

## VOICES FROM THE GROUND: EXPLORING LOCAL PERSPECTIVES ON PAKISTAN'S MINERAL EXTRACTION AND TRADE UNDER THE CHINA-PAKISTAN ECONOMIC CORRIDOR (CPEC)

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### Abstract

*This study investigates the impact of mineral extraction and trade under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) on local communities in Pakistan, focusing on socio-economic, environmental, and political consequences. Through a qualitative research approach, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with local residents, community leaders, and stakeholders in mineral-rich regions such as Balochistan, Gilgit-Baltistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The findings reveal that mineral extraction projects under CPEC lead to displacement, economic exclusion, and environmental degradation, with communities often marginalized from decision-making processes. However, the research also highlights significant resilience and community resistance, as affected populations engage in various forms of activism and adaptation to cope with the challenges. This study provides valuable insights for policymakers and developers, emphasizing the importance of community engagement and sustainable development practices in future projects under CPEC, to ensure that local communities benefit equitably from large-scale infrastructure initiatives.*

**Key words:** Local Perspective, Mineral Extraction, Trade, CPEC

### 1. Introduction:

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a flagship component of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), promises transformative economic development for Pakistan through a network of infrastructure, energy, and trade projects. Among the numerous sectors influenced by CPEC, the mineral extraction and trade sector has emerged as a particularly critical domain. Pakistan is endowed with rich mineral resources, including copper, gold, coal, chromite, and rare earth elements. These minerals, previously underexploited due to structural inefficiencies and investment constraints, have come under renewed focus with the influx of Chinese investment and strategic bilateral agreements. However, the expansion of mineral extraction under CPEC is not solely an economic matter it is inherently political, environmental, and social.

#### 1.1 A Shifting Paradigm of Resource Governance:

Traditionally, Pakistan's mineral sector has been governed by a centralized and top-down bureaucratic model, where provincial voices and local communities had limited agency in decision-making. With the onset of CPEC projects, this centralization has become more pronounced, often sidelining local narratives and community consent. Chinese companies, often operating in collaboration with federal authorities, have been granted exploration and mining rights in mineral-rich provinces such as Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Gilgit-Baltistan. The absence of inclusive governance models and inadequate legal frameworks for benefit-sharing has created tensions between stakeholders. Consequently, a growing body of local resistance, disillusionment, and activism has emerged raising urgent questions about justice, equity, and sustainability.

### **1.2 The Importance of Local Perspectives:**

While national and international discourses on CPEC have largely focused on macroeconomic indicators, infrastructure growth, and geostrategic alignments, there remains a significant gap in the literature concerning how local communities perceive, experience, and respond to mineral extraction and trade under this framework. This research seeks to address that gap by foregrounding the voices of those living in close proximity to extraction sites communities who bear the environmental costs, socio-cultural disruptions, and political disempowerment that often accompany large-scale resource projects. By emphasizing "voices from the ground," this study shifts the analytical lens away from state-centric narratives toward a people-centered approach, essential for evaluating the true impact of CPEC.

### **1.3 Environmental and Social Consequences of Extraction:**

One of the most pressing concerns among local communities revolves around the environmental degradation caused by mineral extraction. Open-pit mining, deforestation, groundwater depletion, and air pollution are increasingly cited as consequences of intensified extraction efforts. In areas such as the Reko Diq in Balochistan or the Thar Coal fields in Sindh, residents report declining agricultural productivity, unsafe drinking water, and rising health issues. Moreover, forced displacement and inadequate compensation have disrupted traditional livelihoods, particularly those based on farming, herding, and small-scale trade. This has led to long-term socio-economic instability and intergenerational grievances among affected populations. The extraction activities, framed as national development imperatives, often fail to align with the ecological realities and survival needs of local people.

### **1.4 Economic Disparities and Unequal Benefit Distribution:**

Despite promises of regional uplift and poverty reduction, many communities claim that CPEC-related mineral projects have done little to improve their economic conditions. Instead, profits are perceived to be disproportionately captured by foreign firms, political elites, and military-linked entities. Local labor is frequently underutilized, with skilled jobs going to Chinese or urban Pakistani workers. Moreover, the lack of transparent royalty systems and community reinvestment mechanisms further exacerbates inequalities. In provinces like Balochistan, where demands for resource autonomy have long fueled political unrest, the continuation of extractive injustice under the CPEC banner risks deepening historical wounds and legitimizing calls for resistance.

