

Sustainable Development of Chitral: A CPEC Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The vision of sustainable growth of any community or region cannot be materialized unless provided with equitable socio-economic opportunities with environmentally friendly conditions. In the mountains of Hindukush, Chitral has remained significantly important from a geographic and strategic perspective. The piece of land in the extreme north of Pakistan is blessed with numerous natural resources and it is also a gateway to Central Asia. This valley is surrounded by rugged mountains, due to neglect and lack of land connection with the main country it has been deprived of the required development. The construction of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), an alternative passage through Chitral will bring economic opportunities through investment in different sectors. With the materialization of the CPEC route, the potential in the valley will be explored and utilized for the betterment of the country in the broader spectrum and the local economy will strengthen as well. The opening of this trade route will not only change the economic landscape of the valley but will change the sociology of the area. This mega venture along with economic opportunities will also generate challenges for the indigenous community. Expected opportunities will attract more businessmen and investors from outside. This migration process will open the door to social transformation along with challenges not only from an economic perspective but an indigenous cultural heritage of the society will be endangered. Only an inclusive and integrated development stratagem with the involvement and support of all stakeholders will lead to the sustainable economic growth of the valley. Further, the people-centric development approach will bring economic opportunities for the people, otherwise, there will be more challenges than opportunities. This research work has been conducted to investigate the expected challenges threatening sustainable growth of the community and region. Furthermore, it suggests policy guidelines based on empirical evidence for curtailing those challenges.

Key Words: Sustainable Growth, CPEC, Tourism, Hindukush, Green Energy, Holistic Development & Unequal Distribution of Resources.

Introduction

The transformation of developmental initiatives into a long-term sustainable program with socio-economic progress by mitigated environmental concerns has become difficult today. Nowadays, Governance failure is the dominant factor in this regard, where the leadership lacking political will and people-centric development approach has failed in achieving long-term sustainable goals. In this

manner, environmental sustainability is endangered due to unplanned developmental activities; and the increasing carbon footprints are hitting the struggling economies of developing nations in the form of socio-economic destruction due to constant natural calamities and emerging health challenges. Pakistan has also faced huge infrastructure and social destruction due to floods and lacking basics measures to tackle such disasters. Increasing energy consumption with the rising population has led to environmental degradation and depletion of natural resources. The developments in the district Chitral are reflecting a lack of long-term sustainability leading to increasing challenges for the local community. The CPEC as a forerunner of economic prosperity is considered a game-changer for the country. This road will be an alternative passage to the already existing Karakorum Highway. This route will bring economic development to the North-Western areas of Pakistan, which are less developed as compared to other parts of the country. Livelihood opportunities are linked with the expected developmental projects which will bring socio-economic prosperity to the underprivileged area of the country. In addition, this land-locked area will be exposed to the rest of the world along with numerous tourist destinations. "The valley has great potential which will contribute to the national hospitality industry with the creation of earning opportunities for the people. The local production of indigenous items will flourish and the products will create their footprints in the national market along with access to the international market. A handsome amount of revenue will be generated for the locals and further, it will contribute and strengthen domestic production at the national level. The peaceful and harmonious values of the society along with the unique cultural heritage will be promoted within the country and across the borders." (Hussain M. , 2016)

Various researchers are of the view that CPEC is a neo-imperialist stratagem for the Chinese hegemony in the world which could not be a win-win opportunity for Pakistan." (Ejaz, 2019) Notwithstanding, CPEC has prospective benefits which could be utilized with well-designed policies for sustainable growth of the mountainous community. Various challenges are also associated with this development. There is evergreen peace in the land of Chitral instead of surrounding volatile regions because of its exceptional societal values and its quarantined topographical position. Lacking appropriate road infrastructure, this valley used to remain cut off from the down country for almost six months in a year. The construction of the expected route will connect this valley to the rest of the country throughout the year. In this manner this valley will be connected with an all-weather global trade route; this abrupt exposure of the valley to the rest of the world will make its culture and societal values vulnerable to external invasion. This would be a completely different experience for the people of the isolated region. With the growing commercial activities, prevalent peace in the valley will be susceptible by non-state actors with the emerging commercial and development activities because massive anti-CPEC sentiments are existing in the region. With a sudden shift from isolation to globalization the culture, values, and norms in the

society will experience a harsh time before acclimatizing the new and positive changes.

