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Travel and Tourism Development in Pakistan under CPEC: Policy Recommendations

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Travel and Tourism Development in Pakistan under CPEC: Policy Recommendations

By

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INTRODUCTION:

Travel and Tourism (T&T) sector is considered substantial to foster socio-economic activity. Growth of T&T sector generates both the direct, indirect and induced impacts like employment opportunities so its total contribution in terms of economic and social prospects is tremendous. Therefore, developing economies like Pakistan has prioritized T & T sector as preferential policy preference in its developmental agenda. It is the major reason for Government of Pakistan to incorporate T&T sector as key area of cooperation under the long term plan of CPEC. Cooperation and investment under CPEC are expected to enhance the development of T&T sector in Pakistan.

As per the Travel and Tourism Competitive Index report of World Economic Forum 1,429,580 people are employed in the T&T sector of Pakistan which comprised 2.4% of total employment, this sector contributed US \$7,362.0 million in GDP which comprised of 2.8% of GDP. Furthermore, 965,498 international tourists visited Pakistan during a year in which survey was conducted⁴

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⁴ (WTTC), World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and World Travel and Tourism Council. 2017. Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index 2017 edition. Annual, World Economic Forum.

Whereas, induced or indirect impacts are concerned a Canadian tourist Ian who has travelled to 188 countries of the world shared his experience in Pakistan by saying that *“Never would have I imagined Pakistan to be the way it was! I had pictured something similar to India and Bangladesh. But it is far from it! It has its very own flavor and culture, its people are particularly friendly and its landscape is breathtaking! Kind of a mix between Iran, Afghanistan and India and Nepal at the same time”*⁵. Similarly, an Indian-American Asim Jaweed experienced culturally diverse Pakistan and penned his experience *“I cherished my time in Lahore..... In Karachi ethnic Sindhis rub shoulders with Pashtuns, Punjabis, Baloch and even a few Hyderabadis like me. Karachi teemed with the infectious spirit of a bustling metropolis rapidly evolving, even reinventing itself, and I was hooked”*⁶

In 2018, one of the leading global tourism guidance organization Lonely Planet ranks Pakistan as the top ranked country among twenty best countries for the back-packers tourists. Lonely Planet shared the experience of an international tourist group British Backpacker Society who said Pakistan was ranked at top spot because it was *“home to some of the world’s friendliest and most hospitable people, and offers some of the world’s dramatic mountain scenery”*⁷.

Tourism endowments of Pakistan are potentially remarkable. Keeping in view the long term plan of CPEC there is dire need to establish new or revitalize already existing tourism parks in different regions of Pakistan. Currently, to complement the CPEC three tourism parks along the route of CPEC are strongly suggested; one in north, second in Indus valley and third in coastal area of Pakistan. First, in north the high stretches of Himalayas, Karakorams and Hindukush with permanent snow lines

⁵Ian. 2017. 2 weeks Traveling Pakistan: My Experience and Impressions. September 7. Accessed August 28, 2018. <https://www.thedigitalglobetrotter.com>.

⁶ Jaweed, Asim. 2017. "As an Indian visiting Pakistan for the first time, I discovered I had another home." Dawn. DAWN, June 21.

⁷ FOXE, KEN. 2018. Lonely Planet. January 6. Accessed August 28, 2018. <https://www.lonelyplanet.com>.

and beautiful meadows offers incredible tourism resources including Socio-cultural diversity. The attractive topography invites the adventure lovers for the adventures tourism and elegant minds to witness meaningful secrets of the nature. From these high ranges originates the one of the largest rivers of the world the Indus River. It passes all along Pakistan and engendered remarkable civilizations in the Indus valley of the country. The Indus valley civilization is one of the early three cradles of civilizations of the old world and it entices spiritual and cultural tourism. Third, in south where river Indus falls into the Arabian Sea considerably decent coastally tourism resources presents the high biodiversity and gorgeous but fragile ecosystems in the regions like Jiwani, Gwadar, Jhal Jhao, Ormara, Sonmini and Ketu Bander. These coastal areas along with significant Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) of almost 100 km extended up to 200 km inside the Arabian Sea with attractive virgin coastal area and marine life.