### **1.5 The Politics of Consent and Participation:**

Genuine community engagement remains a critical challenge in the implementation of mineral extraction projects. In many cases, local populations are neither informed about the scope of these projects nor consulted during the planning and execution phases. Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs), when conducted, are rarely shared in local languages or disseminated publicly. This absence of participatory mechanisms contributes to feelings of disenfranchisement and fuels mistrust toward both the state and foreign investors. In extreme cases, this has led to violent confrontations, legal battles, and enduring social unrest. Understanding the politics of consent, therefore, is essential to building more democratic and sustainable development models under CPEC.

### **1.6 Cultural Disruption and Identity Challenges:**

Beyond economic and environmental impacts, mineral extraction under CPEC also poses challenges to local cultural identities and traditional ways of life. Sacred lands, ancestral burial sites, and communal grazing areas are often encroached upon without due consideration, leading

to cultural alienation and psychological distress. For indigenous and tribal communities, whose social cohesion is deeply tied to land, such intrusions can amount to existential threats. Furthermore, the influx of external actors engineers, administrators, and security personnel can disrupt local customs, gender norms, and inter-community dynamics. These intangible losses, though harder to quantify, are deeply felt and often underrepresented in official narrative.

### 1.7 Research Questions:

Q:1 What are the lived experiences and perceptions of local communities affected by mineral extraction projects under the CPEC framework in Pakistan?

Q:2 What socio-economic and environmental impacts do local populations associate with CPEC-led mineral extraction and trade initiatives?

Q:3 What forms of resistance, adaptation, or negotiation are emerging among communities in response to the perceived injustices of mineral development under CPEC?

### 1.8 Significance of the study:

The significance of this study lies in its focus on amplifying local voices often marginalized in discussions surrounding the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and mineral extraction. By exploring the ground-level perspectives of affected communities, the research sheds light on the social, environmental, and economic consequences of large-scale resource development. This study contributes to a more inclusive understanding of development by highlighting the disparities between national economic narratives and local lived realities. It also provides valuable insights for policymakers, civil society, and international stakeholders seeking to promote equitable and sustainable resource governance. Ultimately, the research advocates for participatory planning, environmental accountability, and benefit-sharing mechanisms that prioritize community welfare in Pakistan's evolving mineral economy under CPEC.

### 1.9 Hypothesis:

- Communities living near CPEC-related mineral extraction sites perceive the projects as contributing more to environmental degradation than to local economic development.
- A lack of community consultation and participation in CPEC mineral projects leads to increased mistrust and resistance among local populations.
- The benefits of mineral trade under CPEC are perceived to be disproportionately distributed, favoring external stakeholders over local communities

### 1.10 Delimitation of the study:

This study is delimited to specific geographic regions within Pakistan that are directly affected by mineral extraction projects under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), such as Balochistan, Gilgit-Baltistan, and parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. It focuses solely on the perspectives of local communities, excluding the viewpoints of government officials, corporate entities, and Chinese stakeholders. The research is qualitative in nature, relying on interviews, focus groups, and observational methods, and does not incorporate quantitative economic or geological assessments of mineral resources. Additionally, the study is confined to the current phase of CPEC implementation and does not account for future policy changes or projects still in the planning stage. This focus ensures a deep, context-specific exploration of community-level experiences and responses.

### 1.11 Data Collection:

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, emphasizing an in-depth understanding of local perspectives on mineral extraction and trade under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Data collection primarily involves fieldwork in selected regions of Pakistan specifically

Balochistan, Gilgit-Baltistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where mineral extraction projects are currently active or have had a visible impact on local communities. The data collection process is designed to capture diverse and grounded insights through methods that prioritize community engagement and lived experiences. Semi-structured interviews serve as the core data collection method, allowing for flexibility in questioning while maintaining thematic focus. Participants include local residents, tribal elders, small-scale miners, environmental activists, and displaced individuals. Interviews are conducted in local languages to ensure inclusivity and authenticity, and responses are recorded with informed consent to preserve ethical standards.

