



Aspects of Green Transition in Georgia

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Accepted: November 30, 2022
Approved: December 15, 2022

Keywords:

Green Transition, Green
Economy, Georgia.

ABSTRACT

In the 21st century, the issue of sustainable development has taken on a key role in every field of the economy and business. The development of a green economy can play an important part in the sustainability of environmental protection, being an economic model that focuses on human health and the environment in parallel. Sustainable development involves protecting the environment and ensuring community well-being, having the world's citizens living in ecological cleanliness and health. The growth of sustainable development and green economy contributes to overcoming the risks related to environmental pollution and the reduction of ecological problems. As such, green transition has been set as a goal by many countries today. Yet, it is a multi-faceted process that needs the broad-reaching involvement of numerous stakeholders in a focused network for collaboration. The main direction of the green concept in the process of economic activity is to reduce the use of natural resources and protect the principles of ecological health and sustainable development. Much attention is given to the prevention of natural disasters and, in the best case, to their complete avoidance. The article covers the challenges faced by Georgia in its own process of green transition, and touches on issues related to green business development, air pollution, waste management, energy efficiency, and other sustainable development issues that provide an overview of aspects of the green transition.

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Introduction

Nowadays, the development of a green economy and green business is a global essential need, awareness of which is growing and gaining popularity. The main goals of the green economy are the well-being of society and the efficient use of natural resources to prevent further environmental pollution. Green economy is closely related to environmental problems, and includes the following: green transportation and green buildings, and waste, water and land management (UN Environment Program Publications).

Environmental protection experts of the United Nations (UN) consider the green economy as the most important direction to ensure the material and social well-being of people. It is said that a green economy can make a significant contribution to reducing the risks of environmental pollution and social deterioration. The development of a green economy and green businesses is becoming more and more important, both for developed and in developing countries. Therefore, over the next decade, the field of sustainable development has been set as the highest priority for all countries.

In recent years, economies around the world have been developing rapidly. In these conditions, which see the environment being carelessly polluted and natural resources being used irrationally, human health is under the greatest threat (Beridze, 2018). Issues such as water and air pollution, unchecked use of natural resources, unreasonable management of industrial or household waste, land erosion, deforestation, and desertification are especially acute.

Therefore, people must take steps to stop the negative impact on the environment, which can have devastating consequences for humanity (Ranvir, 2020). To solve these issues, the development of the green business sector is vital (Cameron & Clouth, 2012), as it can play an important role in the development of the economy and the creation of a healthy environment.

The Green Deal developed by the European Union is a useful reference example in the process of green transition. The European Green Deal set the blueprint for transformational change, a change that will bring with it many benefits, from creating new opportunities for innovation, investment, and green jobs, to improving citizen health and wellbeing. All 27 EU Member States committed to turning the EU into the first climate-neutral continent by 2050. To get there, they pledged to reduce emissions by at least 55% by 2030, compared to the 1990 levels (The Green Deal, 2021).

As a result of the Association Agreement with the European Union, Georgia is developing along the European path, and this requires making appropriate changes in almost all fields. Both Europe and Georgia's transition towards a green economy is a critical, ongoing process.

The green transition is a multi-faceted process and requires a wide range of stakeholders to collaborate in a focused network. Its benefits are distributed to society as a whole and cover all spheres of socio-economic life.

The article aims to examine various aspects of the green transition and identify challenges to it faced in Georgia. Based on anal-

ysis of the studied material, conclusions are drawn and recommendations are developed.

Green Business in Georgia

Today, human well-being is a vital world issue, something which includes not only material goods but also health as a key. This is why it is extremely necessary to develop green businesses for the supply of both material and non-material goods. Green business, as the main force of the economy, ensures the development of said economy and serves as a guarantor of a healthy environment (Sustainable Development Goals, 2020), and hence people's well-being.

The development of green business can have a positive impact on the country's financial sector, social stability, and the well-being of the population. At the end of the last century, it became clear that such a pace of economic development would be harmful to humanity. As a result of industrial waste and climate change, water and land resources become dirty and depleted, plants and animals are going extinct or are on the verge of extinction, and human diseases have increased because of environmental pollution. The situation around the world today indicates that the current economic development has brought society and the planet to a crisis point, seeing us gradually losing the opportunity to live in a healthy environment, and bringing with it an increasing number of diseases that threaten the life and health of children and adults. With all this in mind, it is vitally essential to introduce a green economy throughout the world, now.