Amidst these opinions, the chances of extinction of small indigenous cultures and societies like Chitral is greater. The expansion of imperial powers and their pattern of growth strengthen their hold on smaller nations in different manners and perspectives. Chitral with its virgin market has greater chances of non-local dominance in terms of businessmen, and the optimum advantage from this market seems quite blur for the locals with the ongoing trend of development. Besides this, all the expected projects associated with the CPEC and the increasing commercial activities will contribute to carbon footprints which have potential threats to the ecosystem. This will be another cause of climate change and hundreds of glaciers in the valley will become vulnerable to such vagaries. Although in the past few years climate changes have resulted in various natural disasters leading to economic and infrastructure destructions.

Inquisitively, the benefits of this mega initiative for the region with sustainable development without any ruinous loss to the social configuration with a well-maintained ecosystem and preservation of cultural heritage is questionable without a prior stratagem. The strategies for counterbalancing the challenges along with availing the potential opportunities and pre-emptive measures for tacking potential external invasion and protection of the cultural heritage is the need of the hour. Whether the sociology and existing fragility of society with peace will remain unharmed while on the track of development in a sustainable manner backed by economic growth with the utilization of the resources present in the valley. “The vulnerability of the indigenous values and culture from extinction is evident as a part of periphery states which only serves the interest of the imperial state amid economic development and social-imperialism.” (Ejaz, 2019)

Research methodology

This is qualitative research as an attempt to highlight the scope of sustainable growth of Chitral in the context of CPEC amid the expected challenges and prospects. This is empirical research which is composed of insightful interviews of historians, experts, and various stakeholders from across the valley to get information on the relevant matter. The conducted interviews are Semi-structured to get in-depth information from the respondents. Analytical technique is a part of the study for digging out the trends of past developments in the valley and their possible implications on the lives of the people. Attempting to find relevant insight regarding the topic, and by considering the scope of the research the samples have been kept small, and a purposive method of sampling has been utilized in this regard. Besides this, books, research articles, conference proceedings, newspapers, dissertations, television interviews, magazines, different websites, and official documents are the secondary sources of data used. For citation, the APA referencing style has been used in this study.

CPEC and sustainable growth of Chitral

The accomplishment of any project is guaranteed by the resultant socio-economic growth of the population with minimum risks and challenges. The question is the smooth growth of the society in terms of economic and social development with improved live standards without affecting the pre-existing social setup and environment. The cultural values are unique with linguistic and ethnic diversity and have a fragile ecology without major human interruption for a long time. Currently, in the Pak-China mega economic venture, this isolated valley will provide an alternative passage for CPEC to strengthen and broaden regional connectivity. The economic activities will grow and cultural understanding will increase with the improvement of connectivity between the countries of the region. "China and Pakistan are exchanging their cultural values, customs and traditions through this initiative of CPEC." (Niazi, 2019)

Furthermore, the potential challenges could not be ignored with the identification of durable economic growth under the banner of CPEC. The emergence of challenges with this project is natural, because, where abrupt change occurs if primitive measures are not taken that intensifies further. If this global trade route becomes operational it will be a great prospect for the indigenous population in terms of diversified livelihood opportunities and growth of the local economy but the expected challenges couldn't be ignored in the wake of the development. Sustainable development in the mountain region is quite challenging due to its environmental vulnerability due to its ecosystem, indigenous growth pattern, and endangered biodiversity. In the recent past, development activities in the valley have led to environmental challenges especially with the opening of the Lawari Tunnel several social and environmental challenges have erupted, moreover, natural calamities have hit the valley causing various socio-economic losses. With the growing settlement of the non-local population, the sociology of the valley has already changed, especially problems that have intensified for the business community. The locals in the markets have to face tough competition because the non-local businessmen are strong in terms of capital. The shift in the sociology of the valley could not be ignored, although it is cultivating threats to the prevalent social order. Even the colors of imported cultures are visible in the valley as the non-locals settlements are increasing over time.

