



Journal of Human Development and Capabilities

A Multi-Disciplinary Journal for People-Centered Development

ISSN: 1945-2829 (Print) 1945-2837 (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cjhd20>

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To cite this article: Johannes M. Waldmüller, Hameed Jamali & Nelson Nogales (2019) Operationalizing Sustainable Development Goals in Vulnerable Coastal Areas of Ecuador and Pakistan: Marginalizing Human Development?, *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 20:4, 468-485, DOI: [10.1080/19452829.2019.1666810](https://doi.org/10.1080/19452829.2019.1666810)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19452829.2019.1666810>



Published online: 17 Sep 2019.



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Operationalizing Sustainable Development Goals in Vulnerable Coastal Areas of Ecuador and Pakistan: Marginalizing Human Development?

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ABSTRACT *Drawing on multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork in socially and ecologically vulnerable coastal areas of Ecuador and Pakistan, we focus on Chinese-funded investment projects to analyze how SDGs are susceptible to be instrumentalized in the context of exploitative economic dependencies, as well as national development agendas. In our case studies, forced displacement of vulnerable inhabitants during the post-earthquake recovery in coastal Ecuador and displacement of small-scale fishers in coastal Pakistan are justified by SDG implementation. We identify a techno-managerial approach to SDGs in order to discuss its effects in terms of endangering ecosystems and human freedoms, increased social vulnerability and dependence on wage labour. Despite contextual differences, both case studies reveal a similar pattern of intervention under the pretext of SDGs where human freedoms and capabilities are severely undermined by large-scale projects of territorial and social securitization.*

KEYWORDS: Ecuador, Pakistan, SDG, Displacement, China, Livelihoods

1. SDGs and Post-Disaster Recovery in Ecuador and Pakistan

Much has been written about the emergence (e.g. Pogge and Sengupta 2015; Fukuda-Parr 2016), politics (Boulanger 2007), scope and implementation difficulties (Brandi 2015; Sampathkumar 2016; Biermann, Kanie, and Kim 2017) related to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in past years. Conceptually, SDGs represent an important step forward by combining economic, social, political and ecological rationales, and requiring national statistics to adapt their methodologies. As such, the SDGs have been promoted as the most inclusive and potentially transformative development agenda to date (United Nations

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2015; Dugarova and Gülasan 2017). Despite potential trade-offs, and while realizing their potential and relevance in diverse contexts will require on-the-ground studies (Stafford-Smith et al. 2017), the integrative nature of the SDGs can lead to more coherent policy-making as well as science-policy and inter-sectorial dialogue (Le Blanc 2015; Nilsson, Griggs, and Visbeck 2016).

Yet there is also evidence of conceptual shortcomings, in particular with regard to dominant power imbalances between the global North and South (Camacho 2015; Waldmüller 2015a), but also within the South itself, partly owed to still widespread patterns of “internal colonialism” (Casanova 1965) and features of “competitive authoritarianism” (Levitsky and Way 2002). In the global South, SDGs should address the roots of unequal societies and unequal human development too, i.e. existing marginalizations based on social distinctions of all kinds, including class, ethnicity, gender, religion, and age. It is therefore relevant to explore how SDGs, similar to other global indicators and ranking mechanisms (e.g. Merry 2011, 2016; Davis et al. 2012; Waldmüller 2015b), are adapted and transformed in the global South (Horn and Grugel 2018). In the following, we focus on the contemporary impact of foreign investments on predominantly ethnic minorities exposed to long-standing marginalization in coastal regions of Ecuador and Pakistan, linked to SDG implementations.

Drawing on multi-sited, repeated ethnographic fieldwork during 2016–2018 on the post-disaster recovery process after the earthquake of April 2016 (Ecuador) and 2014–2017 on development planning in the context of the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (Pakistan), the purpose of our contribution is therefore to examine emerging patterns with regard to sustainable human development (Lessmann and Rauschmayer 2013; Voget-Kleschin 2013; Biggeri and Ferrannini 2014) of the two study countries.

The ethnographic study carried out in Ecuador in the aftermath of the 7.8 moment magnitude earthquake that struck the coast on 16 April 2016 focused on comparing post-disaster socioenvironmental vulnerabilities, livelihood changes and adaptive capacities in four coastal semi-urban communities (between 3000 and 12 000 inhabitants), active in tourism, fishing, small-scale and industrial agriculture. From December 2016 to August 2018, ten field trips were realized over several days each, including observations, aerial documentation (using drones), 170 semiformal and informal interviews with local and national interlocutors (fishers, disaster victims, local administration, politicians, NGO members, humanitarian professionals, volunteers, etc.) and a survey on individual and collective (community) capabilities and capacities during the recovery process.

In Pakistan, data collection included three rounds of field visits to coastal areas during 2014–2017, semi-structured interviews (64) and group discussions (11) with relevant stakeholders and key actors at the national and sub-national levels (fishing communities, NGOs and local activists, government representatives, academic researchers, political party representatives and journalists). This data collection was complemented by observations of key policy debates at workshops and seminars especially on coastal development issues during the same period.

