

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT POLICY IN GEORGIA

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The paper deals with the role of the green economy in achieving sustainable development goals. The development of society is discussed – with a long-term system of economic growth, economic well-being – taking into account environmental protection interests. The aim of the paper is to study the green economy as the basis of sustainable development. This article uses case study and analysis methods. The paper is based on various scientific works, data from the Statistical Service, and the results of research conducted by state and international organizations. As a result of quantitative and qualitative research, it was confirmed that the green economy is the basis of sustainable development and that environmental protection problems are important and relevant, that more discussion and development of appropriate measures and implementation should be carried out to solve the problems. All UN member states have agreed on 17 sustainable development goals and 169 tasks, which should be achieved by 2030. Georgia attaches great importance to the development of a national environmental protection program and its periodic updating. The Association Agreement between Georgia and the European Union, among other issues, focuses on environmental protection issues and sustainable development goals and objectives. The work is important and interesting – for representatives of the scientific community, heads of state, specialists, and all interested parties. The article evaluates the special role of Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the development of the economy both in Europe and Georgia. On the other hand, the need to introduce and develop framework conditions for sustainable development to achieve long-term economic well-being is emphasized. To achieve this goal foreign experience in different countries in terms of stimulating sustainable development has been studied. The sustainable development of SMEs in Georgia and EU countries is compared.

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Осадзе Л. Т., Сосанидзе М. О. Політика екологічного сталого розвитку в Грузії

У статті розглянуто роль зеленої економіки у досягненні цілей сталого розвитку. Зокрема, проаналізовано розвиток суспільства як довгострокової системи економічного зростання та економічного добробуту з урахуванням інтересів охорони навколишнього середовища. Метою статті є вивчення зеленої економіки як основи сталого розвитку. У цій статті використано методи тематичного дослідження та аналізу. Стаття базується на різних наукових працях, даних Статистичної служби та результатах досліджень, проведених державними та міжнародними організаціями. В результаті кількісного та якісного дослідження було підтверджено, що зелена економіка є основою сталого розвитку, а проблеми охорони навколишнього середовища є важливими та актуальними, що для вирішення цих проблем слід проводити більше обговорень та розробити відповідні заходи, а потім їх впровадити. Усі держави – члени ООН погодилися щодо 17 цілей сталого розвитку та 169 завдань, які мають бути досягнуті до 2030 року. Грузія надає великого значення розробці національної програми охорони навколишнього середовища та її періодичному оновленню. Угода про асоціацію між Грузією та Європейським Союзом, серед іншого, зосереджена на питаннях охорони навколишнього середовища та цілях і завданнях сталого розвитку. Робота є важливою та цікавою – для представників наукової спільноти, глав держав, спеціалістів та всіх зацікавлених сторін. У статті оцінюється особлива роль малих і середніх підприємств (МСП) у розвитку економіки як у Європі, так і в Грузії. З іншого боку, підкреслюється необхідність запровадження та розвитку рамкових умов сталого розвитку для досягнення довгострокового економічного добробуту. Для досягнення цієї мети було вивчено зарубіжний досвід різних країн щодо стимулювання сталого розвитку. Порівнюється сталий розвиток малих і середніх підприємств у Грузії та країнах ЄС.

Ключові слова: сталий розвиток, охорона навколишнього середовища, малі та середні підприємства, економічне зростання.**Бібл.:** 14.**Осадзе Лалі Тарешвіна** – доктор економічних наук, професор, Горійський державний педагогічний університет (просп. Іллі Чавчавадзе, 53, Горі, 1400, Грузія)**E-mail:** l.osadze@gmail.com

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Introduction. One of the most important issues of state economic policy in the 21st century is the problem of environmental protection. Scientists have long argued that solving the problem of environmental protection is necessary for the survival of humanity [3].

The European Union's (EU) Wider Europe concept and inclusion of the South Caucasian countries in the European Neighborhood Policy opened up new prospects for Georgia in terms of future integration into the European economic and social structures. European Neighborhood Policy and consistent adherence to the EU-Georgia Action Plan must encourage growth of trade and investment; it should also facilitate economic integration. Inclusion of Georgia in the European Neighborhood Policy creates new opportunities for the country. However, at the same time it poses new challenges for the existing system of governance and makes the formation of a more democratic and transparent political system necessary. This is particularly the case in the sphere of environmental governance, the field where decisions are made on the management of natural resources and ecosystems. As is well known, poor and low-income communities are particularly vulnerable to failed environmental governance, as they rely more heavily on natural resources for subsistence and income.

