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IMPACT OF INCREASED ENVIRONMENTAL ANXIETY ON THE YOUTH OF UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract

Over the past decades, our country has faced many environmental challenges, the consequences of which are deterioration of air quality, pollution of water and soil, accumulation of waste and degradation of agricultural lands. These problems not only cause direct damage to ecosystems, but also affect the social and psychological state of society. In recent years, attention to environmental anxiety among young people has been growing, since it is we who will have to solve the problems and take the brunt of climate change and environmental degradation. This paper examines the main environmental problems of Uzbekistan, their impact on the population, as well as the efforts of the state and NGOs to improve the environmental situation.

Keywords: *environmental anxiety, sustainable development, air pollution, water resources, waste management, desertification, youth of Uzbekistan, sustainable development, psychological impact, environmental initiatives.*

Introduction. The environmental situation in Uzbekistan is deteriorating, and this is causing growing concern among the population, especially among young people. Air pollution in large cities, degradation of agricultural land, problems with waste disposal and lack of water resources - all this has a negative impact not only on the environment, but also on the mental state of people.

In terms of productivity, maize surpasses other cereal and fodder crops. Currently, the average maize yield in Uzbekistan is 25–30 centners per hectare for grain and 200–250 centners per hectare for green fodder. However, this is 2–2.5 times lower compared to other countries [1].

The environmental situation in Uzbekistan is deteriorating for a number of reasons. One of the most acute problems has become air pollution in large cities such as Tashkent and Navoi. Emissions from industrial enterprises and motor vehicles, especially in winter, increase the concentration of harmful particles in the atmosphere, which negatively affects human health. According to the Ministry of Ecology, Environmental Protection and Climate Change, emissions of harmful substances from industrial enterprises and motor vehicles lead to an increase in the concentration of PM2.5 particles in the atmosphere, which poses a serious threat to public health. The air pollution index has consistently exceeded permissible standards in recent years, and the figures for 2023 exceeded the average annual value set by WHO by 5.7 times.

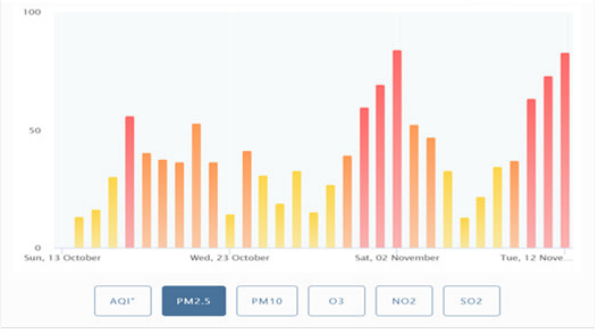


Figure 1. Chronological graph of PM2.5 particle content in the atmosphere in Tashkent. October-November, 2024. IQAir website

Also, soil degradation and desertification pose a serious threat to agriculture. And it is a key sector of the economy of Uzbekistan. Excessive use of chemical fertilizers and unregulated irrigation by irrational methods have led to salinization and depletion of fertile lands. Now, about 40% of agricultural areas have been degraded. Deterioration of the soil negatively affects ecosystems, destroying the natural habitat for many living organisms, and saline and desertified lands become unsuitable for growing crops, which leads to economic losses.

Waste management issues also require attention. The volume of waste produced in the country increases by 15-20% annually. As a result, large volumes of waste end up in landfills, polluting the soil and water resources, creating a risk to public health. Insufficient waste recycling infrastructure worsens the sanitary conditions of cities and villages, emphasizing the need to modernize the solid waste management system. Today, the volume of solid municipal waste in Uzbekistan is 36 million cubic meters per year, and each citizen produces about 165 kg of waste annually. On average, waste consists of 25% food waste, 5-10% paper, 50% polymers, the rest is metal, textiles, rubber, glass and other materials.