In the next section, we first present ongoing investments by Chinese firms in the coastal areas of both countries, followed by a summary of how the SDGs are implemented in each country with a focus on public policy. Sections 4 and 5 present the findings from our case studies in detail, highlighting similarities concerning displacement, livelihoods and freedom of surveillance of concerned populations. Finally, in discussing our findings we consider two possible emerging approaches to SDG implementation (“techno-managerial” vs. “socioecological”) and conclude by calling for stronger regulation, transparency and accountability from national governments.

2. Current Investments by Chinese Firms in Ecuadorian and Pakistani Coastal Regions

At first glance, Ecuador and Pakistan may seem unrelated in terms of geographical location, political and historical contexts. Additionally, the Ecuadorian case is analyzed in a post-disaster context whereas the geopolitics of Pakistan in its relationship to China at first appear more relevant for our analysis. There are, however, striking similarities: national, and in particular, coastal, politics and economies of both are largely impacted by current and planned investments by state-owned Chinese firms, resulting in processes of displacement by development (Penz, Drydyk, and Bose 2011) and thereby creating “spaces of exception” (Serje 2015). In addition, both regions analyzed here are historically excluded border regions, characterized by clandestine economies and little state control over the territory. Today, Ecuador is one of the most important destinations for investments by Chinese firms in Latin America, which are typically directed to extractive industries (oil and mining), shrimp and fish export and construction of mega-infrastructure projects, such as new hydroelectric plants. More than 90 Chinese companies currently operate in Ecuador, providing jobs and market opportunities for Chinese and Ecuadorians (Huaxia 2016).

Also Ecuador’s national emergency response system “ECU 911”, combining urban real-time public video surveillance, police, ambulance and fire fighters, was developed by Chinese companies (Rollet 2018). This is relevant for our discussion, since in the following we analyze *inter alia* one particular effect of post-disaster reconstruction under SDG targeting and influence of (mostly state-owned) Chinese investment companies as amplified securitization (public surveillance), while violating individual and collective privacy rights and impacting human capabilities.

Having said this, the Ecuadorian case analyzed here first, refers to the post-earthquake recovery efforts around the coastal towns of Muisne and Chamanga, located in the Esmeraldas province, bordering southern Colombia. Muisne is inhabited by approximately 8000 people on its island part and around 4000 on its continental part, both surrounded by mangroves and extended shrimp farms. Following presidential decrees and the declaration of environmental protection zones, islanders were for more than 20 months literally “under siege” by the State, leaving the island’s population in a state of post-disaster abandonment (Marchezini 2015). What we analyze here, however, is how the state’s reasoning was influenced and justified by both Chinese interests (mostly through its investors) and SDGs implementation, leading to this human catastrophe, which resembles particular patterns as they have emerged also in the coastal region of Pakistan during past years.

China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a bilateral framework of projects between China and Pakistan to improve infrastructure and enhance regional connectivity. Under CPEC, Chinese state-controlled firms are investing more than US\$ 60 billion to link Kashgar city (Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region) in western China to the cyclone-prone Gwadar—the port city in Balochistan on the Arabian Sea—through a 3000 kilometres long corridor (Government of Pakistan 2017a). After completion, the government of Pakistan expects an investment of more than US\$ 150 billion by Chinese investors.¹ CPEC is a crucial project of the Chinese ambitious One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative that aims to construct a new and modernized Silk Road connecting China with Central Asia, Africa and Europe. Apparently, a major part of CPEC money is currently being invested on building roads, railways, ports and power plants mostly directly by Chinese companies (see Figure 2 for the proposed roads network under CPEC). The government of Pakistan considers these investments as vital for the country’s development especially for energy production and needed infrastructure (*ibid*). The Pakistan Business Council estimates that the projects under CPEC could account for 20% of Pakistan’s GDP over the next 5 years. As of now,

around 700 Chinese companies are operating in Pakistan for CPEC and related projects (DAWN 2016), which is likely to increase in the future after completion of initial phases of the project. According to some sources within the Ministry of Interior, around 71,000 Chinese nationals visited Pakistan in 2016, and the ministry granted visa extensions to more than 27,000 Chinese (Reuters 2017).

Under the CPEC projects, infrastructure and energy development are the primary focus. However, the long-term plan—which has been under some controversy due to limited-disclosure to the public—includes detailed coastal development plans, agriculture development, and a comprehensive and modern surveillance system equipped with 24/7 video recording from Peshawar in the North to the coastal cities of Karachi and Gwadar covering all major cities and the roads along the entire corridor (DAWN 2017).

Situated in the coastal areas of Balochistan, we analyze how the construction of large projects such as the Gwadar port, a strategic project under the CPEC, has been planned and executed at the federal level without considering local priorities and contexts. The port along with other associated projects are directly affecting the livelihoods of local fishing communities and local residents of the Gwadar town. Due to lack of skilled labour, limited training facilities and lack of education in the area, local population is unable to effectively take advantage of these new developments whereas skilled labour from China and other parts of Pakistan are already filling the jobs in these projects. Similar to the Ecuadorian case, we analyze how the government of Pakistan is developing these large infrastructure and surveillance projects under the justification of contributing to achieving specific targets of the SDGs. In the following, we will first contextualize the overall political and social environment of Ecuador and second Pakistan, where SDG implementation take place.