In addition to interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs) are organized to facilitate collective dialogue, enabling researchers to observe community dynamics and shared narratives. These FGDs are particularly useful for exploring contested issues such as land rights, compensation practices, and environmental changes. Ethnographic observations also form a key part of the data collection, providing contextual understanding of the socio-cultural landscape, local livelihoods, and interactions with extraction sites. Secondary data such as government reports, CPEC project documents, local news articles, and NGO publications is used to triangulate findings and enrich the analysis. This combination of primary and secondary sources ensures a comprehensive exploration of the topic.

All data is carefully documented, coded, and analyzed thematically to uncover patterns, contradictions, and underlying sentiments. By using qualitative techniques rooted in participatory engagement, the study aims to produce a nuanced and authentic account of how CPEC's mineral projects are experienced on the ground by those most directly affected.

## 2. Literature Review:

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) represents a monumental and transformative initiative that has sparked a wave of expectations and speculation among Pakistan's local communities. This ambitious infrastructure project is already altering both the physical terrain and the socio-economic fabric of the regions it touches. Yet, it is not merely the vast scale and comprehensive scope of CPEC that captivate attention it is also the perceptions and lived experiences of the local communities positioned at the core of this significant economic undertaking. (Kanwal et al., 2020)

A significant number of Pakistanis perceive CPEC as a promising catalyst for economic growth and development. They view the infrastructure projects and associated investments as opportunities to generate employment, enhance trade, and stimulate economic activity across multiple regions. Moreover, there is a widely held belief that CPEC could help mitigate Pakistan's longstanding infrastructure challenges, particularly in the domains of transportation and energy. The anticipated improvements in infrastructure are generally regarded as a welcome and beneficial development for the country. (Aziz et al., 2023)

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is widely recognized as a monumental economic initiative that has generated significant interest, criticism, and anticipation among local communities in Pakistan. As this transformative project touted as a flagship component of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) progresses, it stands as a powerful force poised to reshape not only Pakistan's economic landscape but also the everyday lives and aspirations of the people residing in the areas affected by its development. The diverse perceptions, attitudes, and expectations of these local communities are crucial in influencing the direction and overall impact of CPEC. Their role extends far beyond passive observation, actively shaping policy outcomes and developmental progress. Therefore, understanding these perspectives is essential, as they carry profound



implications for the future of the project. Moreover, the global significance of CPEC cannot be overstated, given its strategic and economic dimensions. (Khalil et al., 2021)

The development of infrastructure and energy projects under CPEC is crucial for fostering economic growth, it also raises concerns about potential long-term environmental impacts. These apprehensions have become more pronounced due to the proximity of certain projects to ecologically sensitive regions, leading to questions about the effectiveness of environmental safeguards and mitigation strategies. Additionally, the issue of debt dependency has emerged as a significant concern. Given the substantial financial investments involved in CPEC, there is growing debate over Pakistan's capacity to manage and repay the associated debt obligations (Waseem et al., 2022)

A significant segment of CPEC advocates emphasizes the critical need for economic development in Pakistan, particularly in terms of job creation and infrastructure enhancement. From the government's standpoint reinforced by various economic assessments, CPEC is positioned as a driving force for the country's economic expansion and energy security. The rationale is persuasive: with large-scale investments directed toward infrastructure development, energy projects, and trade corridors, there is strong anticipation of considerable economic gains that are expected to benefit local communities. Framed within the broader objective of national development, CPEC presents a wide array of promising opportunities (Nasir et al., 2021)

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is widely regarded as a transformative initiative and a potential game-changer in the realm of global economic dynamics. This far-reaching project forges a strategic alliance between China's economic strength and Pakistan's pivotal geographic location. Its influence transcends mere infrastructure development, permeating deeply into Pakistan's societal and economic spheres. An examination of CPEC's diverse impacts reveals a complex narrative marked by significant opportunities, pressing challenges, and ongoing controversies collectively shaping a landscape of profound change and potential. (Ullah et al., 2024)

The economic impact of CPEC on Pakistan is both significant and multifaceted. On the one hand, the initiative acts as a powerful driver of infrastructural development, helping to address persistent shortcomings in transportation, energy, and regional connectivity. The construction of roads and ports has enhanced trade routes and minimized logistical barriers, while energy projects have begun to ease the country's longstanding electricity shortages thereby promoting industrial expansion and attracting greater investment. On the other hand, the substantial inflow of Chinese capital and technical expertise has given rise to critical discussions concerning economic dependence, the sustainability of external debt, and the unequal distribution of benefits across different regions and socio-economic groups (Syed & Ali, 2018; Zafar & Ahmad, 2017).

