassy of the People's Republic of China for organizing that event. He focused on the following points,



In this globally interconnected world, regional connectivity is not merely a slogan; it is the basis for development, wealth, and harmony.

Regional connectedness appears as a beacon of hope and opportunity in the increasingly porous political, social, and economic barriers of today's global environment. It encourages international cooperation and cohesion since it transcends national boundaries. In order to create the conditions for a better tomorrow, we must fully utilize regional connectedness as we look to the future.

Connectivity is the foundation stone of regional integration and cooperation. Regional cooperation and integration is a dynamic phenomenon and includes several aspects such as economic, social, political and strategic cooperation. Regional connectivity is given a lot of priority, especially in Asian and particularly in South Asian countries.

Pakistan is committed to the objective of regional connectivity as it believes that the future of the region lies in greater connectivity with each other's markets.

Studies of developed states (for example countries in Europe and Asia Pacific) reveal the fact that one of the major factors in the overall progress and sustainability of these states is their successful connectivity in their respective regions. Durable and organised regional connectivity is of utmost significance for any nation-state to progress, and Pakistan is no exception to this rule of contemporary politics.



Pakistan stands firm in its commitment to regional integration and cooperation. We firmly believe that the prosperity of our nation is intricately linked with the prosperity of our neighbors. By expanding trade and investment links with East, West, and Central Asia, we aim to unlock new avenues of growth and development. Our vision extends beyond mere



economic gains; it encompasses the broader goal of fostering peace, stability, and mutual understanding.

The importance of durable and organized regional connectivity cannot be overstated. It is the lifeblood of sustainable development, driving progress and innovation across borders. Pakistan, with its strategic location, is uniquely positioned to serve as a cornerstone in the regional connectivity framework. Our geostrategic significance, coupled with initiatives such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), holds the promise of transformative change for our nation and the entire region.

Central Asia, with its abundant natural resources, presents a wealth of opportunities for collaboration and partnership. Pakistan, facing a dire energy crisis, can benefit immensely from closer ties with our Central Asian neighbors. Through interconnectedness and cooperation, we can address common challenges and chart a course towards shared prosperity. The partnership between China and Pakistan is a prime example of effective regional connectivity. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which provides a model for future projects, embodies the spirit of collaboration and partnership. We are ready to seize new opportunities and realize the full potential of our shared future with China's unwavering support.

Let us seize the opportunity before us and work hand in hand to enhance regional connectivity for the betterment of mankind. Together, we can build bridges of understanding, forge lasting partnerships, and create a world where prosperity knows no boundaries.

## **Poster Competition “On the theme of Community with Shared Future”**

### **Inauguration:**

The poster competition, themed "Enhancing Regional Connectivity for the Betterment of Shared Future of Mankind," Organized by the students from the department of Art & Design SBBWU was inaugurated by the Chancellor Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa



accompanied by The Vice Chancellor SBBWU and all the esteemed guests of the conference.

This competition invites participants to creatively express how strengthening connections between regions can lead to a more prosperous and harmonious world. This competition encourages individuals to visually depict the significance of regional integration in areas such as infrastructure, economic development, cultural exchange, and sustainable practices. By showcasing innovative ideas and inspiring designs, the competition aims to highlight the potential of collaborative efforts in addressing global challenges and fostering a united, inclusive future.



By showcasing innovative ideas and practical solutions, the posters demonstrated how collaborative efforts can address pressing environmental challenges and promote sustainable practices. Furthermore, the competition aims to underscore the critical importance of empowering women and fostering entrepreneurship as key drivers of regional economic growth and social progress. Through their creative expressions, students highlighted the transformative impact of women's participation in economic activities and leadership roles, advocating for a more equitable and thriving future. Overall, this poster competition seeks to inspire and mobilize young minds to envision and work towards a connected, sustainable, and empowered world.