3. Human Development and SDGs in Ecuador and Pakistan

3.1. Ecuador and SDG Implementation

As a general context, it is noteworthy that disaster politics in Ecuador today is embedded within a generally conflict-stricken and highly polarized social environment. A recent historical juncture in this process was the adoption of a path breaking new constitution in 2008 under then-President Rafael Correa. It paved the way for Buen Vivir (“good living”) politics, being part of the Leftist self-styled progressive Latin American governments. This refers to the establishment of a highly centralized state backed by peak prices for commodities until 2015, but also a political system characterized by notions such as “hyperpresidentialism” (Gudynas 2016), “commodity consensus” (Svampa 2015) and “high modernist” programs (Scott 1998; Japhy and Bayón 2015; Wilson and Bayón 2017), in particular with regard to emblematic infrastructure projects. This model of re-nationalized resource extraction, aiming at strengthened state control and simultaneous pay-back through increased social spending and economic inclusion toward selected groups (typically aligned with the government), has been termed the “compensatory State” (Gudynas 2016).

Paradoxically though, the Ecuadorian constitution of 2008 and its subsequent national plans of good living (2009–2013; 2013–2017) make explicit reference to human development and cite the work of both Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum (SENPLADES 2009, 2013). Following the core tenets of the capability approach (Sen 1999; Comim, Qizilbash, and Alkire 2008; Burchardt and Vizard 2011; Nussbaum 2011), public policies should be carried out in a way that takes bottom-up individual aspirations and capacities into account, avoiding paternalism wherever possible (Davis and Wells 2016), instead of State interventions being implemented top-down without further assessment and consultation.

In theory, these principles are highly relevant to disaster risk reduction (DRR) and SDG targeting as well. According to Aitsi-Selmi and Murray (2015), it is implicit in the SDGs that integral health is not simply a matter of biology but of social, political and economic decisions—likewise also disasters are not natural events but occur when hazard interact with “environmental, social, physical and economic vulnerabilities and exposure of populations” (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction 2013). In this sense, proper disaster risk reduction management has to transform societies from within, and from below—taking human development principles into account—to strengthen resilience and reduce intersectional vulnerabilities, instead of shielding socio-environmental and economic development against what are seen as external shocks and events (*ibid.*). There are several SDGs that are crucial for achieving better DRR. For instance, SDG 11 (addressing safe and resilient cities) has a match with the post-2015 DRR Sendai framework as it seeks to strengthen local resilience of communities and systems while increasing participation. Population health is addressed by SDG 3, and is particularly relevant in disaster prevention and recovery contexts. Similarly, SDGs 2 (end hunger and food security), 8 (inclusive growth), 12 (sustainable consumption), and 14 (sustainable use of seas), are similarly relevant and are synergistic with the currently promoted Sendai framework for DRR.

In general, Ecuador’s efforts toward the SDGs are embedded within the country’s overarching development strategy of *Buen Vivir*. “This concept puts the human being at the centre of the state’s development strategy, and is based on notions of interculturality, diversity and environmental sustainability. The public policy instrument [...] contains these principles and brings them into [...] a strategic planning document that sets the national priorities for a period of five years” (Morales et al. 2016, 1). In this sense, objectives and policy incentives for the realization of the SDGs are vertically transmitted from the National Secretariat for Planning and Development (SENPLADES), the supra-ministerial planning authority in the country, towards national ministries as well as provincial and cantonal governments. Formally, representatives of all levels of administration are assembled in the National Decentralized Participatory Planning System (NDPPS). In practice, however, provincial and cantonal governments are highly dependent on the timely payment and availability of public funding, which is also subject to political affiliations and interests. As of 2017–2018, all cantonal governments must develop plans for the alignment of their local objectives with the national and international SDG framework. This vertical structure of transmission is displayed in the [Figure 1](#) below.

With regard to SDGs 11 (resilient settlements), 3 (health) and 2 (end hunger)—which are of major relevance also for DRR—the Ecuadorian National Goals stemming from the current plan of good living (2013–2017), stipulate the following:

- SDG 2: Foster social and territorial equity, cohesion, inclusion and equality in diversity.
- SDG 3: Improve people’s quality of life.
- SDG 11: Ensure the sovereignty and efficiency of strategic sectors for industrial and technological transformation (*ibid.* 5).

This points to an important tension between fostering local improvement of life quality, inclusion, equality and equity, on the one hand, and ensuring the efficiency of strategic economic sectors, on the other. The latter include the sectors of extractive industries, but also those of prime economic relevance for the country, such as shrimp and banana farming for exportation. Overall, according to the 2017 SDG monitoring report published by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), Ecuador ranks 46 out of 156 (Sachs et al. 2017). In terms of the Human Development Index, Ecuador has witnessed a slight but steady improvement since 2010 (0,710) to 2017 (0,739), currently ranked at 89.

