

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Reflections on development and fishermen's survival in Gwadar, Pakistan

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the marginalization of a poor fishing community in Gwadar, Pakistan. The study provides an insight into how different levels of power, such as hidden, visible/pluralist, and invisible ideological powers, are used in policy arenas to hinder fishers' access to participatory spaces, decision-making, and resource use. By employing Gaventa's power cubes analytical model, we analyze fishers' experiences and prevailing scenarios. Qualitative research methods were used to collect data, including in-depth interviews and participant observation. The finding shows that the interests of the fishing community in fishery policies and ongoing development projects are excluded both with intention and unintentionally. The exclusion of the local fisher community from key spaces brings interruptions and transformations that influence their lives. Due to this, they are induced to join insurgent groups to confront exclusion-based policies in Gwadar, Pakistan.

## KEYWORDS

*Gwadar; fishermen; exclusion; development; power; participation*

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## 1. Introduction

Today, in the developing world, 56 million people are directly involved in fish-related activities in inland small-scale fisheries (Big Number Program [BNP], 2009). According to a report by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2020), this number has increased to 59.5 million in fishing and aquaculture. This number—including people working in fishing and associated post-harvest activities such as fish processing and trading—is larger than the estimated 50 million people who depend on the same activities in *coastal* and *marine* fisheries (Béné and Friend, 2011). The fishing sector in Pakistan directly supports 125,000 people and indirectly, if one includes dependents, close

to one million. Fishing communities, whose way of life has survived for generations, are dispersed along a 682-mile coastline between Sir Creek in Sindh Province and Jiwani in Balochistan Province, respectively (Khan and Khan, 2011).

This reality, however, remains largely unknown to most scientists, development practitioners, and—perhaps more critically—policymakers and planners (Béné and Friend, 2011). Pakistan's fisheries contribute to economic growth and social development, but their full potential is unrealized. The sector produces an estimated US\$650 million in fish annually, equivalent to about 0.4% of GDP (Fanning et al., 2016). Pakistan's water resources contribute significantly to its wealth (Aswathy and Kalpana, 2018). Pakistan is rich in fishing resources, including coastal and offshore fisheries, and has the potential for industrial fisheries. Pakistan's offshore waters, the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), have a rich fauna of commercially essential tuna species. In the west bay of Gwadar (Pakistan), more than 16 species of commercially important bivalve molluscs have been identified. A record of 400 marine fish and a rich shrimp fauna was identified in Pakistan's coastal waters (Nazir et al., 2016). Sea fisheries in Pakistan are usually tropical river fisheries, where small-scale fishers produce most of the catches. Fish is typically the main animal protein being expended by the local people of Gwadar (Khetran, 2015; Siddiqi, 1992). Despite all this natural wealth, the fishing community in Pakistan in the Gwadar area is categorized socially, economically, and politically as a marginal community, often described as the poorest of the poor (Hos et al., 2019; Shahrukh et al., 2020). Pakistan has one of the largest climate risks in fisheries worldwide and has faced a significant disconnect between stakeholders' knowledge and its incorporation into management and decision-making processes. Despite the vulnerability of its fishing industry to climate change impacts, such as rising sea temperatures, changing currents, and altered marine ecosystems, the valuable insights and experiences of the fishing community have often been overlooked (Li et al., 2023).

The fishing community in Gwadar faces challenges that have been attributed to global warming and climate change, the inadequate and ineffective fisheries management and development policies. Policies governing fishing rights, resource allocation, and conservation measures may be poorly designed or not adequately implemented. This can result in the overexploitation of fish stocks, environmental degradation, and a lack of sustainable fishing practices, ultimately affecting fishers' livelihoods driving them into poverty (Humayun and Zafar, 2014; Noman et al., 2022). The poverty of the Gwadar fishing community is further exacerbated by their limited meaningful participation and representation in decision-making processes related to development policies. Fishers face challenges accessing platforms where their voices can be heard and their perspectives and needs can be considered (Ullah et al., 2023). This marginalization significantly impairs their ability to influence policy formulation, resource allocation, and the implementation of development initiatives that directly impact their lives and livelihoods. Power imbalances and unequal distribution of power play a significant role in perpetuating the poverty of the fishing community. Decision-making processes are often dominated by external actors, such as government agencies, private companies, and investors, who may prioritize their interests over the needs and aspirations of the fishers (Paulinus, 2022). The lack of management ability is the primary reason in South and Southeast Asian nations (including Pakistan) have less developed fisheries management (Sun et al., 2023).