The sustainable development agenda is a wide-ranging issue. According to the document "2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" adopted by the UN General Assembly, as well as the action framework of the European Commission "European Consensus on Development" and the European Union's development policy, "poverty eradication remains the primary goal of development policy" [4].

Large enterprises have clear experience in terms of sustainable development, while SMEs lag behind large enterprises in this regard and face more challenges. Consequently, it is difficult to fulfill the framework conditions of sustainable development in these enterprises. It should also be noted that despite the recognition of the important role of SMEs, academic research on the problems of sustainable development of SMEs is scarce [6].

To ensure sustainable development, it is essential to keep the growth balance of economic parameters in SMEs. The pursuit of profit maximization should not lead to a negative impact on social and environmental issues. On the contrary, the company's strategy should consider reducing the negative impact on the environment and it is important to assess their sustainability according to Environmental, Social, and Governance criteria – ESG. First, it should be noted that the use of sustainability management tools and framework conditions is poorly developed in most SMEs and does not respond to specific needs. In most SMEs, sustainability practices are informal and not integrated with business development strategies [12].

From the point of view of sustainable development, it is important to share the experience of developed countries in this field. The use of successful examples ensures awareness of the goals of sustainable development in the areas of SMEs' sustainability, innovation, and SCR, which are directly related to the fulfillment of the framework conditions for sustainable development.

Scientists believe that the approach should be complex, taking into account the framework conditions of sustainable development in the modern global world. Active work on international trade barriers is important for accelerating the process of global standardization. The development of trade between the countries will have a positive effect on the indicators of the population's well-being and will contribute to the improvement of the economic, cultural, and political conditions between the countries. Also, scientists consider the conditions of sustainable development from another perspective, for example, sustainable development is evaluated as a strategic policy lever. Such leverage is successfully used in New Zealand, where economic policy focuses on the better adaptation of SMEs to the competitive environment. Such an approach makes SMEs more globally competitive. However, it is recommended to focus not only on growth but also on sustainable development procedures of SMEs. For sustainable development, a number of scientists indicate the need to expand the participation of SMEs in public procurement, the need to modernize existing regulations in this area, and the need to attract investments.

The economic and social importance of SMEs further increases the need to expand their inclusion in the sustainability agenda. The 2030 Agenda defines the core role of SMEs in achieving the SDGs. Such types of enterprises can create an economic value of \$12 trillion and 380 million jobs by 2030 [14]. Manufacturing based on sustainability principles is essential for SMEs, as it gives them better access to the opportunities and resources necessary to run their business.

The Sustainable Development Goals are an unprecedented agreement on sustainable development among 193 member states. The goals have received the support of the world's civil society, businesses, parliamentarians and others. "Governments, international organizations, the business sector and other non-state actors and individuals must work towards" leaving no one behind. The most developed, developing and poorest countries all have specific steps to take to improve the inclusion of marginalized groups and to promote social integration, which is a prerequisite for stable and prosperous societies [2].

For the sustainable development of the country, Georgia has already developed the first, second, third and fourth National Environmental Action Programs.

The Third National Program was prepared in 2017 and covers the development period until 2021. The Program was prepared in accordance with the Law of Georgia on Environmental Protection and taking into account the significant experience gained in the preparation and implementation of the Second National Program of Environmental Action. Attention was focused on the challenges arising in the process of Georgia's rapprochement with the European Union. The Third National Program of Environmental Action was developed taking into account the following three main political trends:

- Association Agreement between Georgia and the European Union;
- UN Sustainable Development Goals" and their international environmental agreements to which Georgia is a party;
- National and sectoral strategies related to environmental protection and natural resource management [5].

With the coordination of the Ministry of Environment and Agriculture of Georgia, with the support of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Government of Sweden, in accordance with the Rules for the Development, Monitoring and Evaluation of Policy Documents approved by the Resolution of the Government of Georgia N629 of 20.12.2019, the draft of the Fourth National Environmental Action Program (NEAP 4) of Georgia for 2022-2026 was developed [10].