## **Paper Presentation: Dr. Asif Saleem Head of Political Science Department Bacha Khan University Charsadda**

### **Topic: Strategic Dimensions and Regional Security Threats to CPEC: Case Study of Afghanistan.**

In his Presentation Dr Asif Saleem said that the geopolitical landscape of Asia, particularly regarding Afghanistan and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), presents intricate challenges and opportunities. Afghanistan's stability is crucial for regional peace, with its instability having widespread repercussions across Asia. The CPEC, a significant project under China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), aims not only at economic growth and trade but also serves strategic purposes by enhancing China's connectivity from the South China Sea to the Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea. However, regional stability is threatened by issues such as border disputes in South



Asia, internal political polarization in Central Asia, and extremism in the Middle East. Additionally, Chinese interests in Pakistan have been frequently targeted by terrorist groups, resulting in numerous attacks over the years. Afghanistan faces severe internal challenges, including political instability, extreme poverty, food insecurity, youth unemployment, and underdeveloped infrastructure. These issues are compounded by the presence of various terrorist organizations. Strategic interactions, such as the meeting between Chinese officials and Afghan delegates in 2021, highlight Afghanistan's role in the success of CPEC. The evolving political and strategic dynamics necessitate China's

active involvement in Afghanistan to ensure the continuation of CPEC and BRI. Dr Saleem concluded his presentation on the following key points,

Afghanistan's stability is essential for regional peace.

CPEC is a key project under China's BRI, enhancing strategic connectivity.

Regional threats include border disputes, political polarization, and extremism.

Terrorist attacks on Chinese interests in Pakistan highlight security challenges.

Afghanistan faces internal issues like political instability, poverty, and terrorism.

**Presenter: Ms. Urwa Shahid MS Student from Department of History Lahore College for Women University.**

**Topic: Cultural exchange and Social Cohesion**

In her presentation Miss Urwa Shahid highlighted that Cultural exchange involves the transfer of culture, values, beliefs, and traditions between societies, promoting understanding, tolerance, and appreciation of diversity. Milton J. Bennett defines it as an interactive process of sharing cultural traits, leading to increased empathy and unity. Social cohesion, described by Emile Durkheim, is the integration and solidarity within a society, based on shared values and norms. Both concepts are interlinked; cultural exchange strengthens social cohesion by fostering mutual understanding and respect among different cultural groups. Historical examples, such as the Christian Reformation and cultural exchanges in Islamic dynasties, illustrate how these processes have shaped societies and promoted social stability. In the modern era, technology plays a crucial role in facilitating cultural exchange and enhancing social cohesion by enabling instant communication and breaking down geographical barriers. Digital platforms and virtual communities allow for cross-cultural interactions that bridge divides, reduce stereotypes, and promote social harmony.

## **Key Points of her presentation are:**

### **Cultural Exchange:**

Defined as the transfer of culture, values, and traditions between societies.

Promotes understanding, tolerance, and appreciation of diversity.

### **Social Cohesion:**

Defined by Emile Durkheim as the integration and solidarity within a society.

Based on shared values, norms, and beliefs.

### **Interlinking Concepts:**

Cultural exchange strengthens social cohesion by fostering mutual understanding and respect.

Promotes empathy and unity through shared cultural experiences.

### **Historical Examples:**

The Christian Reformation and cultural exchanges in Islamic dynasties illustrate the impact of cultural exchange on social cohesion.

Influences include art, literature, religious teachings, and architecture.

### **Modern Era and Technology:**

Technology enhances cultural exchange and social cohesion by enabling instant communication and virtual interactions.

Digital platforms facilitate cross-cultural interactions, reducing stereotypes and promoting social harmony.