This lack of power and agency further marginalizes the fisher community and limits their ability to break free from the cycle of poverty. Despite the Gwadar port's presence and potential economic opportunities, fishers often face barriers to accessing these opportunities. Factors such as

limited skills, lack of capital, and insufficient infrastructure prevent them from benefiting from the development activities taking place in the region (S. M. Baloch, 2016; Hassan, 2022). This further aggravates their poverty and prevents them from participating fully in Gwadar's economic growth and development. Addressing these underlying policy issues and empowering the fisher community through inclusive and participatory development policies can improve their livelihoods and reduce poverty in the region; Gwadar can move towards more sustainable and inclusive fisheries management, ultimately improving the livelihoods and well-being of the fishing community. It requires collaboration between government agencies, policymakers, stakeholders, and fishers to create and implement policies that empower the fishing community, promote sustainable fishing practices, and alleviate poverty.

This study focuses on the Gwadar fishing community. The established paradigm regarding Balochistan fisheries marginalization and poverty includes natural factors such as marine resources and their level of exploitation, the tragedy of the common people, weak governance structure and problems in local institutions (Khan and Khan, 2011), traditional social structure, lack of infrastructure and its relative remoteness (Budhani and Mallah, 2007), and lack of education and employment opportunities (Ali et al., 2018). Nevertheless, we can see almost a complete absence of references to the relationship between power relations and fishing poverty and marginalization in the current literature on fishing communities in Pakistan.

We apply the definition of marginalization to the Gwadar case of the fishing community as defined by Atkinson (1998) as a process by which groups are systematically disadvantaged through policy arenas from ongoing development benefits because they are discriminated due to their ethnicity, race, caste, education, class disability, social status, weak political power, and so on. In this context, this paper presents a case of a marginalized community at the coast of Gwadar by assessing the interruptions and transformation factors influencing the fishers' lives due to which they join insurgent groups to confront the state for claiming their spaces of participation in the ongoing development process (Bruce et al., 2011; Cornwall, 2002, 2004b).

In this paper, we argue that this results from the transformation process behind the smokescreen of development policies, where their marginalization and vulnerabilities are growing to the peak by closing spaces of participation for the local fishing community. The primary achievements of this research are documenting the Gwadar community's continued presence in the region, which they owe to their continuing activism to maintain their rights to fish and live in the area they have traditionally regarded as home for centuries (Anees, 2022; Baloch, 2021; Bokohari and Parkin, 2021; Chaudhury, 2021; Grare, 2022). As shown in this study, the Gwadar battle orbits around several elements; geopolitics and insurgency due to a strong interplay attributed to the interest games of different actors, including the state, poorly designed development processes causing both a deliberate and un-deliberate exclusion of fishermen's community from the mainstream agenda, exploitative fish market, encroachment of the industrial fishing grounds, illegal fishing, and restricting fishermen's access to the sea due to various aspects.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

### **2.1. Gaventa's power cubes (power and space)**

According to Gaventa (2004), spaces refer to arenas where people interact and communicate, intending to make decisions. Gaventa notes that an analysis of how spaces are created, for whose benefits, and on what engagement terms are critical when looking at spaces of participation. This study focuses on types of legal spaces where the less powerful struggle to influence decision-making and exercise power adversely affecting their lives (Cornwall, 2004a; Cornwall and Coehlo, 2006; Gaventa, 2004; Webster and Engberg-Petersen, 2002). In addition, Gaventa (2004) notes that influential people usually form such spaces, but they are claimed and created by the less powerful. A theory based on analysing and exploring the struggle and negotiation between various actors is provided, in addition to how these processes influence policy outcomes and material practices. An analysis of the following provides an exploration of such questions:

- 1) What strategies are employed by the various actors, including local capitalists, elites, the community, the state, corporations, and other vital actors?
- 2) What is the impact of the policies and strategies on the livelihoods of fishers?

In addition to either creating claimed or invited spaces and the resulting power relations, there are different ways in which an actor may exercise power over others. For example, an actor can control access to resources. The primary resources are land, sea (including marine resources), and ongoing development projects, which produce opportunities. This study also includes to analyze the mode of power in which we see a kind of struggle among actors where they focus on winning the battle of the mind and ideas over human utilization of the environment. In this type of struggle, the actors engage in a tussle aimed at achieving and legitimising their interests over the interests of others in order to assimilate them to the idea of the common good or national interest. In the case of Gwadar, different types of spaces exist and include closed spaces, invited spaces, and claimed or created spaces. Closed spaces arise due to closed decisions made by a few influential people to exclude others considered less powerful.