The development of the green business and green economy concepts is a relatively

new direction for Georgia, and is something which has gained special significance in recent years (Ananiashvili, 2014). When entrepreneurs decide to start a business, when building their strategies, they need to first analyze environmental and social issues to as to be able to positively impact the well-being of their future beneficiaries.

In 2016, Georgia signed the Green Growth Declaration, a cooperation pact between countries for the development of green economy and green business. Georgia also signed the Association Agreement with the European Union, the purpose of which is to promote economic integration and political association. This agreement implies Georgia's active involvement in EU programs and campaigns, a key element of which is to promote green economy and sustainable development. One of the most important directions for the development of Georgia's economy, as in other countries, is the rational use of natural resources, ensuring an ecologically healthy environment for its people, and eliminating or minimizing the risks of natural disasters.

The absence of a healthy environment causes harm to human health and well-being. As a result, many diseases are appearing among us, some of which are completely new and unstudied, and some which are modified versions of old illnesses. As a result of these diseases, the mortality rate has been increasing. According to the data of the National Statistics Service, the mortality rate in Georgia increased until 2010, decreased again, then peaked in 2016. As such, it is clear that urgent measures to reduce the mortality rate need to be taken.

There are numerous challenges related to environmental health in Georgia, and the growth and development of green business

is a very important way to overcome them. Air pollution, garbage management, wasted water, deforestation, and imports over local produce are among them. Solving the mentioned issues will ensure that people live in a healthy environment and that this environment has a positive impact on the overall health and well-being of the population.

Air Pollution

Today, air pollution is a very significant problem in Georgia. Compared to previous years, the number of harmful materials in the air has increased dramatically, despite the well-recognised fact that clean air is a guarantee for a healthy life (Evans, 2011), while polluted air has a negative impact on people's health. Polluted air can lead to numerous deadly diseases, and can impact the socio-economic situation: Sick people can't work normally, yet they need money for treatment and medicines, a cycle which ultimately damages the economy of the country.

Unfortunately, Georgia is in a leading position on the list of air-polluted countries. The main cause of air pollution here is cars and their fumes, as Georgia boasts a high number of second-hand or very old cars, the unchecked exhaust of which pollutes the air.

In addition, polluted air may have a certain negative impact on climate change, soil conditions, and flora and fauna, each boasting their own human-impacting knock-on effects.

Garbage

Georgia has a deplorable situation with its garbage, with city streets full of such waste.

Sea and river pollution are also very common here, waste which is then pushed back onto Georgia's beaches.

There are also many cases where people dump industrial waste into water. As a result, not only is the drinking water polluted, but also the organisms that live in the water.

Water

The pollution of rivers through economic activities or natural disasters may not directly harm human health, but it significantly deteriorates the quality of drinking water. Agricultural lands are irrigated by rivers, and the products in that water are spread over consumable products, resulting in negative impacts on people's health. In addition, a large amount of water is wasted in both industrial and home use, which we call irrational use of water.

Deforestation

Because the human population is increasing, more and more plants and trees are being destroyed. In the most part, trees are cut for repurposing as timber. Deforestation has greatly changed landscapes around the world, which naturally results in more carbon dioxide being released into the atmosphere. The loss of trees can also make the soil more prone to erosion (Nunez, 2019).

There is an appalling situation regarding forest protection in Georgia. For centuries, people have been felling trees and using their wood for household purposes, as well as construction. This is an ongoing issue of growing concern, particularly in the last decades, and especially considering the current energy, financial and economic crises.

The development of a green economy and green business serves to eliminate these problems. Georgia needs to encourage the development of green businesses. This will strengthen the country's economy and have a positive impact on people's material well-being, as well as their health.

Lack of Local Food

In parallel with rising global food prices, the local harvest in Georgia is gradually decreasing. Due to a lack of funds, farmers are increasingly unable to cultivate their land. This leads to a large amount of food products being imported, and yet Georgia has great potential to develop in the agrarian direction and minimize the amount of imported food.

Genetically modified food directly impacts the health of the population. Some believe that genetically modified food is in fact harmful to human health, while others claim the opposite, stating it does not cause significant negative effects on overall health (Talikadze, 2019). In 2015, Georgia enacted a law, according to which labeling genetically modified food and informing consumers about the mentioned issue became mandatory, empowering the consumer to decide on and take responsibility for whether they consume genetically modified food or not.

Green Projects in Georgia

In general, sustainable development is one of the most important issues in the world today, and almost all countries are trying to develop green economies through the introduction of projects at the local and international levels. Several significant proj-

ects are being actively implemented by the state of Georgia.