**Presenter: Ms. Sobia Rehmat Lecturer Government Girls Degree College Karak KP**

**Topic: Cultural Exchange and Social Cohesion: Strengthening Ties through Mutual Understanding**

The presentation by Sobia Rehmat emphasizes the interconnectedness of cultural exchange and social cohesion in fostering harmony and understanding within diverse communities. Cultural exchange involves sharing ideas, traditions, and customs, and occurs through travel, education, art, music, literature, food, and technology. Social cohesion refers to the solidarity and strong relationships among community members, aiming to promote well-being, fight exclusion, and provide opportunities for social mobility. The presentation highlights the significance of cultural exchange and social cohesion in international relations, particularly between Pakistan and China, showcasing various initiatives that enhance their bilateral ties. Educational exchanges, cultural festivals, tourism, and sister-city partnerships are some examples of how these concepts manifest in Pakistan-China relations. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) plays a crucial role in economic integration, community development, and mutual support, contributing to social cohesion. Despite challenges like cultural sensitivity and language barriers, these efforts significantly strengthen the bilateral relationship and foster mutual understanding and cooperation.



**Key Points of the presentation were:**

**Educational Exchanges:** Scholarships and student exchanges enhance educational opportunities and foster mutual understanding.

**Media and Art:** Cultural festivals and art exhibitions showcase each other's heritage and enhance people-to-people connections.

Tourism promotion projects under CPEC enhance cultural experiences and people-to-people contacts.

**Economic Integration:** CPEC projects foster economic development and social cohesion through shared economic interests and infrastructure projects.

Community Development and Mutual Support: Chinese investments in health and education sectors contribute to social welfare.

Acts of solidarity during crises and participation in cultural festivities strengthen social ties.

**Speaker: Rana Pervaiz Iqbal Department of Political Science, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur**

**Topic: Connectivity and Cooperation: Security, Economic and Social Perspectives**

In his presentation Rana Pervaiz focused on the importance of Regional Connectivity and emphasized that Regional connectivity enhances mobility, trade, and access to opportunities, benefiting health, energy, and education sectors. Developed states achieve progress through well-planned regional connectivity, fostering cooperation and integration. South Asian countries, particularly Pakistan, recognize its importance for economic and social development. Pakistan actively participates in regional organizations like SAARC, ECO, and SCO, promoting security, economic growth, and social cohesion. The SCO addresses common security threats and economic challenges, while initiatives like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) exemplify the benefits of regional cooperation, enhancing trade, investment, and energy opportunities. Regional connectivity is essential for achieving peace, economic, and social progress.

## **Key Takeaways**

Regional connectivity improves mobility, trade, and access to opportunities, benefiting crucial sectors like health, energy, and education.

Developed states achieve progress through strategic regional cooperation and connectivity.

Pakistan actively supports regional integration through organizations like SAARC, ECO, and SCO, focusing on security and economic growth.

The SCO combats common security threats, promoting peace and stability in the region.

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) exemplifies the benefits of regional cooperation, enhancing trade, investment, and energy opportunities.

**Speaker: Ms. Hira Sarwar Diplomatic editor/ Researcher World Affairs Inside**

**Topics: Empowering Women in Tourism Development in Pakistan through China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)**

In her presentation she highlighted that the development of tourism within the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) necessitates empowering women. However, women face significant barriers in this field, including gender-based violence and poor access to financial resources, which limit their growth and entrepreneurship. A transformative strategy, such as the establishment of "Women-Centric Economic Zones" (WCEZs), is needed to address these issues. The Global Gender Gap Index Report 2022 ranks Pakistan poorly in terms of women's economic participation, educational attainment, health, survival, and political empowerment. Studies indicate that a significant percentage of women feel unsafe due to harassment, have limited access to financial services, and face physical violence, all of which hinder their economic participation. Women's ownership of land in Pakistan is minimal, further limiting their access to collateral for loans. Women's empowerment is closely linked to several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including gender equality, poverty alleviation, health, education, economic growth, and strong institutions. WCEZs could enhance women's participation in tourism by providing

focused business opportunities, skills development, access to finance, infrastructure, marketing, and legal support. The potential areas for WCEZs along the CPEC route include Karakoram Highway, Skardu, Murree, Islamabad, Karachi, Quetta, and Gwadar. Empowering women in tourism faces challenges like gender-based discrimination, early marriages, limited access to education, unequal pay, safety concerns, traditional gender roles, lack of role models, and networking opportunities. Programs like the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme and Sindh's Women Development Department are already empowering women through vocational training and should be integrated into the CPEC framework. Women's empowerment in CPEC's tourism sector is vital for regional economic development, social progress, and cultural preservation, leading to a more inclusive and prosperous future.