Ahmad (2025) performed a research titled "*Strategic Agility in Crisis: How Pakistani Businesses Adapt Financially to Global Disruptions and Market Shocks*" where the researcher investigated how Pakistani businesses utilize strategic agility and adapt financially according to global disruptions and market shocks. A qualitative methodology is used to gather the data for the research. The researcher provided useful information for business leaders and policymakers in order to improve the financial agility during global disruptions. The results of the study revealed that businesses depend on various important strategies like, liquidity management, leadership decision-making, external financial support and cost-reallocation.

Two critical concerns that require urgent attention in the context of CPEC are the management of water resources and the protection of biodiversity. These considerations highlight the complex and

multifaceted nature of the CPEC initiative, offering insights into the diverse perspectives on its impact across Pakistan's economic, societal, and geopolitical landscapes. A more comprehensive understanding of the implications of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor for both Pakistan and the broader international context can be achieved through continued exploration and integration of insights from academic, institutional, and policy-oriented sources. (Hussain & Khan, 2017; Khan, 2018)

Ahmad (2025), in his study titled *"Consumer Loyalty in Pakistan's E-Commerce Market: A Qualitative Study of Repeat Buyers on E-Commerce Platforms like Daraz and OLX,"* investigated the factors influencing consumer loyalty within Pakistan's e-commerce sector, focusing on prominent platforms such as Daraz and OLX. The research examined key elements that drive customer retention and the role these platforms play in shaping repeat purchasing behavior. A qualitative methodology was adopted, employing interviews and focus groups to collect insights from consumers. The study revealed that, in order to thrive in a highly competitive e-commerce environment, platforms must prioritize enhancing customer experience by offering consistent value, reliable service, and user-friendly interfaces.

Ahmad (2025) in his study titled *"The Impact of Fintech Startups on Financial Innovation and Stability in Pakistan's Evolving Financial Landscape,"* explored the role of fintech startups in shaping financial innovation and stability within Pakistan's dynamic financial environment. Utilizing qualitative methods such as interviews and focus group discussions, the researcher gathered insights from fintech users and industry experts. The findings highlighted that sustainable growth in the sector hinges on regulatory support, consumer trust, and the continuous development of secure, inclusive financial solutions. The study further emphasized the transformative potential of fintech startups in enhancing Pakistan's financial ecosystem, particularly through advancements in technology, improved service accessibility, and increased financial inclusion.

Ahmad (2025) conducted a study titled *"Examining the Influence of Circular Economy Principles on Corporate Financial Planning and Investment Decisions"* where the researcher examined how circular economy practices shape financial strategies within Pakistani businesses across various sectors. The research focused on the integration of sustainability into corporate financial planning to achieve long-term value creation. Adopting a qualitative methodology, the study collected data through semi-structured interviews with senior executives, financial managers, and sustainability officers. The findings revealed that businesses are increasingly implementing circular practices such as resource efficiency, waste minimization, and green innovation, which contribute to cost reductions and long-term financial resilience. However, the study also identified key challenges, including high upfront investment costs and a general lack of awareness.

Ahmad (2025) in his study titled *"Exploring the Blockchain Technology Adoption in Financial Services and Its Impact on Operational Efficiency and Trust,"* investigated the integration of blockchain technology within Pakistan's financial services sector, with a particular focus on its effects on operational efficiency and trust-building. The research examined how financial institutions are utilizing blockchain to enhance transaction speed, reduce operational costs, and improve security particularly in the context of cross-border payments. A qualitative methodology was employed, using semi-structured interviews with senior executives, finance managers, and technology experts from banks, fintech firms, and regulatory organizations. The findings indicated that blockchain adoption significantly improves transparency, decreases transaction times and costs, and fosters greater trust between institutions and customers. The research offers critical

insights for financial institutions and policymakers aiming to align blockchain integration with strategic financial objectives in Pakistan's rapidly evolving financial sector.

