

AID AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE TIMES OF SDGS: A CASE STUDY OF KAZAKHSTAN

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Received: 11 November, 2023 Revised: 15 December, 2023 Accepted: 26 December, 2023 Published: 31 December, 2023

ABSTRACT

This article provides an in-depth analysis of Kazakhstan's socio-economic and political landscape since its independence in 1991. It discusses the challenges the country faces, such as corruption, income inequality, and political authoritarianism, and how these impact its development. The article then aligns these challenges with specific Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), emphasizing Goals 8, 3, and 4, which focus on economic growth, health, and education. It also examines the role of international aid and critiques the effectiveness of international aid strategies, highlighting both their benefits and drawbacks. Case studies demonstrate the successes and failures in implementing these strategies in Kazakhstan, leading to suggestions for improving the efficiency of development strategies and international assistance.

Keywords: AID, Development, SDGS, Kazakhstan

INTRODUCTION

Overview of the Country:

Socio-economic and political background:

Kazakhstan is the world's ninth-largest country by land area and is located in Central Asia. After gaining independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, Kazakhstan underwent significant socio-economic and political changes. The country has a mixed economy that is heavily dependent on its natural resources, particularly oil, gas, and minerals.¹ Despite facing numerous challenges, including corruption and income inequality, Kazakhstan's economy has grown significantly over the past two decades, making it one of the most prosperous countries in the region.

Politically, Kazakhstan is a presidential republic with a strong authoritarian streak. Nursultan Nazarbayev, who served as the country's first president from 1991 until 2019, was widely regarded as a strongman who exerted tight control over the country's political institutions. In 2019, Nazarbayev resigned, and Kassym-Jomart Tokayev was elected as the new president. While there have been some efforts to

liberalize Kazakhstan's political system, the country remains largely authoritarian, with limited political freedoms and tightly controlled media.

Challenges in development:

Kazakhstan is a country that has undergone significant changes since gaining independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. However, despite the country's significant economic growth over the past two decades, it is facing several challenges in its development. One of the most pressing issues facing Kazakhstan is corruption. The country ranked 113th out of 180 countries in Transparency International's 2019 Corruption Perceptions Index, indicating that corruption remains a significant problem. Corruption is especially prevalent in the country's public sector, where officials are known to engage in bribery, embezzlement, and other forms of corrupt behavior. This undermines public trust in government institutions and hinders the country's development. Income inequality is another significant challenge facing Kazakhstan. While the country's per capita GDP has increased significantly over the past two

decades, income inequality remains high. According to the World Bank, the top 10% of Kazakhstan's population holds more than 33% of the country's wealth, while the bottom 10% holds just 1%.ⁱⁱ This disparity is a cause for concern, as it can lead to social unrest and political instability.

In addition to these domestic challenges, Kazakhstan's political system is also a cause for concern. The country is a presidential republic with a strong authoritarian streak. While there have been some efforts to liberalize the political system, the country remains largely authoritarian, with limited political freedoms and tightly controlled media. The government has been known to suppress opposition voices and crackdown on dissent, which undermines democracy and human rights in the country.

Furthermore, Kazakhstan's heavy dependence on its natural resources, particularly oil, gas, and minerals, makes it vulnerable to fluctuations in global commodity prices. The country's economy is heavily dependent on these exports, which account for more than 70% of its total exports.ⁱⁱⁱ This dependence on natural resources leaves the country exposed to external economic shocks, which can have a significant impact on its development. While Kazakhstan has made significant progress since gaining independence from the Soviet Union, it still faces several significant challenges in its development. Addressing these challenges will require sustained effort and a commitment to reform from both the government and civil society.

1. Alignment with SDGs:

Relevant SDGs for Kazakhstan:

Kazakhstan is facing several challenges in its development, and three particular Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are most relevant to the country's current problems. The first goal is Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth. Kazakhstan is facing challenges in creating decent job opportunities for its growing population. The country's economy is heavily dependent on its natural resources, particularly oil and gas, which can lead to instability. The COVID-19 pandemic has also disrupted the country's economy, leading to job losses and business closures. Therefore, achieving sustainable economic growth and creating decent work opportunities for its citizens is crucial. This can be achieved by diversifying the economy, promoting

entrepreneurship and innovation, and investing in infrastructure.

