The Significance Of Pluralism Principles In Environmental Policy Of Uzbekistan

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the key factors influencing the environmental situation in the Republic of Uzbekistan, including global climate change, the issue of transboundary resources, anthropogenic pressure, and institutional features of environmental governance. It highlights the political, social, and economic consequences of major ecological threats such as the Aral Sea disaster, water scarcity, soil degradation, air pollution, and waste management challenges. The study emphasizes the importance of a political approach to environmental issues, the need for improved environmental governance, and the significance of aligning national policies with international environmental commitments.

Keywords: *Environmental threat, Aral Sea crisis, water scarcity, climate change, waste management, environmental policy, sustainable development, transboundary resources*

In recent years, Uzbekistan has undertaken large-scale reforms aimed at improving living conditions for its people, including in the field of environmental protection. Significant efforts have been made to preserve the environment, ensure the rational use of natural resources, address ecological problems, and mitigate their negative consequences. Strengthening legal, institutional, and social mechanisms to promote the principles of pluralism within the country's environmental policy has become an urgent task of today. As President Shavkat Mirziyoyev noted:

"In today's world, where technology, industrialization, and innovation have reached unprecedented levels in the 21st century, it is no coincidence that environmental problems are emerging as one of the most pressing global issues. If we fail to act with both the near and distant future in mind, rather than focusing solely on the present, we will not be able to achieve our intended goals" [1].

The environmental situation in the Republic of Uzbekistan is shaped by the interplay of global changes in the natural environment and the specific dynamics of regional socio-economic development. Among the key contributing factors are anthropogenic pressure, the transboundary nature of major resources, climate change, and institutional features of environmental governance. Uzbekistan's geographical location, climatic vulnerability, and reliance on transboundary water resources make ecological threats not only an environmental issue but also a matter of strategic importance.

"The importance of ecology is increasing with each passing year. Indeed, humanity can never afford to ignore the resolution of environmental problems, as failing to address them may pose serious threats to human life.

According to experts in the field, In the 21st century, ecology will become one of the top priorities in the global system of international relations. For instance, nearly half a century ago, academician A. Pokrovskiy noted: Modern man has always been in a state of war with nature. The devastating consequences of this are becoming increasingly evident year after year. If we fail to cultivate a culture of ecological responsibility in our relationship with nature, the outcome could be catastrophic [2]. In this context, the implementation of pluralistic principles in environmental policy is of paramount importance. It is essential to ensure the participation of civil society, non-governmental non-profit organizations (NGOs), and international partners in addressing such issues effectively."

From the perspective of political-ecological analysis, these threats must be regarded as structural factors that directly affect the stability of state governance, social cohesion, public health, and the country's foreign policy engagement. In this context, environmental issues should not be viewed solely as the domain of nature conservation efforts, but rather as an integral component of public policy. Addressing such challenges necessitates cross-sectoral coordination and integration into sustainable development processes, taking into account the diverse interests of various stakeholders.

The Development Strategy of New Uzbekistan is composed of seven interrelated priorities, with the sixth direction defined as "Addressing global challenges from the standpoint of national interests." In this regard, concrete measures are being taken, such as the creation of an additional 500,000 hectares of green space on the dried seabed of the Aral Sea, with the goal of expanding the total green area to 2.5 million hectares—or 78 percent of the territory—by the end of 2026. Furthermore, projects based on the Green Climate Fund and the Global Environment Facility are being implemented in the Aral Sea region to preserve biodiversity, prevent climate change and soil erosion. These ecological programs, concepts, and action plans define not only the current but also the future nature of the relationship between society and the environment in Uzbekistan. They set out the ecological vision, objectives, and principles to be pursued, along with tactical and strategic directions for achieving environmental goals and addressing national challenges. The primary objective of Uzbekistan's environmental policy is to ensure an ecologically safe environment that meets the vital needs of its citizens. This involves the protection of the natural environment, the rational use of natural resources, and the restoration of degraded ecosystems—effectively establishing a sustainable economic-environmental relationship between society and nature.

Among the most pressing global environmental threats is the desiccation of the Aral Sea. As a result of the intensive diversion of the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers during the 20th century, the drying up of the Aral Sea has turned the surrounding region into an ecological disaster zone. The degradation of ecosystems, increased soil salinization, and the rise in public health issues have transformed the environmental crisis into a structural threat to national security. Medical-ecological studies have recorded a steady increase in respiratory diseases, oncological disorders, and anemia in Karakalpakstan and neighboring areas [3]. Moreover, the disaster is of a transboundary nature: toxic dust-laden aerosols are carried by wind across borders, thereby intensifying regional tensions and posing serious international environmental risks.

Another major environmental threat facing Uzbekistan is water scarcity, which is driven by both climatic and geopolitical factors. As a downstream country dependent on transboundary rivers, Uzbekistan receives up to 80 percent of its total water supply from sources that originate beyond its national borders. According to official projections, by 2050, the water deficit could reach up to 25 percent of current consumption levels [4]. Given the growing demands of agricultural production and urbanization, this situation is expected to intensify both domestic and regional competition over water resources.

From a political standpoint, such dynamics necessitate the establishment of

effective mechanisms for managing transboundary water resources and require active diplomacy within regional institutions. Within the framework of Uzbekistan's environmental policy, this underscores the importance of pluralism—ensuring citizen participation in environmental decision-making, along with transparency and openness in governance processes.

In this context, global climate change also emerges as a crucial factor. Uzbekistan is witnessing a steady increase in average annual temperatures; according to the national hydrometeorological service, the rate of warming is approximately +0.29°C per decade [5]. The rise in extreme weather events, including droughts and floods, poses serious risks to water security, biodiversity, and agricultural productivity. These changes call not merely for environmental responses but for political solutions—namely, the development of adaptive and preventive strategies that are integrated into the national sustainable development system.