On the other hand, invited spaces are those in which people or a group, such as a community, are invited to act as participants. Invitations mainly come from the government and national and international bodies (Gaventa, 2005). Furthermore, Gaventa (2005) reaffirms that spaces can also be claimed and created by less powerful actors through mobilisation when ignored by the powerful. The analysis of spaces can also be done at various levels, including local, regional, national, and global levels; in the case of this study, we discuss local, regional, and national levels.

Locals can use these levels based on their capacity to promote their interests or demands. Studies provided an analysis of various dimensions of power used to control actors' access to different spaces. The first dimension of power is characterised by a pluralist approach to power (Lukes, 2012; Gaventa, 2005). According to Lukes (2012), this dimension is characterized by struggles of interests that are not only visible in public spaces but are also considered as coercion as the power in the society struggles to promote their interests over the less powerful in decision-making.

The second dimension of Lukes (2012) model focuses on agenda-setting as a crucial aspect of power. According to Lukes, power is not just about overt coercion or manipulation, but it also operates through shaping the agendas of decision-making processes and influencing what issues

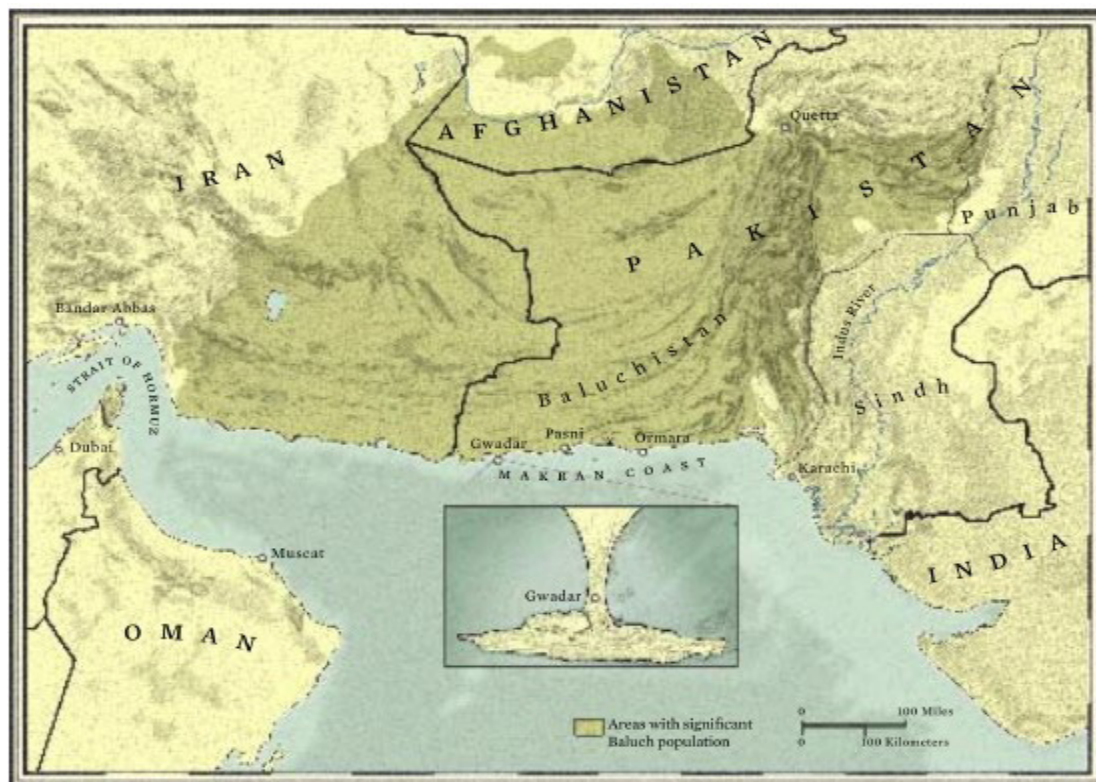
are discussed or ignored. This dimension of power operates subtly, as it influences the political discourse by shaping the perceptions, preferences, and priorities of individuals and groups. The ability to set the agenda can marginalize certain groups or issues while prioritizing the concerns and interests of those in power. It can perpetuate inequalities and prevent the inclusion of diverse voices and perspectives in decision-making processes.

The third dimension of power is the invisible or the ideological, which entails the study of invisible forces that restrain the agenda. This dimension internalizes dominant values, ideologies, and behavioral forms to make conflicts less observable (Gaventa, 2004). Lukes (2012) further notes that the actors in this dimension strongly influence, shape, and determine other actors' wants, perceptions, cognition, and preferences such that the suppressed actors accept their role in the order of things. Peet and Watts (1996) believe that ideological power relates to political power, on which discourses are constructed in addition to shaping the material and social world. In this dimension, this study observes how actors remake and reconstitute institutions and how their actions are shaped.