### **Key Takeaways**

Tourism development within CPEC requires women's empowerment, hindered by gender-based violence and financial limitations.

Establishing "Women-Centric Economic Zones" (WCEZs) is a promising strategy to address these barriers.

Pakistan ranks poorly in women's economic participation, educational attainment, health, survival, and political empowerment.

Women's empowerment is crucial for achieving multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Integrating existing vocational training programs into the CPEC framework can enhance women's participation and empowerment in the tourism sector.



**Speaker: Ms. Seemeen Khan Yousufzai Lecturer Government Girls Degree College Mardan KP**

**Topic: Sustainable Development and Environmental Cooperation: Integrating Sustainability into Regional Connectivity Projects**

She elaborated that the BRI, launched by China in 2013, aims to promote regional connectivity and cooperation through infrastructure development, trade, and investment. Regional connection is critical for achieving sustainable development, as it enables the sharing of resources, expertise, and knowledge. Environmental cooperation is critical for achieving sustainable development, as it enables countries to share knowledge, expertise, and resources to address environmental challenges. Integrating sustainability into regional connectivity projects is crucial for achieving sustainable development and environmental cooperation. The CPEC offers opportunities for environmental cooperation between China and Pakistan, and other regional countries can learn from this experience. She has given four strategies for Environmental impact assessments and monitoring

1. Sustainable infrastructure development
2. Renewable energy projects
3. Green financing mechanisms
4. Capacity building and training programs.

Main points of her presentation were,

Regional Connectivity and Cooperation: The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), launched by China in 2013, aims to enhance regional connectivity and cooperation through infrastructure development, trade, and investment.

Sustainable Development: Regional connection is vital for sustainable development, enabling the sharing of resources, expertise, and knowledge among countries.

**Environmental Cooperation:** Environmental cooperation is essential for sustainable development, allowing countries to collaboratively address environmental challenges by sharing knowledge, expertise, and resources.



**Integrating Sustainability:** Incorporating sustainability into regional connectivity projects is crucial for achieving both sustainable development and effective environmental cooperation.

**Strategies for Environmental Impact:** The CPEC provides opportunities for environmental cooperation, and four strategies for environmental impact assessments and monitoring are: sustainable infrastructure development, renewable energy projects, green financing mechanisms, and capacity building and training programs.

**Panel discussion: Bridging Minds:**  
The Psychological Impacts of Enhancing Regional Connectivity for a Shared Global Future.

The panel discussion titled "Bridging Minds: The Psychological Impacts of Enhancing Regional Connectivity for a Shared Global Future" was held to explore the psychological aspects and impacts of increasing regional connectivity.



## **Panel Discussion**

This session was moderated by Ms. Wajeeha Khan, a Lecturer in Political Science at Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Women University (SBBWU).

The distinguished panelists included:

Sonia Shams - Lecturer in Psychology, SBBWU

Iqbal Sarwar - Director, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Board of Investment and Trade (KPBOIT)

Asif Saleem - Head of Department, Political Science, Bacha Khan University Charsada

## **Discussion Points**

### **Psychological Well-being and Regional Connectivity:**

Sonia Shams opened the discussion by highlighting the positive psychological impacts of regional connectivity. She pointed out that increased interaction between diverse groups can foster a sense of belonging and reduce feelings of isolation. However, she also cautioned about potential stressors due to cultural clashes and the need for mental health support systems.

### **Economic Opportunities and Psychological Empowerment:**

Iqbal Sarwar discussed how enhanced regional connectivity creates economic opportunities that can lead to psychological empowerment. He emphasized that access to broader markets and investment opportunities can boost individual self-esteem and community morale. He also stressed the importance of policies that ensure equitable distribution of these economic benefits to avoid increasing inequality.