The second relevant SDG for Kazakhstan is Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being. Kazakhstan is also facing challenges in ensuring access to quality healthcare for its population. The healthcare system in the country needs significant improvements in terms of infrastructure, resources, and personnel. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the weaknesses in the healthcare system, particularly in the areas of testing and contact tracing. Therefore, achieving this goal is essential for the well-being of the people. This can be achieved by increasing investment in healthcare infrastructure, improving medical education and training, and promoting preventive healthcare measures.

The third relevant SDG for Kazakhstan is Goal 4: Quality Education. Kazakhstan needs to improve the quality of its education system to prepare its youth for the future. The country needs to ensure access to education for all its citizens, improve teacher training, and promote vocational education to meet the needs of the job market. The COVID-19 pandemic has also disrupted the education system, highlighting the need for innovative approaches to teaching and learning. Therefore, achieving this goal is essential for the development of the country. This can be achieved by increasing investment in education infrastructure, improving teacher training and support, and promoting lifelong learning.^{iv}

In conclusion, Kazakhstan is facing several challenges in its development, and achieving the SDGs is crucial for the country's progress. The three most relevant SDGs for Kazakhstan are Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being, and Goal 4: Quality Education. Achieving these goals requires significant investment, innovation, and collaboration between the government, private sector, civil society, and international partners.

Incorporated SDGs into national development plans and strategies:

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of 17 goals and 169 targets that aim to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all. Kazakhstan is committed to achieving the SDGs and has incorporated them into its national development plans and strategies.^v

Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth is included in Kazakhstan's National Development Plan (NDP) for 2021-2025.^{vi} The NDP focuses on economic diversification, promoting innovation and entrepreneurship, and creating decent job opportunities for its citizens. The plan aims to reduce the country's dependence on its natural resources and promote sustainable economic growth. The government has also launched several initiatives to support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and attract foreign direct investment.

Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being is also included in Kazakhstan's NDP for 2021-2025. The plan emphasizes the importance of strengthening the healthcare system, improving access to healthcare services, and promoting preventive healthcare measures. The government has launched several initiatives to improve the quality of healthcare services, including increasing the number of medical personnel, building new hospitals and medical centers, and introducing telemedicine services.

Goal 4: Quality Education is a priority for Kazakhstan, and the government has incorporated this goal into its NDP for 2021-2025. The plan aims to improve the quality of education, ensure access to education for all citizens, and promote vocational education to meet the needs of the job market. The government has launched several initiatives to improve the quality of education, including increasing investment in education infrastructure, improving teacher training and support, and promoting lifelong learning.

In conclusion, Kazakhstan has incorporated the SDGs into its national development plans and strategies, indicating the country's commitment to achieving these goals. The government has launched several initiatives to achieve the SDGs, including promoting economic diversification, strengthening the healthcare system, and improving the quality of education.

2. Role of International Aid:

International assistance has played an important role in helping Kazakhstan work towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that are most relevant to the country's challenges. The first SDG that is crucial for Kazakhstan is Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth. To achieve this goal, the country has received significant international assistance from organizations such as the World

Bank, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD).^{vii}

These organizations have provided funding for various projects aimed at diversifying the Kazakh economy, promoting entrepreneurship and innovation, and improving infrastructure. For example, the World Bank has provided funding for the Kazakhstan Energy Efficiency Project, which aims to improve energy efficiency in public buildings and industrial facilities, thereby reducing energy costs and promoting sustainable economic growth. Similarly, the UNDP has provided support for the Kazakhstan Green Economy Programme, which aims to promote the development of a green economy in the country, thereby creating new job opportunities and reducing dependence on natural resources.^{viii}

The second SDG that is important for Kazakhstan is Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being. To achieve this goal, the country has also received significant international assistance from organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the UNDP, and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).^{ix}

These organizations have provided funding for various projects aimed at improving healthcare infrastructure, increasing access to healthcare services, and promoting disease prevention and control. For example, the WHO has provided support for the development of the National Health Strategy for Kazakhstan, which aims to improve the quality and accessibility of healthcare services in the country. Similarly, USAID has provided funding for the Central Asia Regional Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Project, which aims to improve access to safe water and sanitation in the region, thereby reducing the incidence of waterborne diseases.