Economic progress of Chitral and indigenous response

The expert believes that development will occur in the valley because of the CPEC route but there are some uncertainties regarding the upcoming challenges due to this project. "Chitral has remained a backward area so far due to a lack of government attention. CPEC will bring Chitral to the core of policy-making due to its ideal geographical location. This area will be developed rapidly with the construction of this route." (Shah M. , 2020) The intention of the Chinese government regarding the development of its western part through industrialization

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is one of the aims. For that purpose, the access of China to the warm water is only possible by using Pakistan's land, so seeking this passage through Pakistan linking Gawadar with Khunjerab Pass will bring massive livelihood opportunities to Pakistan. It is not just a route but it includes several economic zones, industrial parks, and many other projects, which will boom the economy of Pakistan on large scale. The expected project of the alternative road via Chitral will be a great opportunity if it could be developed properly. This route has multi-dimensional benefits for the local people. "The said route will bring a lot of economic opportunities to the areas. Improved road infrastructure and connectivity whatever it is CPEC or not will have numerous positive impacts on any area. The connectivity especially between the metropolitan cities and rural areas causes follow of economic activities. Certainly, this project will bring several economic activities to the area where local people could get the benefit of it." (Ali A. , 2020) The anticipation of economic development is judged in comparison with the development in Gilgit Baltistan. Where the economic landscape has completely changed after the opening of KKH, which has completely changed the economy of the area where a lot of changes occurred in a different sector. "The local business developed with the flow of adventure tourism in the area. In the same manner, Chitral will also grow economically with the opening of this route. It has great potential to provide abundant profitable prospects to the local civic if they are considered first-hand beneficiaries. The lack of proper land connectivity is a stumbling block in the way of our prosperity. This will not only make us economically empowered but this will bring social prosperity to the area. Where the local businesses opportunities will develop which will provide handsome income opportunity to the local community. This area has plenty of mineral resources there is a need for large investment. Investment in these sectors is linked with massive job opportunities from which the local could get the benefit of it." (Ali A. , 2020)

Challenges and uncertainties

Beyond any doubt, the upcoming events nurture challenges with the materialization of the said route. Experts are quite uncertain in this regard and they are of the view that the onset of this project entirely not welcoming but the laymen are unable to anticipate both pros and cons of this development. Unfortunately, from the policy-making domain to the execution circle the negative aspects have been ignored, which have been major hurdles in the way of smooth progress. So, this dilemma has remained evergreen, and it has already disrupted the prosperity of the region. Emerging discourse on this development is encouraging, where it should be entertained as a challenge rather than a sheer opportunity.

The evolving business opportunities are attracting non-local businessmen from different parts of the country, especially from the Pashtun community. The challenges for the local people in terms of establishing a business are becoming hard even today due to the growing numbers of non-local businessmen. Traditions

and cultural values were even unspoiled because of their isolation from the rest of the country. Located within the Hindukush Mountains the way of life of the indigenous community of Chitral were still in their original shape with smooth evolution. Now, easy access to services and utilities will be possible with the construction of this project, and this will open new horizons for the people. “So far, these mountains were hurdles in the way of the development of the valley but were also providing cultural and social safeguard to the native community of the regions. Even though with the opening of the Lawari Tunnel numerous changes have become apparent and the migration process is also increasing over time.” (Ali A. , 2020)

Unemployment is one of the big challenges for the young population of Chitral. The major reasons behind this dilemma include lack of required skills in the workforce, where technological intervention has a lot increased. In the current situation, the market requires skilled manpower. Every sector which is investable in the valley from tourism to the construction industry and from Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) to large business skilled workforce is essential. For availing opportunities well-equipped technical capabilities are vital. The reason behind this problem is the lack of compatibility of our education system with the market. This is why the youth of the valley are losing opportunities to the non-local workforce, therefore the capital is moving out of the valley which is an increasing burden on the local economic growth. For ensuring sustainable economic growth the local population has to be equipped with the required skills, otherwise, the investors and businessmen will no hire an unskilled workforce. More technical labor will attract maximum capital because in the contemporary world any business cannot survive without compatible skills.

