



The
**GREEN PROMISE OF
THE BELT & ROAD**

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China has always learned from its lessons, painting its progress not in broad, reckless strokes, but by the ancient philosophy of 'crossing the river by feeling each stone.' Once, Beijing's sky was a thick, gray quilt, a smog so heavy that taking a breath felt like swallowing damp cloth. But they felt those stones, step by step, deliberately, and transformed choking air into a promise of blue. It is a story Pakistan must now learn by heart, for we stand at our own murky riverbank, amidst the exhaust of coal-heavy industry, our skies echoing Beijing's past.

In light of this pressing need, the data presents a sobering picture: more than 60% of Pakistan's electricity comes from coal, a reliance that contaminates our air and increases our susceptibility to climate change. Despite making up less than 1% of the world's emissions, we suffer disproportionately. In this crucial situation, our best strategic opportunity is to collaborate with China through the Green Belt and Road. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has the potential to become a model green corridor as Pakistan's exposure to climate risks increases and China's own climate ambitions rise. To seize this future, we must create a strong alliance where governance, finance, and policy come together to change this corridor from a carbon pathway to a bridge of resilient, sustainable prosperity.

The Belt and Road Initiative, which spans more than 150 nations and shape almost one-third of the global infrastructure investment, is no longer judged by its connectivity and fast development, but by how clean and resilient it is. Nowhere is this pressure sharper than in CPEC: a strategic gateway for China, and a make-or-break lifeline for Pakistan's energy security and climate survival. The era of building first and fixing later is over; infrastructure locked in today will define emissions, debt, and disaster risk for decades.

The urgent question is stark and unavoidable: can CPEC shift from a carbon-heavy corridor into a green development model, or will it deepen Pakistan's vulnerability at the very moment the climate clock is running out?

To reverse the climate dangers, Greening the Belt and Road is a constructive initiative by the Chinese government. It involves development projects that align with 2030 UNSDG goals.



It also presents climate-action-positive investment opportunities. Pakistan is also part of it by signing several memorandum of understanding (MOUs). The Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) has also joined the "Beijing Initiative for Belt and Road Green Development" as a founding member during the High-Level Forum on Green Development, part of the Third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in Beijing. Moreover, the Green China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is an effort within the larger Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to make these massive infrastructure projects more sustainable and environmentally friendly, shifting focus from coal to renewable energy and ensuring green development across the whole BRI framework. .

In this context, a true "green corridor" is more than new power lines; it is a road map for survival and prosperity. It means building an energy system powered by sun and wind, constructing roads and ports that can withstand monstrous floods, protecting our forests and rivers as vital national assets, and ensuring every dollar of investment is clean and transparent. It builds a future free from debt and disaster.

This vision is not a distant dream but an urgent necessity, and CPEC is uniquely positioned to deliver it. With an investment pipeline exceeding \$60 billion and unwavering high-level backing from both nations, it commands the scale and political will for transformation. Furthermore, Pakistan's extreme climate vulnerability, exemplified by the catastrophic 2022 floods that submerged a third of the country, makes this shift from grey to green infrastructure an existential imperative, not just an economic choice.

The lesson from China is not just about clearing smog, but about the power of mature policy to steer an entire economy. Domestically, this maturity is seen in the world's largest renewable energy fleet and stringent environmental laws. Globally, it translates into a profound shift: aligning with the Paris Agreement, pledging carbon neutrality by 2060, and crucially, ending support for new overseas coal projects. This is not a retreat but an export of learned responsibility. China is putting its hard-won lessons into practice globally through programs like the "Green BRI" and a "Traffic Light System" to screen projects, transforming the Belt and Road into a testing ground for sustainable development.



Over 60% of Pakistan's electricity comes from fossil fuels, with coal accounting for a rapidly increasing portion. This dependence is a multifaceted monster that consumes limited water for thirsty thermal plants, suffocates our cities with poisonous air, and kills thousands of people every year. In terms of money, it ensnares us in a vicious cycle of expensive fuel imports, burdensome capacity payments, and a skyrocketing circular debt exceeding \$10 billion.

The tragedy is that this coal-heavy path was never our only option. Pakistan is blessed with world-class solar and wind potential, capable of generating many times our current needs. We missed this renewable moment not due to a lack of sun or wind, but a glaring deficit in governance and foresight. Institutions failed to recognize green energy as viable base-load power, opting for familiar coal for perceived stability. Our energy and climate policies were implemented separately, and there was little support for green finance. The resource was always available; what was lacking was a cohesive policy framework to harness it.

Recognizing this missed opportunity, Pakistan has now made clear commitments for a green transition, including its Paris Agreement goals and a pledge to build no new coal plants. This is supported by domestic action like the Ten Billion Tree Tsunami and a new policy targeting 60% renewable energy by 2030. The real test, however, is turning this policy architecture into tangible progress across our economy.

Turning commitment into delivery requires "green finance", capital designed specifically to support clean and resilient projects. Instruments like green bonds and concessional loans can lower costs and reduce risk. Crucially, Pakistan's new green finance guidelines align with China's own "Traffic Light System" for overseas investments, creating a shared framework to fund the transition rather than fossil-fuel dependency.

With this financing foundation in place, the promise of the Belt and Road begins to take concrete shape. A "green CPEC" means transforming the corridor: replacing coal plants with Pakistan's immense solar and wind potential, building climate-resilient roads and ports, and pioneering sustainable agriculture. This shift would not only secure energy independence and create millions of jobs but also redefine Pakistan's development story from one of climate vulnerability to one of resilient, green prosperity.



To build a green corridor, we must first choose our path wisely, using strict "exclusion lists" to filter out harmful projects before they begin. Then, we must walk that path transparently, with independent monitors ensuring rules are followed and communities kept informed every step of the way. This careful, open process is what prevents lasting damage and builds the public trust essential for true, lasting progress.

Building on this careful approach, Pakistan and China must move decisively to make every project count. Financing should reward low-carbon and resilient development while penalizing high-emission choices. Local capacity building and circular supply chains will ensure that benefits stay in Pakistan, empowering communities and making infrastructure investments durable.

This is Pakistan's moment to transform climate challenges into economic strength. With over 220 GW of untapped solar and wind potential, access to global green finance, and the possibility of Eco-industrial zones, the country can generate millions of sustainable jobs, expand renewable energy, and accelerate inclusive growth.

The path ahead is clear: careful, deliberate steps will determine Pakistan's future. By learning from China's experience and setting high governance standards, CPEC can become a green corridor that strengthens resilience, promotes prosperity, and sets a benchmark for sustainable development in the region.