Overall, international assistance has played an important role in helping Kazakhstan work towards achieving the SDGs that are most relevant to the country's challenges. The funding and support provided by international organizations have helped to promote sustainable economic growth, create new job opportunities, improve healthcare infrastructure, and increase access to healthcare services, thereby contributing to the country's development.

International aid strategies:

International aid strategies have been an important tool for supporting economic development and improving social conditions in Kazakhstan. However, they have also been subject to criticism and controversies. One of the potential problems with international aid strategies is their effectiveness. While international organizations like the World Bank and the UNDP have provided significant funding to Kazakhstan for various projects, there is a risk that this funding may not be used effectively. Corruption, mismanagement, and other factors can lead to aid money being wasted or diverted from its intended purpose. Additionally, some critics argue that aid strategies may perpetuate a cycle of dependency, where recipient countries become reliant on foreign aid rather than developing their own sustainable economic systems.

Another potential problem with international aid strategies is the risk of creating a dependency on foreign aid. While aid can be useful in the short term, it may not be a sustainable solution to long-term economic development. Critics argue that aid can create a cycle of dependency, where recipient countries become reliant on foreign aid rather than developing their own sustainable economic systems. This can lead to a situation where aid becomes a substitute for domestic investment, which can hinder the development of local businesses and industries. Moreover, some international aid strategies may be controversial due to their political implications. For example, some critics argue that aid can be used as a tool for promoting political agendas or influencing the policies of recipient countries. This can lead to concerns about the sovereignty of recipient countries and their ability to determine their own development path.

Despite these potential problems, international aid strategies have also been effective in promoting economic development and improving social conditions in Kazakhstan. For example, aid has been instrumental in promoting sustainable economic growth and job creation, improving healthcare infrastructure, and increasing access to education and other social services. Additionally, international aid can be an important tool for providing emergency relief in times of crisis, such as during natural disasters or public health emergencies.

In conclusion, international aid strategies have both potential benefits and drawbacks, and it is important to carefully consider these factors when designing aid programs. While aid can be effective in promoting economic development and improving social conditions, it is important to ensure that aid is used effectively and that it does not create a dependency on foreign aid. Additionally, aid programs should be designed in a way that respects the sovereignty of recipient countries and avoids promoting political agendas.

3. Case Studies and Examples:

Implementation (successes and failures) of projects:

i. Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth:

- Success: In Kazakhstan, the World Bank supported the development of the country's first mortgage-backed securities to boost lending to homebuyers. This project was successful in increasing access to finance and stimulating economic growth.^{xi}

- Failure: One of the challenges in implementing Goal 8 in Kazakhstan has been the lack of job opportunities outside of the oil and gas sector. The government has been working to diversify the economy and create more jobs in other industries, but progress has been slow.

ii. Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being:

- Success: In Kazakhstan, a UNICEF-supported program helped improve the quality of health care for mothers and children in rural areas. This program provided training for health workers and improved access to essential medicines, resulting in a decrease in child mortality rates.

- Failure: One of the challenges in implementing Goal 3 in Kazakhstan has been the high prevalence of smoking and alcohol consumption. Despite efforts to raise awareness about the dangers of tobacco and alcohol, many people continue to engage in these harmful behaviors.

iii. Goal 4: Quality Education:

- Success: Kazakhstan has made significant efforts to improve the quality of education in the country. One example is the Bolashak program, which provides scholarships for Kazakh students to study abroad at top universities. This program has helped to develop a pool of highly educated professionals in the country.

- Failure: One of the challenges in implementing Goal 4 in Kazakhstan has been the lack of access to education in rural areas. Many children in rural areas do not have access to quality schools or qualified teachers, which has resulted in lower levels of educational attainment in these regions.

Lessons learned and implications for future development strategies:

The examples of successes and failures in implementing Goals 8, 3, and 4 in Kazakhstan provide important lessons for future development strategies. One lesson is that successful implementation of these goals requires collaboration and partnership between the government, private sector, civil society, and international organizations. For example, the World Bank's support for the development of mortgage-backed securities in Kazakhstan was successful due to the collaboration between the government and the private sector.