### 3. Methodological considerations

This paper is based on long-term fieldwork with the fishermen's community in Gwadar, Pakistan (as shown in **Figure 1**). The fieldwork was conducted in three stages: an initial 40 days in August 2017, the second visit of seven months in 2018 and the third visit of two months in 2021. Gwadar was selected for this study based on various factors. First, the principal researcher has conducted his PhD research in the area and gained much familiarity with the fundamental problems of the local fishing community. Second, the Gwadar area has recently become popular due to mega development projects, including constructing a deep seaport (a billion-dollar project). Such development projects have deep connections with the livelihood of the local fishing community. Third, Baluchistan fisheries recently introduced new marine resource management and ocean management policies, positively and negatively impacting local fishers' lives. Fourth, we also observed the increasing marginalization of local fishers due to new marine policies and ongoing development projects. Local fishers started a political movement led by Molana Hidayat Ur Rahaman, whose primary slogan is "*Haq do Gwadar ko*" (Give rights to Gwadar). Dozens of research articles and reports have been produced regarding the ongoing development process in Gwadar. However, the aspect of power relations and their connection with the marginalization of the fishing community is ignored. In our preliminary study, we closely observed that the current problems of the local fishing community have a deep association with the existing power structure and their exclusion from their legal rights. We observed that the existing situation of poverty and marginalization of local fishers is complex and can be a compelling case for anthropological study. The data collection process was guided by research questions, including but not limited to the following:

- 1) Why the local fishers are among the poorest despite the huge marine resources available in the Gwadar area?
- 2) What visible and invisible challenges the fishers face in access to livelihood resources (including fishery resources) and life improvement opportunities in the face of ongoing development projects?
- 3) How do authorities see the participation of fishers and vice versa in policies and development?



**Figure 1.** Map of the study region. Reproduced with permission of Gwadar Development Authority (2021).

This research used a qualitative approach in which its method did not only collect the data qualitatively but also understood the phenomena. Participant observation was used as the primary tool for data collection, and in-depth/unstructured interviews as the second preliminary data collection tool. Through both purposive and snowball sampling, with informed consent, 30 interviews were conducted with fishers and their leaders and 30 interviews with fishery officials, other authorities, and actors who have a close connection to the problems of local fishers. In the observation method, the authors first mapped the actors involved in the battles, followed by the collection of field information. The Gaventa's (2004) power cubes analytical framework was used to analyse the study and identify spaces, forms, and levels of power. The Gaventa's framework suits the study because the Gwadar space is occupied by different actors on different levels of exposure and different forms of power, from elective to traditional and representative levels, whose opinions have to be factored in in any decision about the community.

As a tool, both dominant and counter-narratives were used to observe the battle of controlling places through the control of spaces. The study performed a closed observation of legal spaces as arenas, such as invited, closed, and claimed spaces for the fishing community, which are affected not only by the development process but also by other top-down policies. Analysing the broad field of contestation through the power cube facilitated our observational gaze on how policies are implemented using various levels of power to manipulate entry to invited and created spaces. Thus, observation focused on institutional and non-institutional barriers to actions on grievances. Power analysis in such a situation was tricky because the marginalised groups showed fewer visible grievances. However, in our team research method of closed observational techniques and interview method, grievances were recorded among the marginalised groups.

In our field observation exercises, we sought the services of our key informants, who arranged meetings between us, the fishermen, their leaders, and other necessary authorities. We also accompanied fishermen in their fishing activities and observed the fishing techniques, fishing gear, handling of foreign trawlers, and fish marketing. The local language was used for communication. We did not record interviews with any audio device, but field notes were taken. Most of the interviews lasted 40–50 min. The nature of the study and area necessitated us to consider political sensitivities in the field. The principal researcher was investigated twice by intelligence agencies regarding the field survey. Some fishery officials hesitated to give critical information regarding fishing in Gwadar. The Pakistan military's tense political situation and the strict control of Gwadar led us to focus more on participant observation than interviews. The researchers faced fewer problems in building rapport with the local fishing community because they were considered insiders, having over five years of relationships with local community members.