Between 2017 and 2020, the generation of toxic waste of hazard classes 1-3 per capita increased from 0.7% to 10.6%. During the same period, the level of recycling of municipal solid waste increased from 9% to 21.9%. However, the country's solid waste management systems are not yet equipped to meet current demand. Outside of Tashkent, only rudimentary waste management systems operate, and collected waste is often simply thrown into open landfills outside of populated areas. According to statistics, Uzbekistan produces about 8 million tons of waste per year, of which less than 20% is recycled. Underdeveloped waste management systems, old landfills and lack of recycling infrastructure lead to contamination of soil and water resources. This poses a threat to public health and harms the environment, worsening the sanitary condition of cities and villages.

The total irrigated area in Uzbekistan is 4.2 million hectares, with agriculture remaining the largest consumer of water resources, using over 90% of available water. High levels of water withdrawal for agricultural needs, along with pollution of the transboundary Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers, make water less suitable for domestic and agricultural use. Pollution of water bodies with chemical fertilizers and industrial effluents worsens the condition of aquatic ecosystems and increases risks to public health. The situation is especially acute in regions dependent on transboundary rivers, where the quality and availability of water decrease

sharply during dry periods. And despite the introduction of water-saving technologies, their use is limited by high costs. However, thanks to the support of farmers with state subsidies, since 2019 the area equipped with water-saving technologies has increased significantly. By 2023, such irrigation methods were already used on 30% of all irrigated land.

All these environmental issues have a significant impact on the perception of the future, causing pessimism among the population. According to surveys, 75% of young people aged 16 to 30 are worried about the deterioration of the environmental situation. Environmental anxiety manifests itself in a sense of an impending threat and growing concern about one's own health and the health of loved ones, which in some cases can lead to apathy and loss of interest in personal and professional growth in one's country. However, today, the current generation is becoming more interested in sustainable development issues and is actively involved in projects to clean up areas, often initiated by themselves, as well as NGOs and commercial enterprises.

In recent years, the amount of environmental content on social networks has increased dramatically, which has generated interest in environmental education aimed at raising awareness about the state of the environment in the country and the role of the state, NGOs and businesses in improving the situation. Interest in environmental issues is also evidenced by the growing number of non-specialist participants in seminars, exhibitions, competitions and festivals at the local and international level dedicated to sustainable development goals, the problems of the Aral Sea and climate change. Also, more and more youth initiatives are appearing in Uzbekistan. In response to growing environmental anxiety, projects and movements are emerging in the country aimed at protecting the environment and forming sustainable environmental habits. Over the past few years, for example, plogging has become increasingly popular. This movement, which emerged in 2016 in Sweden, involves jogging and collecting trash, cleaning up urban spaces. In Uzbekistan, similar campaigns are supported by the Yoshlar Eco Club movement, which organizes cleanups and tree planting. Youth volunteers participate in practical events and raise public awareness by holding lectures, seminars and workshops on sustainable development and ecology. This movement is supported by both public and private organizations. Another significant initiative is the Green Marathon project, which aims to plant trees across the country. The Clean Up UZ program, which promotes separate waste collection and promotes the development of a recycling culture, also plays an important role. The active participation of residents in such projects underlines the desire of people to improve the environmental situation and their willingness to take personal responsibility for their future.

Conclusion

The increase in environmental anxiety among the youth of Uzbekistan is an alarming signal that requires attention and action. The negative consequences of climate change, environmental pollution and loss of biodiversity are already being felt in the country, causing young people to feel anxious and uncertain about the future.

It is important to understand that environmental anxiety is not just an emotion, but a reaction to real threats. It can lead to apathy, helplessness, as well as protest sentiments and activism.

To cope with this problem, it is necessary to:

Raise awareness: Conduct educational campaigns on environmental issues, the role of humans in climate change and ways to solve these problems.

Develop environmental education: Include environmental topics in school curricula, support environmental clubs and organizations.

Create opportunities for participation: Involve young people in solving environmental problems, provide them with the opportunity to participate in environmental projects and initiatives.

Develop sustainable development: Switch to environmentally friendly technologies, create "green" jobs, promote sustainable agricultural practices.

It is important to remember that environmental anxiety is not only a problem, but also an opportunity. Young people concerned about the future of the planet can be a driving force for positive change. Their activism, knowledge, and enthusiasm can help create a more sustainable and environmentally friendly future for Uzbekistan.

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