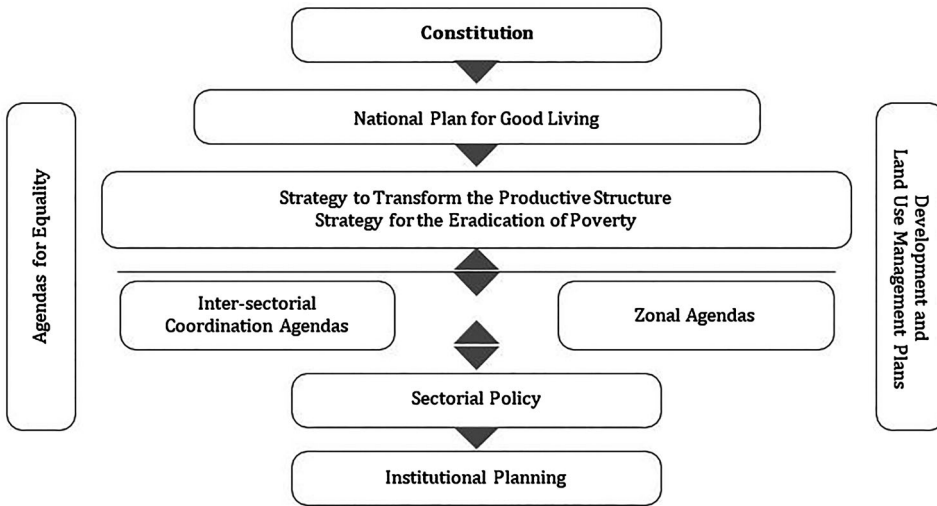


Figure 1. Instruments that articulate national development planning in Ecuador.
 Source: Morales et al. 2016, 7.

3.2. Pakistan and SDG Implementation

Implementing SDGs essentially involves trade-offs between a number of goals based on national contexts, such as investing in large infrastructure development versus human development, which can also have negative ecological consequences as we will see in the case of Pakistan. This also resembles the Ecuadorian example in terms of selective preferences for certain goals that are in line with the long term strategic plans of the country. The powerful federal Ministry of Planning, Development and Reforms is directly responsible for Vision 2025, the SDGs and the CPEC portfolio.

Despite similarities between Vision 2025 and the SDGs in a number of areas, budget allocations and large investment in CPEC related infrastructure and energy projects indicate the federal government's prioritization of these strategic goals especially in the context of the coastal area of Gwadar in Balochistan. The federal government is portraying CPEC as a central piece to its national development Vision 2025 and the SDGs with a number of environmental, economic, and social benefits, and a key strategy for achieving the SDGs by presenting it as "equitable development" in a number of news articles and opinion pieces, most of which are authored by people linked to the ruling party and government departments (Khan 2017). Since financing the SDGs is a colossal undertaking for Pakistan's weak economy—with one of the lowest growth rates in the region—CPEC is promoted by the federal government and other development practitioners as a key project for achieving a number of these goals (Government of Pakistan 2017a). However, governments are also responsible for prioritizing social sector SDG targets by devising relevant social policies. In practice this tension results in constant trade-offs arising from prioritizing large infrastructure projects that can easily be publicized for short-term political gains at the expense of prioritizing human development in the long-run.

According to the SDG Index of performance, Pakistan slipped from 115 out of 149 in 2016 to 122 in 2017 (Sachs et al. 2017), despite the apparent commitment of the Government of Pakistan, which adopted the SDGs through a unanimous resolution of parliament. For example, Pakistan is projected to stand among the last three countries for projected neonatal mortality rate by 2030 if the current trends continue in terms of achieving target 3.2 of SDG 6 (UNICEF 2018).

Coordination among the federal and provincial governments for development planning has been a complicated process especially after the 18th Constitutional Amendment passed in 2010, which devolved several ministries from federal level to the provinces. SDG Coordination Units, led by the powerful Planning Ministry, have also been set up in the planning and development departments of all four provinces. At the provincial level, UNDP plays a central role in terms of providing human and financial resources and “technical support.” Vertical and horizontal policy coherence is an essential pre-requisite in order to reduce trade-offs and improve synergies for an integrated approach—a central tenet with regards to SDG thinking. Policy-making in silos directly undermines not only the SDG targets linked to a specific ministry but also other closely linked issues, as well as increasing implementation costs. For example, in Pakistan there are different ministries both at the federal and the provincial levels for dealing with irrigation water, climate change, agriculture, coastal development, forestry, wildlife, drinking water, roads and infrastructure. All of these ministries have different projects and activities in the context of coastal areas. Coordination among these ministries during the design and budgeting phases often remains problematic.

4. Marginalized Islanders Under Siege: Post-Disaster Recovery in Coastal Ecuador

This section focusses on the cases of Muisne and Chamanga, both located in the Esmeraldas province, bordering southern Colombia. This location has historically fostered clandestine ties of trafficking (humans, drugs, gas, gasoline) and insurgency. The cantonal seat, or administrative centre, is located on the island of Muisne, which borders the Pacific Ocean to the west and the river Muisne to the east; in addition, the city has a newer part on the main land. The total population of its municipal region is 28,474 people (CEPESIU 2015), and most residents consider themselves as Afro-Ecuadorians, thus belonging to the poorest segments of Ecuador’s population. Poverty and extreme poverty levels for Muisne, based on the Unsatisfied Basic Needs (UBN) index, are very high. In the principal urban areas, poverty levels reach up to 94.7% and in rural areas these levels can reach up to 99%.