Georgia's economic development, especially of its industrial sector, relies heavily on the exploitation of the country's natural capital such as minerals, water, biological resources, landscapes and pristine ecosystems. Air emissions and pollution of surface water, groundwater and soil remain important issues in regions where manufacturing and mining enterprises are located. The energy intensity of the Georgian economy is high and the amount of specific energy needed to produce goods and services in Georgia is 2–2.5 times higher than in Western countries.

The phrase "sustainable development" was first mentioned in the 1987 report of the United Nations Commission on Environment and Development. The report included a definition of sustainable development that was used for the next 25 years: "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." This definition was later expanded to include three dimensions of sustainable development: economic development, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability [9]. The importance of three-dimensional sustainable development was emphasized at the 20th Rio Conference in 2012.

The Georgian government is concerned about environmental problems and is trying to protect the basic human right to live in a safe environment. The Law of Georgia on Environmental Protection was adopted in 1996. After that, it underwent many amendments, the last amendment was made in 2023. The main goal of the law is to determine legal norms in the field of environmental protection and ensure a safe environment - in accordance with rational nature use and economic interests. It also ensures the solution of common global and regional problems in the field of environmental protection and the conditions for sustainable development of the country.

The Georgian delegation participated in the High-Level Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), which was held at the UN Headquarters in New York from 8 to 18 July. Within the framework of the Forum, Georgia submitted its third Voluntary National Review (VNR) report, thus reaffirming the country's commitment to the 2030 Agenda and its goals.

According to the report, despite the growth in real GDP and the reduction in poverty over the past 10 years, the problem of inclusive economic growth remains, reflected in the poverty of 20-21% of the country's population.

According to the document, the quality of education and its mismatch with the labor market remain problems in the Georgian education system.

The report emphasizes that low youth participation and high youth unemployment are serious problems for the country. It notes that the percentage of young people (aged 15-24) who are neither in education, employment, nor training was 27.9% in 2016, and 26.9% in 2020.

The High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) is held under the auspices of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

Its purpose is to assess the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals at the global level. In addition, it is the main platform for countries to share and discuss their progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The 2024 report focused on the country's progress, best practices, challenges and future games in three main areas: economic development, human capital development and social well-being, and democratic governance. Within the framework of the forum, the main theme of which was "Strengthening the 2030 Agenda and eradicating poverty across multiple crises: Pathways to sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions".

Environmental policy indicators allow us to comprehensively reflect and characterize the current situation in this area. The basis for decisions made by environmental policy makers is information as a diagnosis of the current state (for example, the intensity of environmental impact, resource consumption), which allows for an approximate forecast of the direction of development.

The purpose of environmental monitoring is a periodic but systematic study of the current state of the environment and the previous situation. It includes such areas as: environmental monitoring and control. Environmental indicators, as supporting tools for environmental policy, have the following tasks to perform: Forecasts of future environmental pollution (trends), Assessment of environmental pollution and the state of the environment, Formulation and specification of environmental quality and environmental action goals, forming the public about the state of the environment, Testing environmental protection strategies, monitoring individual plans, environmental protection measures and results. These tasks can be implemented if there is clarity of the goals of public and environmental protection policies, on which environmental indicators depend. These indicators should be oriented towards environmental protection goals and their specification [7].

In 2017, the European Commission launched and supported an initiative to develop a joint research and innovation agenda - the "Blue Growth Initiative for Research and Innovation in the Black Sea", which would guide policymakers at na-

tional and EU levels. In this regard, the “Burgas Vision Document” was created and launched in 2018 – a framework document for a productive, healthy, sustainable and more valuable Black Sea by 2030.

The common vision and challenges identified in this document are based on the Black Sea “Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda” (SRIA). It identifies 4 main challenges, on the basis of which various types of scientific research and innovation activities can be developed. In 2022, Georgia, together with the European Commission, became the co-chair of the Black Sea Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda Working Group. In order to coordinate activities, a national working group has been established, which, within the framework of its authority, discusses various substantive and organizational issues considered within the framework of Georgia's co-chairmanship. On May 21, 2019, Georgia, Bulgaria, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine signed the Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea (CMA). The agenda is an initiative that serves to promote regional cooperation for a more sustainable blue economy in the Black Sea basin.