In 2019, restrictions were imposed by law in connection with polyethylene bags. According to the law, the use and production of non-biodegradable polyethylene bags was banned. The purpose of this ban is the fact that polythene bags can cause severe damage to the environment, as they take a significant amount of time to decompose. Further, the production of polyethylene bags requires the use of minerals that are on the list of exhaustible resources. The mentioned law had a positive impact on the protection and improvement of the environment in the country, with shoppers switching in large part to "bag for life" bags.

Waste recycling is also being implemented in Georgia through a variety of on-going projects. The first stage of waste sorting is carried out at home, and so homeowners require four boxes- for plastic, glass, paper, and metal. To expand this, four recyclable waste containers need to be installed in neighbourhoods countrywide.

Since 2017, the green roof concept has been highlighted globally- green roofs are already well implemented in many countries, with some even regulating the issue of green roofs through local legislation. People are interested in this issue in Georgia, too, and we have seen private home owners installing such roofs during the construction of their own houses, and small and medium business owners taking on the concept in their office designs (Guidelines and Best Practices, UNECE, 2021).

To reduce environmental pollution created by businesses in Georgia, and to increase

business efficiency, in 2015, an important campaign in the direction of agriculture - "Implant the Future" was launched, the purpose of which was to support and encourage the production of high-quality planting materials, with a focus on strengthening local production so as to make it possible to replace imported produce with local products. Although there are still funding challenges, this project was successfully implemented and brought positive results to the field of agriculture in Georgia. The purpose of the mentioned project was also the rational use of agricultural lands.

For the green economy and business to develop in Georgia, it is important to make rational use of natural resources and the ecosystem. In those regions of the country where industrial and mining production is carried out, local communities face a huge problem of polluted water, soil and air. That is why the development of a green economy and green business is critical for Georgia, now.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The green economy and growth of green businesses is a great opportunity for Georgia to improve the living conditions of the population, as well as to boost the economy. But it is necessary to take certain measures to develop and encourage such green businesses. With the development of green business, Georgia will gain a unique environment, the capitalization of which will positively impact almost all directions.

It is important to identify the mechanisms that can help green businesses to develop in Georgia. First is the allocation of a

budget for green priorities and investment, and the minimization or complete cessation of subsidizing activities that damage the environment. In addition, the relevant tax reform is needed. The development of the economy largely depends on tax reform, as taxes are both directly and indirectly related to the prices of products. A rational tax system will help to create an eco-friendly product and will also encourage entrepreneurs to work hard in this direction.

Energy-efficient buildings are also essential elements of sustainable development and green economy. Because buildings consume a large amount of energy, energy reduction in this area will play a major role in the sustainable development of the country. According to the trends of recent years, it can be said that the number of construction projects is on the rise, although, unfortunately, there are as yet no relevant regulations to regulate the construction industry in Georgia. The presence of energy-efficient buildings will increase employment in the sector, develop technologies, introduce innovations, and reduce harmful effects on the environment, all of which is directly related to people's health and safety. A specific date should be set, after which only energy-efficient buildings can be built. The EU directive in this regard requires member states to implement certain incentive measures that stimulate the building of new energy-efficient buildings, and in parallel the renovation of old ones, so that they will approximate the energy efficiency standards. Incentive measures include the introduction or establishment of regulations, laws, rules, and tax benefits. Such measures will motivate entrepreneurs to concentrate on the construction of energy-efficient buildings.

The requirements of the European Union Directive, which refers to the construction of energy-efficient buildings, must be reflected in national legislation.

In addition, to develop green businesses in Georgia, it is most important that people be informed about the importance of sustainable development. This point significantly depends on changing the lifestyle of the country's citizens. Educational institutions are excellent places where this goal can be realized through various training programmes and lectures.

When discussing sustainable development and the green transition, it is important to mention the European Competence framework (GreenComp, 2022), the familiarization and implementation of which in the educational space will be useful to promote this process, helping educational institutions to acquire knowledge and develop skills for sustainable development.

Green business development ensures an ecologically clean environment. For the sustainable development of the country, it is necessary and most important to preserve resources and use them rationally. As the population grows, so do the demands, and this can lead to an ecological disaster. Therefore, it is necessary to promote and encourage green businesses to save natural resources and prevent environmental crises.

The joint involvement of the government and society in Georgia will help the country in its sustainable development, while the development of green businesses will ensure the creation of an ecologically clean environment in the country, thus helping to prevent those dangerous diseases that have become so common today.

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