### **Cultural Exchange and Identity Preservation:**

Asif Saleem elaborated on the impact of regional connectivity on cultural identities. He explained that while cultural exchange can enrich individual identities and promote

tolerance, it can also pose a threat to local traditions and customs. He advocated for a balanced approach that celebrates cultural diversity while preserving unique cultural heritages.

### **Social Cohesion and Community Building:**

The panelists agreed on the role of regional connectivity in enhancing social cohesion. Sonia Shams noted that connectivity initiatives could foster a sense of shared purpose and strengthen community bonds. Iqbal Sarwar added that community engagement programs and inclusive development projects are crucial in this regard.

### **Challenges and Mitigation Strategies:**

Miss Wajeeha Khan moderated a discussion on the challenges posed by regional connectivity, such as potential cultural homogenization and psychological stress due to rapid socio-economic changes. The panelists proposed strategies including inclusive policies, mental health support, and education programs to address these challenges.

### **Key Takeaways**

**Promoting Psychological Well-being:** Enhanced regional connectivity can improve psychological well-being by fostering a sense of belonging and reducing isolation.

**Balancing Economic Empowerment with Equality:** Economic opportunities arising from regional connectivity can boost self-esteem and community morale but require equitable policies to prevent increased inequality.

**Cultural Exchange vs. Identity Preservation:** There is a need to balance cultural exchange with the preservation of local traditions to maintain cultural diversity.

**Strengthening Social Cohesion:** Connectivity projects should include elements that promote social cohesion and community building.



**Addressing Psychological Challenges:** Proactive measures, such as mental health support and inclusive policies, are essential to mitigate potential psychological stressors associated with regional connectivity.

## **Conclusion**

The panel discussion provided valuable insights into the psychological impacts of enhancing regional connectivity. The panelists highlighted both the benefits and challenges, emphasizing the need for balanced and inclusive approaches to maximize positive outcomes. The session concluded with a call to action for policymakers, community leaders, and mental health professionals to collaborate in creating a more connected and psychologically resilient global future.

**Inauguration of Regional Connectivity Center at SBBWU:** Chief Guest Governor KP inaugurated Regional Connectivity Center at Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Women University Peshawar. The first center of its kind in this province having the following Aims and Objectives,

1. The Need for Improved Regional Connectivity
2. Current Challenges
3. Enhance Sustainability
4. Foster Regional Integration

## **Scope of RCC:**

Geographic exposure:

The Regional Connectivity Center will focus on the geographical areas/regions connected by the CPEC route. These areas are comprised of Central and South Asian states, i-e; Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan, Central Asian States & China. CPEC route is connecting these regions with Arabia Sea.

### **Activities of RCC:**

- 1) Conducting seminars, conferences and assessments on contemporary prospects & challenges regarding connectivity Challenges & prospects
- 2) Developing and implementing projects at improving faculty, students exchanges, training focusing on regional issues like trade, geo-politics etc.
- 3) Establishing a standard and regulatory harmonizing framework.
- 4) Promoting public-private partnership for funding and operating in connectivity related projects.
- 5) Organizing regional workshops, dialogues and forums to facilitate and enhance knowledge sharing and collaboration.
- 6) Monitoring and evaluating the impact of connectivity initiative on political, social, economic development and environmental sustainability.
- 7) Enhancing and exploring cultural and historical affiliations the regional countries share with each other.

### **Expected Benefits of RCC:**

Multiple benefits are expected from Regional Connectivity Center, including:

- Students and faculty's increased competitiveness and collaborations
- Enhanced understanding of regional affiliations
- Sustainable development via environmental friendly projects/activities.
- Strengthening cultural and diplomatic ties further resulting in fostering regional cooperation and sustainability.
- Improved quality of researches.



## **Conclusion:**

The "Enhancing Regional Connectivity for the Betterment of the Shared Future of Mankind" conference has underscored the pivotal role that regional connectivity plays in fostering sustainable development, economic growth, and social cohesion. Through insightful discussions, expert panels, and collaborative workshops, participants from diverse sectors have highlighted the multifaceted benefits of improved connectivity and the challenges that must be addressed to realize these benefits.

## Pictures Gallery