#### 4. Results and discussion

The new policy of zoning laws has almost denied fishermen access to the sea in Gwadar. The maritime security control was necessary for the state due to the developing deep-sea ports and increasing shipping activities. Due to these reasons, the Balochistan coast was divided into zones. The first agenda was the new developmental policy of zoning laws (as a participatory space for different actors), and the second was commercializing fishing and marine resources. Constitutional jurisdictions are shared over the sea area by federal and provincial governments. Fishermen were invited to fish within their legal boundary, and they were only allowed to fish within 12 Nautical miles, which is a boundary only designated in the policy for indigenous fishers. However, the deep sea trawlers most often intrude into this boundary. It causes heavy damage to the livelihood of indigenous fishers. Here the hidden and pluralist power operates to prevent fishers from continuing their livelihood in this boundary. Our observations showed that trawling is one of the biggest problems the indigenous fishing community faces in Gwadar. The corrupt system and powerful capitalists openly support such trawlers. Because according to local fishers, the trawlers mainly belong to high-level politicians or people in power. The conflict between the local fishermen and trawlers from outside Gwadar is crucial. In the interview, one of the fishermen informed:

*“Our expectation is that local officials would find a solution for us, but contrary to this, the authorities are siding with outside trawlers and curtailing our livelihoods arguing that they have been instructed by top political leaders to do so.”* (38-year-old male fisherman)

This statement means that influential people in the government deliberately deny local people their right to voice their concerns and secure their livelihoods (Gaventa, 2004). This is the first dimension of power where some individuals are coerced into acceptance by state representatives and therefore prevail over others (Lukes, 2012). This means the conflict over marine resources is open and visible, where a visible power can be implied to take away the livelihood of local fishers forcefully. During our visits to Gwadar, we saw fishers frequent protest trawling and against fishery officials who support illegal trawling by taking bribes. Commenting on one of the fisher protests, a fishery officer said:

*“The fishers protest is nothing new we see it even before there was no trawling in Gwadar. They just want to pressurise the government and fishery for cash grants or other material as*

*many times provided to them. One thing more I will mention that there are some nationalist and separatist issues behind the everyday protests of the fishers and it's not actually what they want."* (45-year-old male fishery officer)

After long-term observation in the field, we learned that the policy of zoning law is characterized by hidden and pluralist power apparatuses mentioned by Gavent (2004). The policymakers were aware that the distribution of the ocean into such zones would never produce equality and the less powerful would bear the cost. However, despite this fact, the policies were produced and still continue without any changes into it because the study explores that the interests of the powerful politicians who create such laws are linked to such policies.

Gwadar was a remote fishing town, and it was after the year 2000 when central state authorities properly started to build a deep sea port. They open the door to development projects in Gwadar. Before 2000, there was no registered fish buyer, and most fish auctions would happen in an open, informal environment. In the 2000s, the government authorities decided to formalize the fish buying and selling affairs and bring it under the complete control of the state. The government constructed an auction hall near the fish harbor. This policy was considered an invited space for the democratic participation and benefits of the local fisher community. However, local and national capitalists and state authorities accumulated such developments benefits. After constructing the auction hall, it became the biggest formal marketplace where most fish buying and selling occur.

The construction of a 653-kilometer new highway from Karachi to Gwadar led to increasing connectivity; fishing-related investors moved toward Gwadar and established fish processing factories. After an increase in their factories, the outside buyers threatened the local industrialists and capitalists. Local and provincial governments have developed new policies regarding fishing buying and selling. The fishery department provided licenses only to 10 fish buyers who formally registered with the fishery department. Now only these ten fish buyers, called *Beopari* (mole holders), can be the auctioneers of the fish in the local auction hall, and no other buyers can openly participate in the fish auction. Officials in the fishery department know it was a well-planned idea to control many things of interest to the state, such as tax simplification. More importantly, it interests the expanding state capitalism, where local capitalists accumulate more. It is here, as Ferguson (1994) put it, that state apparatuses typically present themselves as neutral but primarily represent elite economic interests over the needs of the poor. Hidden power works well here by benefiting elites and capitalists in such a policy's development.

All 10-mole holders indirectly belong to fish processing companies. It means such mole holders come to the fish market to fulfill the growing demand of the local fish processing companies and expel the outside buyers from the market by fulfilling the demand of local fish processing companies first. Then the remaining fish catch could go to other fish buyers. This process means decreased competition among buyers for the fish catch.

According to fishery officials:

*"This process was good for local fishermen because, in this way, the dealing between fishermen and the buyer will be secure and systematic."* (45-year-old male fishery officer).

However, they neglected to mention that the right to auction fish to a few hands means monopolizing the fish market by a few capitalists and formally banning competition in the fish



market, which only serves the interests of capitalists and exploits the poor fishermen. These 10-mole holders are agents of the state and local capitalists that facilitate tax collection and best serve the local fish processing companies' owners by auctioning the fish at low prices and manipulating the daily prices in their interest.