In addition, one of the emerging environmental threats is the deterioration of air quality in industrialized and urbanized areas. Cities such as Tashkent, Navoi, Almalyk, and Fergana consistently exceed permissible limits for particulate matter—specifically PM2.5 and PM10 (PM2.5 refers to particles with a diameter of 2.5 micrometers or less; PM10 refers to particles with a diameter of 10 micrometers or less)—particularly during the winter months. Combined with the increasing burden of motor vehicle emissions, this trend contributes to worsening public health, a decline in labor productivity, and rising healthcare costs—resulting in tangible politico-economic consequences.

Alongside this, waste management remains a critical issue. The lack of adequate recycling infrastructure, the low rate of waste segregation, and outdated landfill sites have led to soil and groundwater contamination. Currently, only about one-quarter of waste is recycled or disposed of in accordance with environmental standards [6]. Moreover, the legislative framework governing waste management requires significant reform. Limited participation of the private sector in this field has turned waste management into not only an ecological concern but also an institutional challenge—necessitating a reevaluation of policies in areas such as economic governance, investment, and entrepreneurship regulation.

Thus, the analysis of environmental threats in Uzbekistan reveals their complex and politically significant nature. These threats impact core components of national security, including food security, public health, demographic stability, social cohesion, and international cooperation. Consequently, environmental policy must not be viewed merely as a tool for nature conservation, but rather as an integral element of strategic state planning—requiring a foundation of scientific evidence, inter-agency coordination, and active participation by civil society.

Moreover, in the context of Uzbekistan’s dependence on regional water resources, geopolitical tensions are intensifying. For example, the transboundary rivers—especially the Amu Darya—originate in neighboring countries. Forecasts indicate that by 2050, water scarcity in Uzbekistan could reach up to 25 percent of the nation’s projected demand [7]. At the same time, the construction of the Qoshtepa Canal in Afghanistan poses a risk of reallocation of the Amu Darya’s flow. The canal is intended to provide irrigation for agricultural lands in Afghanistan’s Balkh, Jowzjan, and Faryab provinces. While the project promises agricultural benefits for Afghanistan, it has also sparked international concern. The Qoshtepa Canal is expected to divert up to 10 cubic kilometers of water annually from the Amu Darya—equivalent to approximately 25 percent of the river’s total volume. This could result in the river’s shallowing, increased drought conditions, and the depletion of downstream reservoirs.

The Amu Darya River represents one of Uzbekistan’s most vital natural resources, playing a crucial role in the country’s agriculture and irrigation systems. The diversion of a significant portion of its water through the Qoshtepa Canal by Afghanistan poses serious risks. This reduction in water flow could result

in major irrigation challenges for Uzbekistan's agricultural lands. Such a scenario threatens to disrupt the ecological balance, contribute to drought, and intensify water scarcity. With diminishing water resources, the natural environment within the Amu Darya basin faces increased degradation. Insufficient irrigation could lead to the drying out of arable land, increased soil salinization, and a decline in agricultural productivity. These environmental issues are not limited to the agricultural sector—they also jeopardize biodiversity and the ecological sustainability of rural areas. The situation highlights the urgent need to strengthen transboundary water diplomacy.

In this context, attention must also be paid to the escalating pressure that global climate change places on water and agricultural resources. In some regions of Uzbekistan, the growing threat of desertification is giving rise to ecological migration. Among the areas most vulnerable to this phenomenon are the regions of Karakalpakstan, Khorezm, Bukhara, and Kashkadarya [8].

Global challenges—particularly water-related issues—are not confined to any single country or region; rather, they are a matter of global concern. In the 21st century, the globalization of environmental problems such as water scarcity and climate change has turned these issues into critical factors shaping international relations. These challenges now define interactions not only between individual states, but also on regional and global levels. The problem of access to clean water, its safe treatment and efficient use, as well as the need to mitigate water-related risks, has compelled the Republic of Uzbekistan to take proactive steps in addressing these concerns. Accordingly, the national policy places particular emphasis on "preventing ecological problems that may harm the natural environment, public health, and the nation's genetic heritage" [9].

In addition, the problem of waste management is exacerbated by inadequate recycling infrastructure and weak institutional coordination. According to the State Committee for Ecology, only 24 percent of waste is either recycled or properly disposed of. Most landfills do not meet sanitary standards, posing a significant environmental threat, particularly to rural communities and recreational zones [10].

In Uzbekistan, the study, analysis, and resolution of such environmental challenges are coordinated by the State Committee for Ecology and Environmental Protection, which performs both regulatory and coordinating functions. The country's legal framework includes several foundational environmental documents, among them the Law "On Environmental Protection" (revised in 2021), the Law "On Environmental Expertise," and the Law "On the Rational Use of Water Resources," among other legislative acts. In addition, a number of strategic policy documents further strengthen the institutional framework—for instance, the National Strategy for the Conservation of Biodiversity until 2030 and the Concept for Transition to a Green Economy, approved in 2019.

In conclusion, the transformative developments taking place across all sectors of the country today are not only aimed at protecting nature but also at ensuring the legal rights and environmental interests of citizens. These efforts are intended to provide the population with the necessary conditions to live in a safe and healthy natural environment. The current phase of Uzbekistan's environmental policy is marked by an active transformation of its institutional and regulatory framework, driven by the need for systematic responses to ecological challenges and the fulfillment of international commitments to sustainable development. From a political standpoint, these processes signify a gradual shift from a technocratic model of environmental protection to a strategically oriented and institutionally grounded sustainability policy. This transition opens the way to more comprehensive and effective solutions to ecological problems.

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