The agenda combines three main goals: healthy marine and coastal ecosystems; a competitive, innovative and sustainable blue economy for the Black Sea; attracting investments for the development of the Black Sea blue economy. It is noteworthy that, Efforts to reduce disaster impacts and risks have not yet stemmed billions in economic losses Despite significant efforts to reduce disaster impacts, related economic losses remain stubbornly high. From 2015 to 2022, average annual direct economic losses exceeded \$115 billion worldwide, an amount equivalent to 0.3 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) of reporting countries. LDCs and landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) suffer disproportionately from disasters. Disaster-related economic losses in LDCs are over six times the global average.

From 2015 to 2022, this group of countries accounted for 6.9 per cent of global reported economic losses from disasters despite comprising only 1.1 per cent of reporting countries' combined GDP. Similarly, LLDCs reported 4.9 per cent of total economic losses, four times the global average, while accounting for only 1.1 per cent of reporting countries' combined GDP. Government spending on essential services is ticking up but with a chronic gap between advanced and developing economies Based on recent data from about 100 countries, worldwide government spending on essential services – encompassing education, health and social protection – averages around 50 per cent of total government expenditure. Among advanced economies, this figure rises to 60 per cent, while in emerging market and developing economies, it stands at 40 per cent. Over the past two decades, both groups have seen a slight uptick in their shares, maintaining a consistent 20-percentage-point gap between them (The Sustainable Development Goals Report, 2024).

Environmental policy stringency is becoming more pressing. The OECD Environmental Policy Stringency (EPS) index has become a widely used tool for policy analysis since its creation in 2019.

It is necessary to tighten environmental policies and use the necessary tools to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

As a result of the reforms in Georgia, the business environment in this sector has significantly improved, the administrative barriers related to business activities have been eased, and the provision of state services has become flexible. The Georgian economic policy implemented in the sector was positively evaluated by various agencies and international financial institutions, and the results were reflected in the indices and ratings of economic freedom.

However, taking into account the European framework conditions, it is very important for the further development of SMEs to promote their sustainable development. Also, to ensure sustainability, a number of economic problems need to be assessed in terms of environmental, social, and economic transformation. It is necessary to find ways to ensure the full inclusion of these types of enterprises in global value chains. On the other hand, identifying the challenges of sustainable development for SMEs and searching for ways to overcome them is an important opportunity to strengthen the competitive advantage of such enterprises

The main barriers to sustainable development in SMEs are the scarcity of own funds and less access to investments, insufficient experience, inconsistency of sustainable development goals with enterprise zones and applicable regulations, low level of international experience sharing; State institutional factors, including regulations, bureaucracy, etc. Accordingly, it is necessary to offer support measures to reduce the deficit of own financial resources, adjust financial regulations to attract investments, insufficient experience; Formation regulations promoting the introduction of SDGs, formation of ethical aspects of sustainable development policy in enterprises, ensure the balance of enterprise goals with SDGs.

The comparative analysis of the barriers to the sustainable development of enterprises showed that all the barriers in European countries are relevant for Georgia, especially the institutional factors and the lack of financial resources. However, there is little sharing of foreign experience on opportunities to stimulate sustainable development. It is advisable to share the successful practices of supporting initiatives and tools for stimulating the sustainable development of SMEs, it is especially important to use green credit guarantee schemes related to sustainable development, green/social financial instruments, sustainable supply chain management programs, sustainable public procurement, soft loans delivery channels as private in some cases, both at the institutional level.

Results and discussion. One of the priorities of the Georgian government in the process of economic development is the rational use of natural resources, ensuring ecological safety and sustainability, and preventing the risks of natural disasters. When making decisions, it is necessary to assess both economic feasibility and ecological and social effectiveness (Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia, 2016) IPM Market Intelligence Caucasus (IPM MIC), commissioned by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD), conducted a study focused on climate change and environmental issues in Georgia in November 2022. The aim of the study was to study the attitudes of the Georgian population towards the environment and climate change. The majority of respondents (64% of men and 70% of women) answer that climate change is most caused by deforestation, reduction of

vegetation cover; then in place is excessive energy consumption (43% of men and 46% of women), then in place is the increase in the number and use of private cars.

Government spending on essential services is ticking up but with a chronic gap between advanced and developing economies. Based on recent data from about 100 countries, worldwide government spending on essential services – encompassing education, health and social protection – averages around 50 per cent of total government expenditure.