Government institutions, including fishery authorities, only focused on improving those things through policies that were of interest to them, such as the formalization of the fish market through the construction of an auction hall, the standardization of tax collection through registered mole holders, and giving benefits to the local capitalists. Ridiculously, such measures were taken in the name of participatory invited spaces and benefits packages for local fishers from ongoing development projects in Gwadar. Government authorities and policymakers had cast a blind eye to the informal financiers and fishermen. The policymakers should have taken institutional measures to make possible easy access to loans to fishers. These state-sponsored capitalists in the field of fishing got involved in informal lending activities on high interest to the fishermen for lending fishing gear, boats, engines, and many other things, which led to the structural marginalization of the local fishing community. The historical power asymmetry keeps them on the lower social ladder (Shahrukh, 2020). On the other hand, they are politically so weak that sometimes they do not possess enough power to make claims on the state or other institutions to open the legal spaces for them or to manipulate the existing invited spaces in the interest of poor fishers. Thus, fishers' economic and livelihood activities are restricted by closing the spaces of participation in the areas related to the fish market.

Gwadar is a pearl on the jewel. Its deep sea coast makes it an ideal place for the construction of a deep sea port establishment. Due to its strategic importance, Pakistani state authorities, with financial help from China, started to develop a deep sea port in Gwadar in 2013. It comes under China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and there are many other infrastructure projects associated with CPEC. On the importance of the Gwadar deep waters, authorities claimed that Gwadar port would contribute to national and regional trade by contributing billions of foreign exchanges through the Pakistan exchequer, promoting development and prosperity. The small community of fishermen who traditionally owned the site where the port was to be constructed welcomed the government's call to embrace development. The site for port construction was the most fertile fishing area on which Gwadar fishermen depended. However, despite the agreement by this community to have the port constructed, they were relocated to a new area known as *New Mullah Band*, which was 10 km from where they operated their boats. Before moving to the new area, negotiations were conducted between fishermen's leaders, the district administrator, and the mayor (*Zilla Nazim*).

In collecting the views of fishermen regarding the project, the bargainers cleverly framed their questions. According to one of the fishermen who was present on one of the occasions, the questions were as follows:

- Do you like more and better livelihood opportunities in your community?
- Would you like your children to get a better education and well-positioned jobs?
- Do you like to have 24/7 availability of electricity and clean drinking water?
- Do you like cemented houses and plots in government-planned housing schemes?

These questions were intended to create an impression of invited spaces for better sources of

income, education, better housing, and excellent service delivery. Fishermen's responses indicated agreement to relocate. In the negotiation, fishermen were promised land and money to build permanent houses. Furthermore, every fisherman was promised a well-paying job in the port and other development projects and a sustainable source of income. However, as is evident from the current fishers' situation, the promises were technically framed to take advantage of the ignorance and lack of skills among the fishers to legitimize their exclusion and create jobs for the already well-positioned wealthy people and outsiders.

Information from some of our informants indicated that the representatives of the national government offered gifts to fishers' leaders at the local level to speed up the relocation process; this led to the leaders' being accused of corruption; the Mayor's representatives denied this claim, noting that bribery is an important national issue. The fishermen were also promised the construction of schools and health facilities. One of the fishermen recalls the time when they were relocating from deep-sea port site:

*"We got up at night with the noise of giant cranes working at the construction site. Most of my fellow fishermen thought that our houses could be demolished as the government is not so much trustable. Nonetheless, most of us were excited by the promise of better futures for our children and eradication of poverty."* (52-year-old male fisherman).

Faithful to their promises, the government relocated the fishermen and built them houses. However, the promised social amenities such as water and electricity supply, schools, and job opportunities were not fulfilled. We enquired about the job quota for the fishers from the local authorities, and they said most fishers do not have the requisite skills and education to fill the positions. The concept of merit was used to deny fishermen participation in these spaces. Jobs requiring merit acted as open and invited spaces to which fishermen were blocked from accessing as they lacked the skills. The skilled positions were only available to Baloch groups of higher status and outsiders.

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is essential in such mega construction projects to mitigate the negative impact on the environment and local livelihood. During our fieldwork, we started to search for authorities and departments regarding EIA. However, we could not find any department that deals with the environmental aspect of ongoing development projects in Gwadar. Finally, we found one person in the Gwadar Development Authority (GDA) who knew how they conducted EIA in the first phases of development projects. GDA representatives told us that they do not have any functional mechanism for the distribution of EIA, especially regarding projects conducted within the community. Nevertheless, of course, they had conducted one meeting with local fishers at the beginning of Gwadar port construction. Queries were collected from local fishers regarding their concerns, but until now, no action has been taken to respond to the fishers' queries.