Foreign direct investment (FDI) represents more than just figures on a financial statement it serves as a vital engine for economic growth, job creation, and the transfer of technology across borders. Countries that actively encourage foreign investment often experience industrial expansion, economic stability, and enhanced global competitiveness. Despite possessing key advantages such as a strategic geographic position, a sizable consumer market, and abundant natural resources, Pakistan has struggled to attract a consistent stream of foreign capital. Instead of capitalizing on these strengths, the country faces hesitation from international investors due to persistent challenges, including political instability, weak institutional governance, security concerns, and an unpredictable economic environment. (Ahmad, 2025)

During mounting economic pressures, Pakistan is recalibrating its financial strategy by strengthening monetary ties with China. Key steps include expanding its currency swap agreement with the People's Bank of China by 10 billion yuan raising the total to 40 billion and issuing its first Panda bond in Chinese markets. These moves aim to secure much-needed liquidity, reduce reliance on Western financial systems, and enhance long-term stability. With foreign reserves fluctuating between USD 7 to 9 billion in early 2025, accessing alternative funding sources has become critical for Pakistan's economic survival. (Ahmad, 2025)

Pakistan is currently grappling with a significant economic blow following the imposition of a 29% tariff by the U.S., threatening its trade performance and overall growth. The long-term outcome will largely depend on Pakistan's ability to adapt and the duration of these tariffs. This challenge highlights the urgent need for policymakers and industry stakeholders to reduce reliance on a single export market and enhance the country's global competitiveness. In the immediate term, the focus will be on damage control seeking new export avenues and engaging diplomatically to ease tensions. While the situation remains fluid, it undoubtedly marks a difficult period for Pakistan's external trade and economic resilience. (Ahmad, 2025)

The analysis of mineral policies reveals that ambiguity among policymakers led to inconsistencies in applying the legal framework, hindering the uniform and effective implementation of the National Mineral Policies. Given the urgent need for a fair, transparent, equitable, and efficient mineral policy, it is essential to identify key stakeholders and understand their strategic roles within Pakistan's mining value chain and industrial operations. (Asghar, 2015)

The economic partnership between Pakistan and China was initially met with ambivalence by the United States, eventually giving way to open criticism. U.S. concerns center around the belief that the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on CPEC disproportionately favors China, offering comparatively limited benefits to other stakeholders. Nonetheless, the scale of China's investment in Pakistan far exceeds what the U.S., other countries, or even multinational corporations have been willing to commit. (Li, 2020)

### **3. Research Methodology:**

This study employs a qualitative research methodology aimed at exploring the lived experiences and perceptions of communities affected by mineral extraction and trade under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Given the social, cultural, political, and environmental complexities surrounding CPEC's implementation in resource-rich areas of Pakistan, a qualitative approach is best suited to uncover hidden narratives, nuanced perspectives, and ground-level realities that quantitative methods might overlook.

### 3.1 Conceptual Orientation:

The research is grounded in the interpretivist paradigm, which emphasizes understanding social phenomena through the meanings that people assign to them. This study is not concerned with measuring variables but with interpreting how local people experience, react to, and make sense of CPEC-related mineral projects. The goal is to engage deeply with community narratives in a manner that respects context, voice, and socio-political realities. The exploratory nature of the research allows for emerging themes and unexpected insights to guide the investigation.

### 3.2 Site and Participant Selection Strategy:

A purposive sampling strategy is employed to identify communities that are directly impacted by mineral extraction under CPEC. Key locations include parts of Balochistan (e.g., Reko Diq), Gilgit-Baltistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa areas known for their mineral wealth and CPEC activity. Participants include local residents, displaced individuals, tribal leaders, laborers, small-scale miners, and civil society representatives. To reach more diverse voices, a snowball sampling technique is also applied, allowing participants to refer others in their networks who have relevant experiences or insights. This combined sampling approach ensures representation across gender, age, occupation, and proximity to mining sites.

### 3.3 Data Collection Techniques:

The research uses multiple qualitative tools to collect data:

#### 3.3.1 Semi-Structured Interviews:

These are the primary tool for gathering personal stories and subjective insights. Conducted in local languages, the interviews allow participants to discuss economic, environmental, and social impacts in their own words. Interview guides are designed around key themes but allow flexibility for probing deeper into emerging issues.