The Socio-Economic Division at Center of Excellence CPEC has already conducted research on eco and cultural tourism in KP and GB, Pakistan and research is under design process on coastal tourism. Based on the field research following evidence based policy guidelines are recommended.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE TOURISM INDUSTRY:

With particular reference to long term plan of CPEC below are the main policy guidelines and recommendations to improve and promote the T&T industry in Pakistan. In this regard it is required to engage the respective line departments of each governmental tier to implement these policy guidelines. The main policy recommendations are as mentioned below.

1. Creating enabling and business supportive environments for T&T related industry across Pakistan. the main suggestion includes
 - Ensuring the price competitiveness in the T&T sector;

- Ensuring effective implementation of Property Rights in tourist regions;
 - Flexible tax regime for T&T sector promotion;
 - Easy access to finance/credit to encourage profitable investments e.g. tourism products by banks;
 - Reduction in the cost to start T&T related businesses;
 - Efficiency of legal frameworks sitting disputes and challenges in tourist regions;
 - Doing effectiveness of marketing and branding in T&T sector of Pakistan to attract tourists.
2. Safety and security is the pre-requisite for the promotion of tourism industry. The main component includes
- Developing reliability and competence of police services with particular reference to tourism;
 - Engage media to promote concept of emerging Pakistan to dismantle insecurity and terrorism related impressions;
 - Ensuring political stability to establish goodwill of Pakistan globally.
3. Prioritization of T&T in policy preferences of the government as a driver in services based economic activity. The main suggestions includes;
- Increase in the governmental spending in budget to promote T&T;
 - Develop the access to improved sanitation and clean drinking water to tourists;
 - Protect and promote natural, cultural, oral, intangible heritage sites;
 - Promote and support heritage of local sports and folk festivals;
 - Regulate quality hoteling and tourism infrastructure to encourage competitiveness in the T&T sector;

- Establishing special emergency health facility for tourist to strengthen their trust on T&T of Pakistan;
 - Improving the internet and broadband system at tourist localities to facilitate tourists.
4. International openness and transport infrastructure need serious governmental attentions. The main suggestions include;
- Facilitating easy visa regime for culturally/spiritually interested tourists;
 - Enhancing quality of air transport infrastructure and availability of airlines;
 - Enhancing tourist oriented ground and port efficiency and ground and port infrastructure which includes quality of railroad and road and its density.
5. Human resources and labor forces in T&T sector is the most important area that needs attention. The main suggestion includes;
- Establishing a tourism and hospitality department in universities to train people and institutions involved in the tourism industry;
 - Putting special attentions to improve education attainment of youth particularly girls in tourist areas because of T&T sector employment is gender biased;
 - Creating awareness about customer orientation;
 - Ensuring the implementation of minimum wage law and hiring and firing practices for the labor force in T&T sector.
6. Ensuring environmental sustainability and environmental laws compliance. The main suggestions includes;
- Enforcement of environmental regulations and environmental treaty ratification;

- Managing baseline water stress e.g. waste-water treatment in the tourist areas;
 - Protecting the biodiversity especially threaten species in tourist areas e.g. snow leopard and brown bear in northern areas of Pakistan.
7. Intergovernmental coordination on the subject of T&T is a significant to eliminate overlapping jurisdiction of governmental units in Pakistan. The main suggestion include;
- Close collaboration of federal and provincial government of the subject of tourism because tourism development and promotion is provincial subject and its global branding is the federal responsibility;
 - Traveling and traveling infrastructure is the federal subject and there is need to complement the provincial tourism strategy
8. Effective and detailed information system to facilitate tourists about the T&T industry of Pakistan is an immediate need. The main suggestions are;
- Develop vibrant information center for international and national tourism with pro-active website that must provide detail information about localities, culture, and facilities;
 - Establish where required and revitalize already available tourist help center on tourist sites.