The entire province of Esmeraldas was struck by a devastating earthquake in April 2016 and Muisne and Chamanga suffered severe damages, leading to an eco-social disaster, which is still ongoing. Already since 2000, Muisne has been experiencing a number of problems on a municipal level, including a high rate of turnover in its political executives, in particular the assassination of a mayor in 2015, and the arrest and detention of other authorities linked to corrupt practices. This lack of stability has yielded less attention to the basic needs of the local population. These problems have been replicated and even intensified in the parish of Chamanga, an area that has long been disregarded by both the local and national governments. Chamanga is nowadays at the edge of a social and ecological collapse, linked to accumulated waste spillage from surrounding shrimp farming and untreated wastewater in its principal estuary (C-CONDEM 2017). Fishing in this estuary, however, provides the main source of income for the local populations. The problems of both towns have intensified since the 2016 earthquake, which reveals the numerous municipal vulnerabilities and historical neglect of the local population who continue to live in precarious socio-ecological and economic conditions.

The island of Muisne itself was significantly affected by the earthquake, resulting in 256 injuries, 1104 displaced residents, 312 destroyed homes and 276 damaged structures, in addition to a loss of basic public services, telecommunication services and other infrastructure (INEC 2017). These debilitating factors in all dimensions of human development provided a unique opportunity for the national government to launch its strategy of

appropriation, as a form of post-disaster shock capitalism (Klein 2007). In interviews carried out with representatives of the provincial government,² this strategy has been linked to implementing SDGs in the area, taking control of a politically abandoned place and—according to various interlocutors—is driven by the Chinese business and recreational interests in the area. For the affected population of Muisne and Chamanga the national government constructed 381 provisional tents for about 1300 individuals as well as 69 houses for 276 families; at least some of which were donated by Chinese companies and through China’s bilateral development cooperation.

In addition, Ecuador’s National Risk Management Secretariat adopted Resolution SGR-73-2016 in June 2016, a direct response to the earthquake, which declared the island a tsunami risk zone and ordered its roughly 8000 inhabitants to vacate their homes. The resolution establishes that all government offices, annexes and services be relocated to the continent, and the declaration of the island as a risk zone has also prohibited humanitarian organizations and other non-government actors from providing assistance to victims, thereby assuring that the only option for assistance comes directly from the national government. These governmental decisions, amounting to a *de facto* siege of the island—upheld for 30 months after the earthquake—sought to pressure the inhabitants to search aid from the government. Only those inside government-operated shelters (located on the mainland) would qualify for public reconstruction support and receive donations. People inside the camps were prohibited from using phones and taking photos; they also had no access to internet, and were subject to 24/7 surveillance by public cameras. For every new home outside the island constructed by the government, former islanders had to hand over their land titles on the island. Cameras installed during the one-year period while people lived in shelters donated by the Chinese development cooperation were not subsequently removed. Being located just in front of their new houses, they continue to record with a 360-degree view all activities of the relocated families.

This, however, followed a clear strategy. On the one hand, the national government justified the evacuation by pointing to the tsunami risk hazard as well as ecological protection of the island. On the other, it simultaneously pursued the development of an extensive eco-touristic project on the island. This project is part of a state-run excellency initiative managed by Ecuador’s Ministry of Tourism published in 2016, just days after the earthquake (Bravo 2017). The initiative for Muisne in particular seeks to transform the island into an eco-park, with visits to protected wildlife zones as well as recreational spaces such as water parks, restaurants and other services. According to local interlocutors, this eco-tourist park would primarily cater to Chinese workers in the country. In addition, some beach sand located on the island seems to contain precious metals, which already sparked Chinese business interests.

A similar situation was observed in Chamanga, where tourist projects promoted by national ministries have already been planned for the rural parish. One such programme involves restructuring the community’s waterfront to provide more tourist services where families currently supported by artisanal fishing could work. As in the Muisne case, residents living on the waterfront must relocate to lower-risk areas. However, as of early 2019, only a huge port facility is under construction, clearly manifesting the project’s purpose: the export of Ecuadorian shrimp, of which China is a major importer. Fostering employment in local shrimp farms implies that artisanal fishers would cease their current activities and eventually shifted from fishing to dependent wage labour, which could generate greater dependence on private capital and governmental “strategic” interests. It is evident that the projects established by the national government lack input from both the resident population and local authorities. This unilateral top-down approach under the pretext of SDG implementation represents more direct involvement from the national

government in imposing certain conditions on the population and effectively guiding residents toward a specific lifestyle with minimal previous understanding of their basic necessities.

In addition, instead of reconstructing in a way that promoted local eco-social resilience, the national government prioritized support for large capital projects (in terms of financial and direct property investment), channelling its flows into “strategic sectors” in the area after the catastrophe. This has been the case, for instance, with the shrimp farms which surround Muisne and Chamanga and have been responsible for the destruction of the mangroves, which in their healthy state provide a natural barrier against flooding and tsunamis in addition to absorbing significant quantities of CO₂ (Lacambra et al. 2013). Extensive shrimp farms were legalized and were provided preferential conditions for obtaining lines of credit for reactivating their pools and expanding their concessions after the earthquake. It is precisely in the years 2015–2017 that the shrimp farming sector grew over 15% annually. Ecuadorian shrimp exports, especially to China, now outperform bananas, and have become the second largest export sector for the country after crude oil (Serrano Moscoso 2018).

