Ecological Transition to Sustainable Societies in a Digital Era: CPEC Perspective

Our societies and economies are struggling to transform in response to the climate crisis with the speed and intent that the rapidly deteriorating environmental situation requires (Broadbent and Cara 2018: 1320). Our initial findings suggest that the use of developed approaches and digital technologies offer a variety of services to enable new sustainable forms of resource use, conservation and environmental protection to improve the overall standard of living of the world population. There are digital environmental projects around the world that can be positioned within the domain of ecological transition such as shifting to renewable sources of energy; moving to the culture of recycling; reusing; repairing; converting to green financing; incorporating environmental, social and governance responsibility; moving to growing and eating organic food; adopting a positive attitude to fight climate change; and reducing environmental degradation.

Over the years, China has made tremendous progress towards achieving ecological transition using concrete policy measures and digital technology and innovations. In line with China’s Green Development Agenda, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) can also be turned into a model for “Eco-civilisation”, a concept to give environment and climate change a central position amid ecological transition to sustainable societies. The Chinese concept based on frugality, environmental protection and sustainability, emerged at the Seventeenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CCP) where the Party General Secretary Hu Jintao, proposed to build a resource saving and environmentally friendly society by 2020 (Gare 2012:10-26).

Leading the same concept in CPEC perspective, this panel aims to deliberate upon capacity building among international and national institutions to promote technological innovation and structural adjustments in major functioning Special Economic Zones (SEZs) of CPEC; consider the ideas of green development, including energy-conserving, low-carbon, and sustainable consumption and production in societies; pushing forward resource saving and using recycling; protecting natural capital and ecosystems; and adopting measures and policies of the concept of “ecological civilisation” in guiding and regulating environmental constraints. This will help government institutions and decision-makers to enable digital technology for sustainable development strategies for the ecological transition, especially in terms of consumption, mobility, governance and financing. It will also help to strengthen knowledge sharing among institutions and people to not only bring in economic opportunities, but also to foster the positive impact of CPEC in line with China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) that will be beneficial for both China and Pakistan as well as other countries. The panellists will address the following questions:

1. What is the potential for digital services to accelerate ecological transition? What are the methods and tools to identify solutions to harness sustainable development strategies in energy sector, transport services, recycling, making, repairing; agriculture, food and textile industries, and SMEs (preferably with reference to their applicability in SEZs of CPEC)?

2. What is the role of private sector in developing strategies and designs towards ecological transition, unlocking opportunities and driving innovation using digital technologies?

3. Public and private digital innovators tend to bring new opportunities for sustainable development, but there are also many challenges. How do we address the environmental impacts of those digital technologies and the associated ecological footprint, and what policies and standards should be placed to guide digital technology for creating the enabling conditions for the benefit of profound transmission of green practices for sustainable development?

4. Resistance to change is solicited as one of the barriers to adopt new sustainable practices for ecological transition. How can digital innovation enable the conditions for up-taking the implementation of green solutions and practices for the benefit of sustainable development in CPEC (e.g. financing)? How does one make sure that the digital transition is conformed to ecological transition values (lessons learnt from the practices from around the world, preferably China)?

References


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