“Graduates from higher education institutions are unable to make space for themselves in the market due to a lack of skills. This is the immediate reason for unemployment where youth is lacking the required capability to develop entrepreneurship and other initiatives. With the increasing population, the local agricultural production is not enough to entertain the households and is also shrinking with the expanding settlement. Today all sectors in the social sector are demanding a skilled workforce and the livelihood opportunities are welcoming for those who have the aptitude to avail that.” (Shah S. A., 2020)

The vulnerability of smooth economic growth is questionable unless the population shows interest in establishes business ventures and attain sustainable livelihood opportunities. The dilemma is that the indigenous population is lacking a business mentality. No soft and small loans for indigenous people to encourage them to start their own business. This is why the non-local business community has already dominated the business circle and the ratio of the local population is increasing as a consumer. As Prof Karim Baig says “Due to dictatorial rule of the princely state and remaining away from any major market place and business venue the people of Chitral are not carrying business-oriented approach and doesn’t show interest in managing business activity. The ruler (Mehtar) was not letting the common man act independently and they have to serve the state for

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food and have to rely on the domestic agricultural income. Also, there were constraints of resources and markets for the local population to conduct bargaining of products. This is a common habit of the locals that they feel ashamed of having any sort of running business or work within the valley. These are some of the said reasons which have kept the people from prosperity.” (Baig, 2020) Diverse business opportunities will generate with the opening CPEC route but the local population has no business idea and experience for availing those opportunities, and this will be the biggest challenge for the indigenous community.

This valley has reserves of abundant natural resources in different categories which are not only uplift the local economy if exploited properly but can also contribute to the national purse. The deprivation of the local population from the natural resources as a first-hand beneficiary has created uncertainty within the masses and it has no positive effect on their lives. Most of the investments in the exploitation of the resources are profit-oriented instead of considering the locals as beneficiaries. With the opening of the CPEC route different investments in this sector going to happen which need to be growth-oriented. As it is said “The reflection of sustainable economic growth could be possible by giving ownership to the local population in the natural resources. The sustainable goal of development couldn’t be achieved without the inclusion of the local population. The water reserves and minerals in the valley are assets of the nation which should be utilized for the people instead of sucking away from the valley” (Shah M. , 2020)

Basically, “The expansionist tendencies of cultures have been under discussion in the context of the theory of ‘Cultural Imperialism’ because of the hegemony of imported cultures on small indigenous cultures due to their elephantine nature. They dominate native cultures as a result of cultural relationships among countries. This causes forced embracing of customs and cultural values of large cultures by smaller ones. This phenomenon has been widely experienced in the 19th and 20th centuries by the colonies due to the imposition of their colonial masters. The footprints of those imported cultures are still dominant in different societies across the world even today. The hostility of the imposed culture upon the colonies was quite prominent which have led to cultural erosion of several small cultures.” (J, 2012) So, the subsequent collision of big cultures with smaller ones leads to cultural erosion which maximizes the chances of extinction of small cultures. The construction of the CPEC route will increase challenges to the indigenous culture of Chitral. Experts have also been concerned regarding these challenges and they believe that preservation of social-cultural values is important for the sustainable development of the valley.

Subsequently, the opening of the Lawari tunnel noticeable changes has occurred in the valley. With the upcoming developments, this valley will be exposed to more changes, where the preservation of cultural heritage will be challenging. Preservation of one's culture has been the top priority of civilized nations since those values are harmonious and keeping them with unique character and give them identity. The socio-economic status of the local community is one

of the major factors which are generating challenges to culture. Due to economic instability and financial constraints, the locals have no option except to sell their land properties to outsiders. Consequently, the migration of non-locals has increased enormously in the valley. “The social structure of the valley has changed with the rising settlements of non-local people. Some of the emerging socio-cultural and socio-economic challenges are the result of this migration process. These people are coming here with their traditions and cultural values and these imported traditions in these areas are completely different from the naïve ones. The customs are eroding leading to the generation of social imbalance and disturbance in society because the role of these customs is much important in maintaining social order in the society. This will completely change the dynamics of society as the pattern of migration gets momentum with the initiation of the CPEC route. The indigenous population will be in no man's land in terms of identity, where the causes of cultural detachments are increasing. It is hard to realize that someone is opting for money at the cost of one's liberty and identity. The impression of this phenomenon will intensify if the current trend of settlement continues.” (Danish, 2020) The social and cultural values of the indigenous community will be influenced by these changes. Traditional values and customs have a key role in the maintenance of order in society, unfortunately, these values are eroding over time. Thus, the native social values and balance in the society will be more vulnerable to the cultural influence of China in multiple aspects.