When we inquired about EIA from the local fishermen, they said some GDA officials met us at *Demi Zar* (East Bay). We informed them of our crucial concerns, such as the harmful effects of the east bay expressway on the environment and our livelihood, the distance of our new home locations from boat operation places, and many more. They said we would work on your concerns but have not seen any fruitful results. Pretty (1995) provides a clear distinction between using participation as a means and as a means of promoting empowerment. Development projects involving local communities should involve the locals in making decisions and allow them to deploy their expertise

and control their lifestyles. Scudder (2012) suggested that the involvement of the locals should start during the assessment stage when the identification of the social, environmental, and equity implications is considered.

Assessing the environmental impacts of development projects, such as the construction of the Gwadar port and associated infrastructure, is essential for understanding the ecological consequences for marine resources and the fishing industry. Furthermore, exploring alternative approaches to development that prioritize sustainability and the well-being of local communities can offer insights into more equitable and environmentally responsible practices. Not paying proper attention to environmental sustainability is dangerous for the health of the mega infrastructure projects in the area. Similarly, the socioeconomic implications of the development projects and policies on the fishing community can provide a comprehensive understanding of the inequalities and marginalization experienced by local fishermen. Examining the potential for community empowerment through collective action, such as forming informal associations, can shed light on strategies for amplifying the voices of marginalized groups and advocating for their rights and interests.

The increasing security of the port brings restrictions for the fishers. The fishers told the researcher they could not fish during official hours, citing security concerns. Many associated projects are underway, such as the newly under-constructed expressway connecting the deep seaport to Makran coastal highway. It hindered fishers from dragging their boats to the sea; thus, they had to relocate their boats from the east bay to the western bay or elsewhere. Government authorities are planning to build a new jetty away from the deep seaport to facilitate local fishers' fishing activities. However, local fishers are protesting such policies because they think they will increase the distance between their homes and the boats' operations. It is thus important to explore the role of local governance structures, such as the fishery department and the Gwadar Development Authority, local state representatives, in shaping policies and decisions that affect the fishing community is crucial. This includes examining the extent of participation and representation of local fishermen in decision-making processes, evaluating the effectiveness of existing institutional mechanisms for addressing grievances, and identifying areas for improvement in promoting participatory and inclusive governance.

After the long-term experience of unequal participation in the decision-making process and overall developmental policies, the fishing community has realized that every possibility for meaningful participation in ongoing development projects and policies is intimately related to the issue of power. Thus, local fishers have formed an informal association called *Gwadar Mahigeer Ittihad*, which every day presses the government to open tight spaces for them and make the development process more participatory and democratic. *Gwadar Mahigeer Ittihad* recently started an intense political movement. The men and women held sit-in protests for over 30 days in Gwadar, calling the slogan "*Haq do Gwadar ko*" (*Give rights to Gwadar*). They try to claim participation in their legal spaces or create new spaces through daily protests, while others are willing to join insurgent groups to make their problems heard. This struggle implies the exploration of their agency. Therefore, this struggle is expected to shape and influence the ongoing development processes in Gwadar significantly. However, they face many problems in making their voices audible for participation.

The media involved can also be considered closed spaces for fishermen because it only portrays images of the success of the development process while refusing to air fishermen's grievances. Spaces closed by the media to fishermen are also closed to women's voices. Exploring the role of media in shaping public discourse and influencing perceptions of development projects in Gwadar is important. The extent of media coverage represents the concerns and grievances of the fishing community and analyzes the power dynamics that influence media narratives. Additionally, examining the potential of alternative media platforms and grassroots communication channels for amplifying marginalized voices and promoting inclusive narratives can offer insights into countering the exclusionary nature of mainstream media. According to Gaventa (2004), dominant actors usually use the media to promote their interests while quashing the views of other actors. Therefore, the media can be considered an invisible ideological power to alter people's perceptions of activities on the Gwadar coast. The media is also a hidden power that excludes fishermen's views of the project. However, fishermen also get occasional opportunities to enter the media by holding interviews with local newspapers and researchers, where they air their grievances about the intrusion of foreign trawlers and state procedures. Depending on the interest of the journalist or researcher, these grievances may be published or not.

## **5. Conclusion and recommendations**

This paper analyses the interaction between various actors in various types of spaces, including closed, invited, created, and claimed spaces, using Gaventa's power cubes analytical framework. This study shed light on the existing power structures and how these structures have continued the suppression of the rights of local fishers. We have seen the situation of created, invited and closed spaces and how different interest groups use various types of power to allocate resources and benefit from the ongoing development projects in Gwadar, Pakistan. The fishermen face many constraints, including criminalisation of protests, dominant narratives, use of invisible/ideological power from interest groups, and lack of access to current information and what policies target them. The study revealed that the first two dimensions of power are more visible than the third one, which still needs further exploration.