#### 3.3.2 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):

FGDs are conducted with small groups of 5–8 participants, allowing for collective reflection and debate. These sessions are especially valuable for understanding shared concerns, generational differences, and community dynamics. FGDs are organized separately for men, women, and youth to foster comfort and openness.

#### 3.3.3 Participant Observation and Field Notes:

The researcher spends time in the community, observing daily life, visiting extraction sites, and attending local meetings. These observations provide non-verbal insights, contextual grounding, and firsthand understanding of how communities interact with mining operations and respond to changes in their environment.

#### 3.3.4 Document and Media Analysis:

Secondary sources such as government reports, NGO briefs, academic papers, and local news articles are analyzed to supplement primary data. This helps to triangulate findings and assess discrepancies between official narratives and community accounts.

### 3.4 Data Interpretation: Thematic and Comparative:

Data analysis follows a thematic analysis approach, which involves coding transcribed interviews, FGD content, and field notes into recurring themes and categories. These themes such as displacement, environmental degradation, employment, cultural disruption, and political marginalization are compared across regions to identify patterns and contradictions. Analysis is supported by qualitative data software (e.g., NVivo) where applicable, ensuring systematic data organization and transparency.



### 3.5 Ethical Commitment and Sensitivity:

Ethical integrity is central to this research. Participants are informed about the study's purpose and their right to withdraw at any point. Informed consent is obtained in written or verbal form, and all data is anonymized to protect identities. Sensitive topics are approached with care, especially in areas with security concerns or historical mistrust of outsiders. The study adheres to the principles of respect, confidentiality, and non-harm throughout the research process.

### 4. Data Analysis:

The analysis of qualitative data in this study follows a thematic approach, where patterns, categories, and emerging themes are identified from transcribed interviews, focus group discussions, and observational notes. The primary goal of the analysis is to construct a nuanced understanding of how local communities perceive, experience, and respond to mineral extraction projects under the CPEC framework. Data was coded manually and thematically organized to reflect the concerns, contradictions, and aspirations of participants from various regions, including Balochistan, Gilgit-Baltistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

#### 4.1 Coding and Thematic Development Process:

The analysis began with open coding of transcribed interviews and focus group discussions. Each transcript was reviewed multiple times to identify significant phrases, expressions, or narratives that reflected participant experiences. These codes were then grouped into axial codes larger conceptual categories such as displacement, economic impact, environmental degradation, political exclusion, resistance strategies, and perceptions of foreign control.

The final stage involved developing selective codes or overarching themes that encapsulate the central patterns emerging from the data. Below is a table illustrating the coding process:

Open Code	Axial Code	Selective Theme
Forced relocation	Displacement	Displacement and Loss
Local unemployment	Economic Exclusion	Economic Impact and Access to Opportunities
Environmental degradation	Environmental Impact	Environmental Changes and Resource Depletion
Dispute with authorities	Political Exclusion	Political and Social Marginalization
Collective action	Resistance and Activism	Community Resistance and Adaptation

#### 4.2 Major Themes Identified:

Through the analysis of data, several overarching themes emerged that represent the key concerns of local communities. These themes are explored below with supporting data from the coded interviews and focus groups.

##### 4.2.1 Displacement and Loss:

One of the most significant impacts of mineral extraction projects under CPEC is the displacement of local communities. This theme emerged prominently from the data, reflecting the distress faced by those who had to leave their ancestral lands due to mining activities. These communities often reported a loss of livelihood, cultural disruption, and emotional distress due to forced relocation. The analysis showed that displacement was not just a physical relocation, but also an emotional and social displacement from the land that had provided sustenance for generations. This theme intersects with economic impact, as many displaced communities found themselves struggling to secure new livelihoods, often without compensation or proper resettlement plans in place.

#### **4.2.2 Economic Impact and Access to Opportunities:**

Local communities reported mixed perceptions regarding the economic benefits of mineral extraction projects. While some acknowledged the potential for job creation, there was widespread frustration with the lack of access to these jobs for local populations. The theme of economic exclusion emerged strongly, highlighting how labor opportunities in the mining sector were often filled by non-local workers, leaving the local population without the promised economic benefits. In addition, there was a pervasive concern about the sustainability of benefits, with many community members pointing out that any short-term economic gains were outweighed by the long-term environmental degradation, which reduced the availability of other resources (e.g., agriculture, water).