The most important concern is the environmental challenge due to the construction of the global trade route through this valley. The ecology of the valley very fragile and several natural calamities have hit the valley in the past two decades because of climate change. The development in the valley short of proper risk assessment plus environmentally-friendly strategies is unaffordable for the ecosystem. This environmental degradation and pollution are increasing rapidly with the increasing population, the flux of tourists, and emerging commercial activities. Human security is threatened due to increasing flood where it has endangered the wildlife and ecological balance because of deforestation. A large ratio of the local population energy consumption is dependent on wood and urbanization in the valley is contributing to deforestation at a startling rate. The Projects lacking environment-friendly planning are also increasing which is the major thread for the sustainable growth of the society.

The disturbing causes of natural disasters will increase when this development will proceed, much bigger threats to the ecology of the valley will erupt. Even today pollution has increased overwhelmingly in the city areas, where the local administration incapable of garbage dumping those waste through proper waste management. Urbanization is causing water pollution which is coming from the glaciers and spring up in the high hills. Prioritizing the environment at first hand especially in the northern region is essential for achieving. The influx of heavy traffic has a bad impact on the lives of the community. “The ecological issues are mounting even today, heavy traffic will maximize carbon footprint where Chitral is a landlocked area where its implications will be severe. “Increase

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in carbon emission will be a big challenge for the valley because Chitral is a landlocked area where be Huge carbon emission will lead to air pollution which causes adverse health problems like lung cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), asthma (respiratory disorder), and ischemic heart disease, stroke. Beyond that, due to air pollution, acidic rain will harm the endangered wildlife. Harmonizing environment-friendly technologies and vehicles will be helpful to counter those challenges.” (Islam, 2020)

Sustainable development: A way forward

The construction of the CPEC route is a harbinger of change for the valley. But from the historical perspective, the dilemma of underdevelopment of peripheries has remained intact. The threadbare relations of the center with the peripheries have not remained encouraging, where the resources are exploited but the socio-economic status of the host communities hasn't changed due to deprivation for their right to ownership of the resources. The flow of resources for the peripheries towards the center is a huge hurdle for the smooth economic growth of the local population. For the sustainable growth of the mountain community, the consideration of the aforesaid issues needs to be fixed before the materialization of the mega project.

The most important consideration for the successful materialization of the project is the ecological aspect of the project. The ecological fragility of the valley, which couldn't effort any development without proper risk assessment measures. The environment should be kept in priority before the construction of any mega project like the CPEC route. Climate change not only endangers human security but the wildlife is also threatened due to environmental disruption and growing land and water pollution with the increasing population and commercial activities across the valley. The first step toward sustainable growth of the community and region is ecological sustainability. The most essential step is the formulation of environment-friendly policies, with inclusiveness and robust execution. Environmental institutions must be on the front line of the battle against environmental degradation due to unplanned developments. Public awareness is paramount for mass education regarding environmental hazards. The provision of renewable sources of energy is much for controlling rapid deforestation. There is a dire need for comprehensive forestation drives in the valley backed with public awareness campaigns. “The valley of Chitral hosts 543 glaciers” (Craig, 2016) , a minor increase in temperature will invite an elephantine disaster leading to a colossal humanitarian crisis. Curtailing vehicles with maximum carbon footprints and encouraging environment-friendly vehicles for transportation and other needs because the landlocked valley is too vulnerable to entertain such heavy traffic. This will also generate various health hazards due to air pollution. There is also a need for an effective traffic management mechanism to control carbon footprints by introducing green technology and environment-friendly vehicles. The waste

management system needs to be updated to in greater extend in commercial areas and tourist destinations where the environment is vulnerable to degradation.

The innate causes of a thriving local economy and unemployment are the major hurdles in the way of sustainable development. So, there is a need for comprehensive skill development initiatives in different categories. A people-centric growth strategy with the involvement of all stakeholders is paramount for the sustainable development of the region. There is a need for intensive human resource development initiatives to equip the young population with the required skills and technical capabilities. The government should encourage small businesses in the valley by providing soft loans through one window operation to facilitate the youth. The government needs to establish institutions for human resource development on a massive scale in the valley to enrich the skills of the youth for getting maximum benefits from different opportunities. Strengthening and uplifting technical institutions on a major level, which would curtail the economic vulnerabilities of the young population of the valley.