Based on this, a comprehensive analysis of power dynamics within the fishing community and between different stakeholders in various policies should be conducted to provide a nuanced understanding of the mechanisms through which power is exercised and how it impacts the livelihoods of local fishermen. This could involve exploring the relationships between political leaders, powerful capitalists, fishery officials, and local fishing. By extension, investigating the direct and indirect effects of zoning laws and maritime security measures on the fishing community in Gwadar can provide valuable insights into the trade-offs between economic development and the preservation of livelihoods. This can delve into the challenges faced by fishermen in accessing fishing grounds, the implications of restricted zones, and the effectiveness of security measures in ensuring sustainable fishing practices.

This study recommends the creation of democratic spaces for participation to include the existing marginalized groups in the ongoing development process in Gwadar and elsewhere for fisheries. The government should encourage job creation in areas where the fishermen are knowledgeable instead of creating jobs in which they are not skilled. With continued inequalities in Gwadar, the

development projects are threatened by increasing insurgency and political resistance. Therefore, the government needs to re-invent its policies to address the social issues using a pro-poor approach that will promote the people's lives and therefore win their support for such projects at the local level.

### **5.1. Practical and policy management implications**

The findings of this paper have several practical and policy management implications for stakeholders involved in developing and managing the fishing community in Gwadar. Understanding and addressing these implications can contribute to more effective decision-making and sustainable development practices. The following points highlight some of the key implications.

The research underscores the importance of engaging and involving local fishermen as key stakeholders in decision-making processes. Meaningful participation ensures that their perspectives, knowledge, and concerns are considered when formulating policies and implementing development projects. This requires creating platforms for dialogue, promoting inclusive governance structures, and fostering collaborative partnerships between government agencies, private sector actors, and the fishing community on issues such as climate change and rising global temperatures and its effects.

The study highlights the need for sustainable resource management practices to protect the marine environment and ensure the long-term viability of the fishing industry. This involves implementing measures such as fishing quotas, seasonal restrictions, and gear regulations to prevent overfishing and promote responsible fishing practices. Additionally, investing in research and monitoring programs to assess the health of fish stocks, identify vulnerable species, and track ecosystem changes can provide valuable data for informed decision-making.

The research emphasizes the importance of spatial planning and zoning laws to balance economic development objectives with preserving livelihoods. Establishing clear boundaries and designated zones with strict regulations that protect sensitive fishing grounds, breeding areas, and critical habitats is crucial. Integrating the perspectives of local fishermen into the spatial planning process can help identify areas essential for their livelihoods and ensure their access to productive fishing grounds.

The findings underline the significance of considering the impacts of infrastructure development, such as the construction of the Gwadar port, on the fishing community. Assessing potential disruptions to fishing activities, changes in access to fishing grounds, and the socio-economic consequences for local fishermen is essential. Incorporating measures to mitigate negative impacts, such as providing alternative livelihood opportunities, improving infrastructure for small-scale fishers, and establishing compensation mechanisms, can help address the challenges arising from development projects.

Enhancing the capacity of the fishing community through training and skill development programs is crucial for their adaptation to changing circumstances. Access to technical knowledge, modern fishing techniques, and alternative income-generating activities can diversify livelihood options and reduce dependence on traditional fishing practices. This can contribute to building resilience within the fishing community and preparing them for potential challenges arising from economic development and environmental changes.

The research stresses the need for integrated coastal management approaches considering the interconnectedness of various sectors and stakeholders. Coordinating efforts across fisheries, tourism, environmental conservation, and urban planning sectors can ensure that development activities are harmonized and do not undermine the sustainability of the fishing industry. This requires institutional collaboration, information-sharing, and the establishment of cross-sectoral management frameworks.

Establishing robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms is fundamental for assessing the effectiveness of policies, projects, and management practices. Regular monitoring of fishing activities, socio-economic indicators, and environmental parameters can provide feedback on the impacts of interventions and guide adaptive management strategies. Continuous evaluation enables stakeholders to learn from successes and failures, make informed decisions, and make necessary adjustments to ensure the sustainable development of the fishing community.

### **Author contributions**

Conceptualization, SU; methodology, SU and UK; software, SU; validation, SU, JM, JAT and KUR; formal analysis, SU; investigation, SU; resources, SU; data curation, SU; writing—original draft preparation, SU; writing—review and editing, SU, UK, and KUR; visualization, SU and KU; supervision, SU; project administration, SU. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

### **Conflict of interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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