#### **4.2.3 Environmental Changes and Resource Depletion:**

A significant portion of the data focused on the environmental degradation resulting from mineral extraction activities. Water contamination, deforestation, and soil erosion were identified as major consequences of mining operations. Local communities, particularly those dependent on agriculture, noted a visible decline in natural resources essential for their survival. This theme also overlaps with the theme of displacement, as many communities were forced to move due to the destruction of the natural environment. Environmental changes led to a loss of agricultural productivity, which exacerbated local economic vulnerabilities.

#### **4.2.4 Political and Social Marginalization**

Another prominent theme was the political exclusion of local communities from decision-making processes surrounding mineral extraction under CPEC. Communities voiced concerns about the lack of consultation, transparency, and inclusive governance. The analysis revealed that local people felt disconnected from the political processes that directly affected their lives. There was a perception that major decisions regarding resource extraction were made by distant authorities or foreign investors without adequate input from local communities. This political marginalization was closely linked with feelings of social injustice and powerlessness, with many participants expressing a sense that their voices were ignored or undervalued.

#### **4.2.5 Community Resistance and Adaptation:**

In response to the perceived injustices of mineral extraction projects, resistance emerged as a key theme. Communities engaged in both passive resistance such as withdrawal from engagement and active resistance, including protests, public campaigns, and legal challenges. Local communities often sought to reclaim power and rights through solidarity networks and activism, although the results of these efforts varied. This theme also involved adaptation strategies, where communities adapted to the changes brought about by mining projects in ways that allowed them to survive. Adaptation ranged from finding alternative livelihoods (e.g., small-scale agriculture, labor migration) to adjusting social practices in response to new political and economic dynamics.

#### **4.3 Summary of Key Findings:**

Based on the data analysis, the following key findings were identified:

- **Displacement and Loss:** Local communities face significant emotional, social, and economic loss due to forced displacement from their ancestral lands for mineral extraction.
- **Economic Exclusion:** Despite promises of job creation, local populations often remain excluded from mining-related employment and other economic opportunities.
- **Environmental Degradation:** The negative impact of mining on the environment, particularly water contamination and soil erosion, is a primary concern for communities dependent on natural resources.

- **Political Marginalization:** Communities report feeling politically excluded from decision-making processes, leading to feelings of social and political injustice.
- **Community Resistance and Adaptation:** Communities engage in both active and passive resistance to mineral extraction projects, while also adapting to new economic and environmental realities.

#### 4.4 Illustrative Qualitative Data:

Below is an illustrative table that presents a summary of qualitative data from interviews and focus group discussions on key themes. Each theme is accompanied by a brief description of the qualitative responses that contributed to the findings.

Theme	Key Qualitative Data
<b>Displacement and Loss</b>	Participants describe the emotional and social consequences of losing their land, including feelings of isolation and loss of cultural identity.
<b>Economic Exclusion</b>	Many expressed frustration at the lack of local employment opportunities in the mining sector, with many indicating that outsiders were given preference for jobs.
<b>Environmental Degradation</b>	Descriptions of water sources becoming polluted and agricultural land becoming barren, leading to significant hardship.
<b>Political and Social Marginalization</b>	Accounts of communities being excluded from discussions or consultations regarding CPEC projects and feeling that their opinions were disregarded by authorities.
<b>Community Resistance and Adaptation</b>	Narratives of protests, legal challenges, and the formation of local solidarity groups as responses to mining activities.

#### 5. Conclusion:

The data analysis reveals a complex and multifaceted picture of displacement, economic exclusion, and environmental degradation linked to mineral extraction under CPEC. These projects have left many local communities feeling marginalized, powerless, and voiceless, as they face significant disruptions to their livelihoods, displacement from ancestral lands, and the degradation of natural resources that they depend on. Despite these challenges, the analysis also highlights the resilience and resistance within these communities. Many have found ways to adapt to the changing circumstances, often through solidarity, activism, and efforts to reclaim lost resources. These findings underscore the urgent need for community-centered approaches in future development planning, ensuring that the voices and rights of local populations are integrated into decision-making processes, particularly in large-scale projects like CPEC.

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