The valley is lacking with entrepreneurship culture, which needs to be enhanced immediately. The time has demanded that the young population should have enhanced entrepreneurial skills to achieve a better living standard. Though unemployment is increasing rapidly which could be curtailed by approaching alternative livelihood opportunities because today's job market demands diversified up to the mark skills in the workforce in almost every sector. The dynamics of the regions suit entrepreneurial culture with diversified business opportunities. Importantly, female entrepreneurs must be encouraged in the demanding fields. The ratio of female in the workplace is quite small as compared to the male which shows inequality in terms of opportunity because women constitute half of the population according to the previous census report and it is one of the major hurdles in the way of social progress. Encouragement of women in the local business and entrepreneurship is essential for the uplifting local economy and a way forward to better living. This will not only enhance the living standard of the people but also uplift the cottage industry across the valley. Provision of long-term and short-term loans for businesses and startups is essential.

The dream of sustainable growth of the valley will come true when profit-centric investment is discouraged and a people-centric approach will be encouraged. The local leadership and representatives should be empowered and taken into confidence before any investment and development in the valley because they are genuine voice masses and they are well aware of the dynamics of the area. The shares of the local population must be ensured on the natural resources existing in the valley. Provision of employment opportunities in terms of the workforce is essential in different projects according to their capabilities on a priority basis. This will be helpful to eradicate their grievances along with the sustainable growth of the local economy.

Along with this, security risks need to be minimized to maintain the prevalent peaceful environment of the valley. The construction of the global trade route and

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expected investments in the valley security risks will increase due to the volatile borders surrounding the valley. Comprehensive security measures should be among the top priorities before initiating any project in the valley, and thus the materialization of the project will be possible in a smooth manner. The coexistence of the community has remained peaceful in the past instead of the volatility of the region in the outskirts. Consideration of the vulnerability of the valley in terms of security with the construction of this global trade route and other mega developmental projects is much important. This because consistent assaults have been taken to disrupt the progress of this project by non-state actors with anti-CPEC sentiments. Smooth materialization of this mega initiative with the maintenance of the prevalent peace of the valley is not possible without proper security measures. Security agencies need to develop a broad security strategy before starting the project. Inclusive security planning with the consensus of the civil society is essential because the vast spread porous border of the valley needs effective security arrangement to avoid any mishap in the future.

Conclusion

Explicitly, the livelihood opportunities linked with the investments and developmental projects along with CPEC have the potential to uplift the thriving economy of Pakistan. Though, this flagship project is the result of Pak-China's long-lasting relations and bilateral confidence building which will improve the regional connectivity; paving the way for smooth and fast trade among the regional states. The expected development of the CPEC alternative route in the north-western part via Chitral will open the doors of livelihood opportunities to the people of the landlocked and peripheral region of the country. The valley with large potentials in terms of investment opportunities and natural resources will be host to diversified livelihood opportunities. With the construction of the route, the land connectivity will be improved and the approach of the locals to the rest of the country will be easy and access to services and utilities will be more efficient. Along with these, the expected challenges could not be superseded in the wake of development. With these opportunities, the economic independence of the local population and the sustainable growth of the valley is still questionable due to certain reasons, mentioned prior. The increasing investment in the valley will attract more non-local businessmen and another workforce, where the number of non-locals has already increased massively. The trend of non-locals has pushed the local population to consumer status and the space for the indigenous population is shrinking in the locals market rapidly. Intensified economic challenges are increasing with the said phenomenon, which needs to be minimized by encouraging locals through identified initiatives. Provision of due shares of the local population on the indigenous resources as a first beneficiary. On the other hand, the culture of the isolated valley will be endangered with the ongoing process of non-local settlements on a massive scale and it is getting intense with the developments in the area. Without effective risk management, the construction

of a global trade route through this valley will make the region more vulnerable to climate changes, so it need ecologically sound policies to counter it. Accordingly, a proper growth strategy with an integrated and inclusive mechanism before kicking of the mega initiative is vital for the safeguard of the local community from any sort of challenges. The development will be counter-productive and the dream of sustainable growth will go in vain if it is not sanctioned by climate-friendly policies and a people-centric development approach.

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