Together with the high tsunami risk decree, it was the establishment of an ecological protection zone, immediately after the earthquake, which was put forward by the government as a step towards meeting specific SDG targets. Justified by advancing SDG targets, these measures pitched the governmental and business interests against human development interests of local populations. As this case is still ongoing, it seems useful to analyze the reconstruction of the Pakistani coastal area which has progressed further under the influence of Chinese investment companies in order to anticipate a possible future for Musine and Chamanga.

5. Corridors of Power: Securitization, Marginalization and Human Development in Coastal Pakistan

Despite abundant mineral and petroleum resources,³ 770 kilometres of Pakistan’s coastline and 44% of its landmass, Balochistan remains the most marginalized province in terms of human development indicators. According to the Multi-dimensional Poverty Index (MPI),⁴ 71% of the population of Balochistan lives under poverty where Gwadar has one of the highest (61%) poverty rates (Government of Pakistan, UNDP, and Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative 2016). Characterized by clandestine economies, Gwadar’s location close to Strait of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf—through which around 40% of the world’s oil is transported—makes it a strategic port for both China and Pakistan (Harrison 1981; Grare and Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2006). China is constructing the second phase of Gwadar port at a cost of US\$ 932 million and acquired 2,000 acres of land. The state-owned China Overseas Port Holdings acquired the port in 2013 on a 40 year lease, further consolidating China’s foothold in the province where many Chinese companies have already established mining contracts since 2002 (Akins 2017) (Figure 2). Large infrastructure development projects have historically caused displacement of local people especially the marginalised groups (Penz, Drydyk, and Bose 2011). A large population of district Gwadar—where 70% of people are engaged in artisanal fishing—is likely to be affected and displaced as a result of development projects. For example, the construction of Gwadar port phase-I during 2002-2006 displaced local fishing communities from a small neighbourhood of Mulla Band. The displaced families were compensated with land and other financial support to build houses and start a new livelihood. The compensation materialised primarily as a result of pressure on the then military-backed government due to historical injustices and violence by the security forces in the

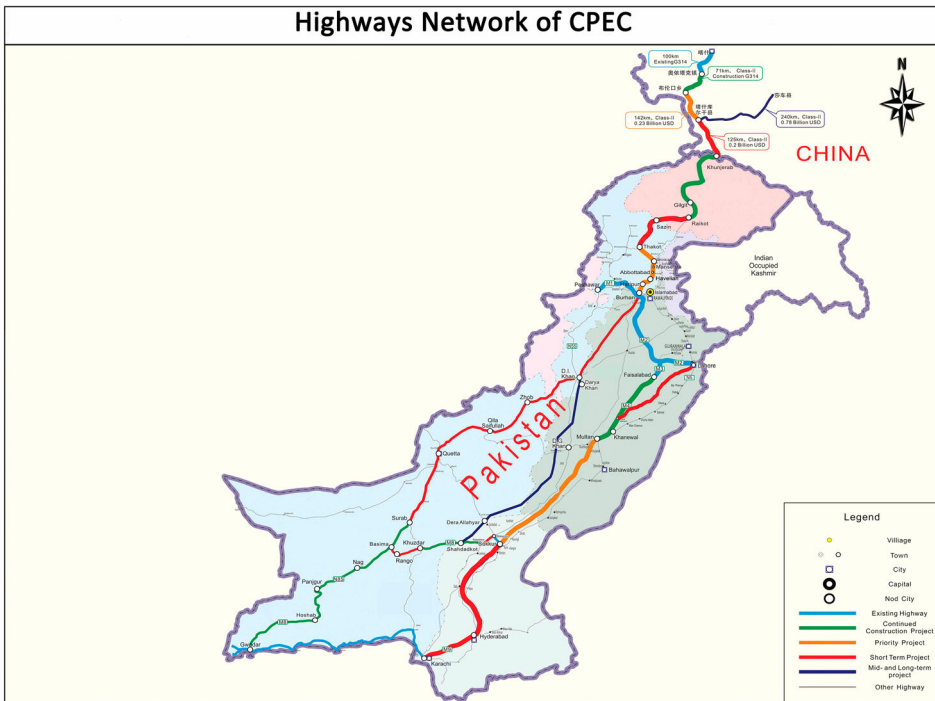


Figure 2. Planned and ongoing highways network of CPEC.

province as well as to neutralise the negative sentiments of local population against planned infrastructure projects. The promised facilities of education, health, electricity and water in their new urbanized area outside Gwadar town are either non-existent or far away without any public transport, and prospects for better livelihoods appear bleak. Some of the fishers who are still engaged in fishing must travel back and forth for fishing, consequently increasing demands on their costs and time. Many families who sold their boats have started another livelihood and are now forced to work as labour on the boats of their fellow fishers or performing unskilled labour (Jamali 2013).

In Sur Bandar, a small fishing town located 20 kilometres from Gwadar, local fishers fear that the displacement of fishing communities as a result of the port expansion and related projects would lead to increased migration, bringing in more fishers to the area, which is already struggling to cope with its existing 7000 fishing boats. A new jetty is being developed at Sur Bandar by the Gwadar Development Authority; locals fear that it will be used to accommodate newly displaced fishers from Gwadar. The local fishing communities from Gwadar argue that by relocating to Sur Bandar, they would not be able to fish in the months of June, July and August due to high waves which is not the case in Gwadar owing to its hammerhead shaped semi-circular bays on each side of the town. This will also increase their cost as it takes two hours to reach Sur Bandar.