Another lesson is that addressing challenges related to these goals requires a long-term and comprehensive approach. For example, improving access to quality education and health care requires not only investments in infrastructure and resources but also efforts to raise awareness and change attitudes and behaviors. The examples also highlight the importance of tailoring strategies to the specific context and needs of the country. In Kazakhstan, efforts to diversify the economy and create more job opportunities have been necessary to achieve Goal 8, while addressing the high prevalence of smoking and alcohol consumption has been critical for achieving Goal 3.

Moving forward, future development strategies should take these lessons into account and prioritize collaboration, comprehensive approaches, and context-specific strategies. This will help to ensure that progress is made towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and improving the lives of people in Kazakhstan and beyond.

4. Critical Evaluation:

SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth - Progress has been made in some areas towards achieving this goal, such as reducing the global unemployment rate and increasing access to financial services. However, challenges remain, such as persistently high levels of informal employment, gender gaps in labor force participation and pay, and income inequality. Additionally, the COVID-19

pandemic has had a significant impact on progress towards this goal, with many people losing their jobs or experiencing reduced income.

SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being - Significant progress has been made towards improving global health outcomes, such as reducing maternal and child mortality rates, increasing access to vaccines, and reducing the incidence of infectious diseases. However, challenges remain in many areas, such as reducing the burden of non-communicable diseases, addressing mental health issues, and achieving universal health coverage. The COVID-19 pandemic has also highlighted the need for greater investment in health systems and preparedness.

SDG 4: Quality Education - Progress has been made in improving access to education, with more children attending school and completing primary education than ever before. However, quality of education remains a concern, with many children not achieving basic literacy and numeracy skills. Additionally, gender disparities in education persist, particularly at higher levels of education, and access to education remains a challenge for many marginalized groups. The COVID-19 pandemic has also had a significant impact on education, with many children unable to attend school due to school closures and disruptions to learning.^{xii}

Suggestions:

Improving the efficiency of development strategies and international assistance requires a multifaceted approach that involves collaboration between governments, international organizations, and local communities. Here are some suggestions:

1. Focus on building local capacity:

Development strategies should prioritize building local capacity by investing in education, training, and skill development programs. This will enable communities to become self-sufficient and reduce their reliance on international aid. By providing the necessary tools and resources, the communities can take control of their own development and create sustainable solutions that will benefit them in the long run. Therefore, it is important to prioritize local capacity building as a part of any development plan.

2. Increase transparency and accountability:

One way to improve the effectiveness of international aid is by increasing transparency and accountability in aid organizations. This can be achieved by regularly reporting on their activities and outcomes. By doing so, aid organizations can build trust with local communities and ensure that aid is being used effectively. To increase transparency, aid organizations can make their financial reports public, disclose their sources of funding, and provide detailed information on the projects they are working on. This will help local communities to understand how aid is being used and to hold aid organizations accountable for their actions.

3. Foster partnerships between governments and NGOs:

To maximize the impact of development efforts, it is important for governments and NGOs to work collaboratively. By fostering partnerships between these two entities, it is possible to develop and implement development strategies that are tailored to the needs of local communities. These partnerships can be built on mutual respect, shared goals, and a willingness to work together towards a common vision. By working together, governments and NGOs can identify the most pressing issues facing local communities and develop targeted solutions that address these challenges. For example, governments can provide funding and resources for development projects, while NGOs can provide expertise and on-the-ground support.

Together, these two entities can ensure that aid is being used efficiently and effectively.

4. Encourage innovation and technology:

Innovation and technology have the potential to revolutionize the way we approach development efforts. By embracing new ideas and technologies, it is possible to improve the effectiveness of development strategies, reduce costs, increase efficiency, and enable greater collaboration between stakeholders. For example, the use of mobile technology can help to bridge the gap between remote communities and development organizations, enabling more efficient communication and collaboration. Similarly, the use of renewable energy technologies can help to reduce energy costs and improve access to electricity in rural areas.

5. Monitor and evaluate outcomes:

Development strategies should be regularly monitored and evaluated to ensure that they are achieving their intended outcomes. This will help to identify areas for improvement and ensure that resources are being used effectively. Monitoring and evaluation can take many forms, including tracking key performance indicators, conducting surveys and focus groups, and analyzing data on project outcomes. By collecting and analyzing this information, development organizations can gain a better understanding of the impact of their work and make informed decisions about future investments.

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