Among advanced economies, this figure rises to 60 per cent, while in emerging market and developing economies, it stands at 40 per cent. Over the past two decades, both groups have seen a slight uptick in their shares, maintaining a consistent 20-percentage-point gap between them.

The study of the statistical indicators of SMEs in Georgia showed that their share in the total operating enterprises is 99.7%, 59.3% of the total number of employees are employed in this type of enterprise, and its share in the total output is 58%, in the total turnover – 40.8%, 59.3% of the total added value. According to the data of 2020, the share of products released in small enterprises was 32.5%, and in medium enterprises – 27.1%. In the same year, the share of small enterprises was 23.8% of the total volume of turnover, and the share of medium-sized enterprises was 17.9% [13].

By the 2021-2025 strategy for SME development in Georgia, it is important to determine the specifications of the country and to identify the challenges facing this sector. To make perfect the economic policy and harmonize it with the relevant regulations of the European Union, several changes were made in this law in the direction of the use of supporting mechanisms. It should be noted about one fact – in the 2021-2027 strategy of agriculture and rural development of Georgia, the growing productivity of SMEs was named among the strengths identified about the socio-economic situation in rural areas.

According to the OECD report, with a strategic approach to the development of SMEs, Georgia has achieved success in terms of entrepreneurship education and improvement of the operating environment of entrepreneurship [11].

The analysis showed us that the current political approaches to SMEs are generally positive. In particular, the regulatory framework for SMEs has been created, services for startups have been developed, the conditions of standards and technical regulations are in effect, the business environment has been improved, administrative regulations have been simplified, the tax burden has been eased, free trade has been supported, privatization has been promoted, etc. [8].

Conclusion. The Sustainable Development Goals 2024 report details the significant challenges the world faces in making significant progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, based on the latest data and assessments. It highlights areas where there are gaps and also shows where tangible progress has been made, for example in reducing global child mortality, preventing HIV infection, and increasing access to energy and mobile broadband. The report also highlights areas where action needs to be accelerated, particularly in critical areas that undermine progress on the Sustainable Development Goals – climate change, peace and security, inequality among countries, and more. According to the Sustainable Development Goals 2024 report, with only six years

left, current progress falls far short of what is needed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Without large-scale investment and large-scale action, the Sustainable Development Goals – a path to a more resilient and prosperous world and a path out of the current global crisis – will not be achieved.

Despite the increase in the intensity of environmental protection measures, at the modern level of technical development it is not always possible to completely avoid the harmful impact of the environment on nature. The expansion of the economy and the adoption of new technologies still increase the magnitude of the negative impact on nature. However, humanity cannot stop the production process because of this. Therefore, carrying out the production of material wealth, society always makes certain ecological concessions. Nevertheless, we are dealing with a certain paradox – in the past, products were ecologically clean and the negative impact on nature was minimal, but the standard of living was much lower and life expectancy was much shorter than today [1].

The paper defines the conditions for sustainable development in SMEs. In the paper, the main challenges of sustainable development and opportunities for stimulation are investigated with the following methodology: bibliographic research is conducted; Analysis, comparison, induction, and other methods are used; Quantitative and qualitative research has been conducted. The focus of the research is the sector of agriculture and the firms operating in this field. Conclusions. Conclusions are made on SMEs' main barriers to sustainable development and digital transformation (DX). Recommendations are offered on overcoming challenges and implementing opportunities for stimulation.

Based on the analysis of opportunities for identifying and stimulating sustainable development challenges in SMEs, the following conclusions and recommendations can be made. SMEs have limited access to conceptual information and indicators of sustainable development, and the level of involvement in the development of sustainable development strategies and initiatives is low. The digital transformation (DX) of enterprises and the creation of websites and mobile phone applications that will help improve access to sustainable development information and make effective decisions are recommended. It is also important to increase the involvement of representatives of SMEs in the process of developing the legislative/regulatory framework, changes, and harmonization with the international space, offering them appropriate legal consultations. What is more, it is very important to prevent the above-mentioned challenges at an early stage by integrating relevant teaching tools into educational programs. Special attention should be paid to entrepreneurial education and the promotion of an entrepreneurial environment. It is necessary to provide enterprises with information about new initiatives and instruments harmonized with the international space, to conduct relevant training on barriers and incentives that hinder sustainable development.

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