Despite the massive investments in infrastructure, the town regularly faces drinking water shortages and lacks basic health and education facilities (Tribune 2017). For example, in cases of childbirth complications local people must travel more than 200 kilometres to reach appropriate facilities. Centralized political power excludes marginalized groups from decision making processes and promotes a rent-seeking behaviour which is usually captured by the elites due to lack of rule of law and poor governance

(Hussain et al. 2017). Local fishers from Gwadar express their powerlessness and lack of voice in these mega projects: “this is all being done for China not the local people as we, the fishers, do not fit in these projects and will lose our land, our homes and our livelihoods.”⁵

CPEC can potentially alter the demography of Gwadar due to mass migration from other provinces. The Gwadar Development Authority estimates that around 1.7 million people would be settled in Gwadar within thirty years’ time and Chinese are likely to outnumber the local population by 2048 (Financial Express 2016). The fears of local people’s displacement due to the CPEC projects are well-grounded since they lack technical skills needed for the planned projects, which are likely to be filled by skilled workers from China as well as from other provinces of Pakistan.

Political leaders from Balochistan consider CPEC as a military project of China and Pakistan while Pakistan’s poorer communities worry that CPEC will not bring them any benefits, and instead create a situation where only those in Punjab, the largest province, will benefit (Kugelman 2016; Financial Express 2017). The military and geostrategic nature of the project is reflected in the fact that most Pakistani research on CPEC and Gwadar highlights its strategic location and natural resources through a security lens (see e.g. Mazhar, Javaid, and Goraya 2012; Gheorghie 2014; Ismail 2014; Iqbal 2016; Hussain 2016; Khan 2016).

The One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative is Xi Jinping’s grand ambition to dominate China’s neighbouring countries, to restore the country’s status as a great power and civilization. Although building industrial corridors and communication infrastructure is OBOR’s stated aim, the strategic goal appears to be control across land and maritime domains in the region (Miller 2017). Overall, Gwadar resembles a fortress town with the heavy presence of Pakistan security forces and continuous monitoring. The Pakistan army has prepared a 30,000 strong security force and PKR 10 billion (USD 90.4 million) have been allocated exclusively for Gwadar and Quetta cities with 464 cameras installed at 136 sites for 24/7 real-time video surveillance (Ebrahim 2016; Xinhua News 2017). Mobility of local people is restricted and a number of cases have been reported where local fishers were caught, locked up and beaten by the security forces for their alleged intrusion in the secure areas (Ebrahim 2017).

Although availability of data on SDG indicators is central for resource allocation and decision-making, budgetary allocations for health and education indicate worrying signs. For example, out of Balochistan’s 2016–2017 budget of USD 2.6 billion⁶ (PKR 289 billion), USD 542 million were allocated for health and education combined (Government of Balochistan 2016). Around USD 4.5 billion are being invested for the CPEC and related projects in Gwadar including port, airport, roads, power plants and industrial zones—many are near completion. Conversely, the so-called human development related projects from CPEC include a primary school, a technical training centre and a hospital upgrade, most of which are in early stages of planning (Government of Pakistan 2017b).

Indeed, investing in infrastructure development and energy projects can be justified but it becomes problematic at the cost of education and health since both the federal and provincial governments are obligated to co-fund a number of these large projects including the provision of high-cost round-the-clock security. For example, despite Balochistan having the highest maternal mortality rate (785 out of every 100,000 births, compared to 272 in the rest of Pakistan), both the provincial and federal governments are investing in roads, energy projects and Gwadar port, with comparatively little attention to health services, education, water, and sanitation.

Talk of infrastructure in Pakistan is no longer banal (see Anand 2017); it has been the unique mantra of several governments and is equated with development in the corridors

of power, be they political or military, which not only (re)define the strategic interests and foreign policy of the country but also equate it with development policy. Whether the CPEC and related projects will contribute towards achieving a few SDG targets is yet to be seen. However, the ongoing securitization of Gwadar is already undermining human development and consolidating the power of the ruling elites over the territory of the marginalized segments of the society.

6. Concluding Remarks: Techno-managerial Versus Socioecological SDG Implementations and Suggestions

Drawing from extended ethnographies in the coastal areas in Ecuador and Pakistan, this article has reviewed the alignment of national strategic goals with business and geopolitical interests in the coastal areas of both countries under the facade of achieving SDG targets. For the case of Ecuador, we reviewed the post-earthquake recovery process in Muisne and Chamanga, which implies the forced displacement of hundreds of inhabitants, justified by SDG implementation and increased environmental protection. In the case of Pakistan, we analyzed the human development situation of local fishing communities in the Gwadar port and town area, being under enormous pressure due to large-scale development currently carried out and backed by the state-controlled Chinese companies.

