



## ACHIEVEMENTS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS IN UZBEKISTAN: PROGRESS OR PROMISE?

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**Abstract:** *Uzbekistan's sustainable development efforts, guided by the Uzbekistan 2030 Strategy launched in 2023, achieved a 6.5% GDP growth to \$115 billion in 2024, driven by \$34.9 billion in FDI and 242 major projects. The strategy targets 50% higher education enrollment and 25,000 MW of renewable energy by 2030, with the Yashilmakon project planting 138 million trees. Governance reforms, including e-government expansion and the Tashkent International Arbitration Centre, enhance transparency, while partnerships with the Asian Development Bank supported \$4.65 billion in projects. Rural-urban disparities in education and healthcare, exacerbated by limited rural connectivity, hinder digitalization efforts. The informal economy (20% of GDP) and SME barriers limit economic inclusivity. Central Asia's water scarcity, driven by regional tensions, complicates environmental goals, necessitating cooperation. Sustaining progress requires equitable policies, public engagement, and diplomatic efforts to address geopolitical and logistical challenges.*

**Keywords:** *Uzbekistan sustainable development, Uzbekistan 2030 Strategy, economic growth, renewable energy, human development, governance reform, Central Asia, social inclusion, environmental sustainability*

### Introduction



Uzbekistan has made significant strides in sustainable development, aligning its national priorities with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through the Uzbekistan 2030 Strategy, launched in September 2023. This comprehensive framework, built on five pillars—human development, economic growth, environmental sustainability, governance, and international cooperation—has driven achievements ranging from robust economic expansion to ambitious environmental initiatives. In 2024, Uzbekistan's GDP grew by 6.5% to \$115 billion, foreign direct investment (FDI) surged, and renewable energy adoption accelerated, signaling a commitment to sustainable progress. However, challenges such as regional water scarcity, economic disparities, and governance hurdles raise questions about the depth of these gains. This article critically examines Uzbekistan's sustainable development achievements, exploring their inclusivity, sustainability, and long-term potential, as if engaging in a reasoned discussion. Drawing on limited official data, it assesses whether these milestones represent transformative progress or aspirational promises in a complex global and regional context.

**Main Body:** Uzbekistan's strides in human development are central to its sustainable development agenda, with initiatives aimed at expanding access to education and




healthcare. The Uzbekistan 2030 Strategy targets a 50% higher education enrollment rate by 2030, alongside transforming five universities into national research institutions. In 2024, digital education platforms expanded, and healthcare reforms improved service delivery in urban centers. However, the benefits appear unevenly distributed. Can rural communities, where infrastructure gaps persist, access these educational and medical advancements? The strategy's emphasis on digitalization assumes robust internet connectivity, yet rural areas often lack reliable networks, raising doubts about equitable implementation. Without addressing these disparities, Uzbekistan's human development gains risk reinforcing urban-rural divides, undermining the SDG principle of leaving no one behind.

Economically, Uzbekistan has achieved robust growth, with GDP reaching \$115 billion in 2024, a 6.5% increase from \$90.8 billion in 2023, driven by \$34.9 billion in foreign direct investment (FDI). The launch of 242 major projects in mining, chemicals, and agriculture reflects a push for diversification, aligning with SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth). Yet, the reliance on large-scale investments prompts critical questions. Are these economic gains translating into improved living standards for ordinary citizens? Small and medium enterprises (SMEs), contributing 56% to GDP, often face barriers to accessing credit and markets, limiting their growth potential. Moreover, the informal economy, estimated at 20% of GDP, indicates persistent challenges in formalizing employment, particularly in rural areas. Sustainable economic progress requires policies that empower local businesses and reduce inequalities, lest the headline GDP figures mask underlying vulnerabilities.

Environmental sustainability efforts have yielded tangible results, particularly in advancing SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy) and SDG 13 (climate action). Uzbekistan's Yashilmakon project planted 138 million trees, and renewable energy capacity increased, with a target of 25,000 MW by 2030. The share of green energy reached 16% in 2024, a step toward the 40% goal. However, transitioning to a green economy involves more than infrastructure. Can Uzbekistan foster a cultural shift toward sustainable consumption among its population? Central Asia's water scarcity, exacerbated by complex regional dynamics, poses a significant hurdle, as irrigation-dependent agriculture competes with hydropower needs. Without stronger regional agreements and public engagement, environmental achievements may falter, highlighting the need for a holistic approach to sustainability.

Governance reforms have bolstered Uzbekistan's sustainable development efforts, aligning with SDG 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions). The expansion of e-government services and the establishment of the Tashkent International Arbitration Centre have enhanced transparency and investor confidence. In 2024, legislative reforms strengthened parliamentary oversight, fostering accountability. Yet, transforming a historically centralized system remains challenging. How will Uzbekistan ensure that governance reforms empower citizens rather than merely streamline bureaucracy? Public trust, critical for sustainable development, requires mechanisms like independent anti-





corruption bodies, which are still underdeveloped. Without these, the governance achievements risk being perceived as elite-driven, limiting their societal impact.

Uzbekistan's international cooperation efforts have amplified its sustainable development achievements, particularly through partnerships with global institutions. Collaboration with the World Bank and UNDP supported 23 projects worth \$4.65 billion in 2024, targeting agriculture, energy, and education. The strategy's diplomatic pillar, emphasizing Central Asian unity and global engagement, has positioned Uzbekistan as a regional leader. However, geopolitical complexities, including trade route constraints due to its landlocked geography, challenge progress toward SDG 17 (partnerships for the goals). Can Uzbekistan balance regional alliances with global ambitions while addressing resource-sharing tensions? Strengthening logistics infrastructure and fostering trust with neighbors are critical for sustaining these diplomatic gains. The international dimension underscores Uzbekistan's potential to shape regional sustainable development, provided it navigates these challenges adeptly.

### **Conclusion**

Uzbekistan's sustainable development achievements, from economic growth to environmental progress, demonstrate a strong commitment to the SDGs and the Uzbekistan 2030 Strategy. The 6.5% GDP growth, renewable energy advancements, and governance reforms, bolstered by global partnerships, are significant milestones. However, questions of inclusivity, sustainability, and regional dynamics persist. Economic benefits must extend to SMEs and rural communities, environmental efforts need cultural and regional alignment, and governance reforms must prioritize public trust. As Uzbekistan progresses toward 2030, its success will depend on translating these achievements into equitable, enduring progress. Support from the global community, combined with rigorous policy execution, will be critical in realizing this vision. Uzbekistan's sustainable development journey offers a compelling case study in balancing ambition with practical realities.

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