The findings of our related case studies reveal a strikingly similar pattern of territorial and social control under the pretext of achieving SDG targets. Despite contextual differences in territorial as well as investment dimensions, in both study countries investors' business and strategic interests came to be aligned with national security interests. It is not by mere contingency that our cases discussed above are located in border provinces, where clandestine economies and repeated insurgencies cause continued unrest with political leaders in both the capitals. Current infrastructure projects carried out in these areas are likely to temporarily pacify these insurgent areas by channelling in funds, paid labour opportunities and massive regional and foreign migration. This comes, however, at huge costs in terms of endangered ecosystems, weakened disaster resilience, restricted basic human freedoms and increased social vulnerability. It is noteworthy that freedom from mass surveillance and security intrusion is not explicitly mentioned in any of the SDGs, although SDG 16 explicitly focuses on peace and justice.

Moreover, it is worrying how in both cases SDGs can facilitate the rise and scope of what has been labelled the "compensatory state" (Gudynas 2016), or in a slightly different version, "competitive authoritarianism" (Levitsky and Way 2002), instrumentalizing democratic elections and rule of law for serving selected interests. By doing so, the capabilities, aspirations and livelihoods of local populations—beyond mid to large-size infrastructural projects—are side-lined, particularly those regarding increased social, health, environmental and educational spending. This, however, points to a clear conceptual tension within the SDGs themselves, where no prioritization or weighting of goals was adopted. This raises the following questions: what structural and institutional contexts are conducive to such situations, and to what extent are further governance reforms needed (Biermann, Kanie, and Kim 2017) to improve SDGs implementation?

First, it seems that in our cases centralized and vertical governance mechanisms tend to systematically overlook local capabilities of marginalized livelihoods and thus reproduce errors from earlier development periods, commonly referred to as "high modernism" (Scott 1998). Ideological preferences of ruling parties seem to play out less in such settings, which is consistent with the Chinese approach to development cooperation and investment (Yanbing, Gu, and Chen 2015). Second, weak local governments in our cases, especially in hazard-prone areas with pre-existing high levels of socioeconomic and ecologic vulnerabilities, are susceptible to facing the negative effects of implementing SDGs, which tend to

pitch local human development and ecological interests against those related to national strategic sectors as well as geopolitical considerations. Third, as our cases suggest, SDG implementation, when aligned with the national strategic interests through commercialization and globalization of local economies and livelihood resources in the face of foreign investments, can increase market dependencies instead of autonomy of individuals and communities.

This is clearly the case in both study regions with regard to local fishers belonging to ethnic minorities, who are driven out of their fairly independent business and instead become adversely incorporated into wage labour schemes. Something similar is likely to happen in cases of expanded tourism projects, which are moreover dependent on governmental support. Such transformations bear potentially deep impact on the formation of human aspirations and capabilities, which are preconfigured by structural (e.g. economic, ecological and educational) constraints. A case in point is the construction of primary schools analyzed in both areas in Ecuador and Pakistan by Chinese cooperation, whose lasting impact on the younger generations is still to be analyzed.

What we see, finally, is that operationalization of the SDGs could be framed and carried out according to two different rationales. On the one hand, a rationale that broadly favours increased insertion into paid labour markets, economic growth through traditional strategic sectors, large infrastructure projects, less autonomy and increased control, even openly violating some fundamental human rights. This rationale could be called a “techno-managerial approach to SDGs” (see also Kaika 2017) and is clearly manifested in the case of coastal Pakistan and Ecuador. At the same time, this opens the space for considering, in contrast, a rationale of socioecological protection, bottom-up policy making, increased social spending and fostered autonomy as well as strengthened local governance. At the policy level, more inclusiveness of SDG implementation could be achieved by increasing transparency (public disclosure acts) and effective local participation in planning processes, from the local to the national level. At least for Latin America, there is also comparative evidence that Chinese investors adapt and even exceed local standards, if local and national governments ensure social and environmental regulations and hold them accountable (Ray et al. 2015). From the perspective of sustainable human development, it is clear that the socio-ecological approach to SDGs is preferable, for its capacity to assess and effectively take into account local aspirations, needs and capabilities. However, we conclude by alerting that advanced large-scale operationalization of SDGs according to a techno-managerial approach will also mould and limit what people in future will perceive as “their” aspirations and needs.

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to express their gratitude to Morgan Scoville-Simons for his insightful comments.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

This work was supported by IHE Delft Institute for Water Education (previously known as UNESCO-IHE) Experienced Water Postdoc Fellowship COFUND Programme (EWPFP COFUND), co-financed by the European Union’s Marie Curie Programme [grant number 606838]; Universidad de Las Américas, Quito [grant number CIP.JW.17.01.].

Notes

1. Stated by the Chairman Board of Investment Pakistan, 12 August 2016: <http://thefortress.com.pk/sdpi-seminar-highlights-the-key-features-of-china-pakistan-economic-corridor-cpec/>.
2. Interview with the provincial director of the National Ministry for Housing, Esmeraldas, 2 June 2017. Interview with the National Sub-Secretary for Housing, Quito, 17 April 2017.
3. For example, Sui Gas fields in Balochistan supply gas to the entire country since 1952 but many major cities of the province do not have natural gas.
4. MPI is a measure developed by the UNDP's Human Development Report Office and the Oxford Policy and Human Development Initiative. MPI captures the severe deprivations that each person experiences with respect to education, health and standard of living.
5. Interview with a group of five local fishers in Gwadar town, Pakistan, 10 January 2018.
6. These figures are calculated based on the current conversion rates from PKR to USD.

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