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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 17 – "PARTNERSHIP FOR THE GOALS": UZBEKISTAN'S ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2024, CHINA'S COOPERATION WITH THE "BELT AND ROAD" INITIATIVE, AND RESTRICTIONS ON WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION MEMBERSHIP

Abstract: This research analyzes Uzbekistan's progress on Sustainable Development Goals 17- *Partnership for the Goals* from 2015 to 2024, focusing on Uzbekistan's SDG score, official development assistance (ODA), foreign direct investment (FDI), trade, GNI per capita, and internet access. The study uses secondary data collected from United Nations Reports and the World Bank, and acknowledges limitations due to small size. Descriptive statistics and a pairwise correlation analysis were used, and the relationships between variables are visually presented using a graph matrix. This study also compares the roles of Belt and Road initiative (BRI) and World Trade Organization (WTO). Findings show that BRI is more flexible and offers faster results, especially in trade and developing infrastructure. In contrast, WTO membership requires from Uzbekistan significant changes in implementation of transparent legal reforms, and establish independent dispute systems. Politically and economically, BRI appears to align more closely with Uzbekistan's current development model. The study concludes with policy suggestions for strengthening global partnerships.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goals 17, Belt and Road initiative, World Trade Organization.

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I. Introduction

1.1. Global Trends

In 2015, the United Nations introduced the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations, 2015). They aim to address global challenges such as poverty, gender inequality and climate change, and to create a sustainable and prosperous future for the entire world community. SDG 17, *Partnership for the Goals*, seeks to strengthen cooperation between developed and developing countries in the current era of globalization. Success of this achievements require strong partnerships between governments, the private sector, and civil society organizations (United Nations, 2015). The goal also calls for mobilizing resources to support sustainable development efforts worldwide. These resources include foreign direct investment, official development assistance (ODA), trade agreements, and regional partnerships.

Loungani and Razin (2001) argue that foreign direct investment facilitates the transfer of new types of manufactured goods and technologies from one country to another—transfers that cannot be achieved through trade in goods and services alone. Official development assistance (ODA) is a vital system of transfers from developed countries to developing countries for the development of education, health, climate change, and infrastructure. Trade agreements and regional partnerships are mechanisms designed to accelerate and strengthen economic integration. The World Trade Organization (WTO) and China's Belt and Road (BRI) projects are among such mechanisms.

The core mission of the WTO is to promote trade between countries by reducing trade barriers, and facilitate this process (World Trade Organization, 2024). The organization notes that trade increases a country's revenue-generating potential and is an important condition for achieving sustainable development (WTO, 2024). China's BRI initiative also aims to develop infrastructure, and increase trade between Asia, Europe, and Africa (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2023). The World Bank (2019) projects that the

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Belt and Road Initiative could help reduce poverty by lifting approximately 7.6 million people from extreme poverty and 32 million from moderate poverty by 2030 (World Bank, 2019). These frameworks, mechanisms and projects aim to foster global cooperation and strengthen Sustainable Development Goal 17 – *Partnership for the Goals*.

1.2 Central Asia's Role in Global Partnership

In recent years Central Asia has become an epicenter for multilateral partnerships and the global development process, due to a combination of its strategic geographical position connecting East Asia to Europe and its role in initiating BRI project (Pomfret, 2020). This BRI project is demonstrating the beginning of a new era for political and economic relationships, especially from a long-term perspective (Zoi Environment Network, 2018).

China allocated over $40 billion in foreign direct investment (FDI) across the region in 2023, highlighting its growing economic footprint (CSIS, 2024). For instance, Kazakhstan received more than $5.7 billion in FDI to build the BRI-related project the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR) (World Bank, 2024). Geographically, Azerbaijan is not part of the Central Asia, but in this situation, the country plays a crucial role. This corridor links Central Asia to both Europe and the Middle East through the Caspian Sea route (Zoi Environment Network, 2018). That's why Azerbaijan is focusing on the expansion of the Port of Baku (World Bank, 2019).

Central Asian countries are interested in participating in the global partnerships to expand their economies, diversify their partners, form new alliances and free themselves from Russian economic and political control. According to the UN SDG Global Trackers all these countries share the same challenges in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. These include limited diversification of partnerships, administrative and institutional barriers, data and monitoring gaps, and capacity constraints. For these reasons Central Asian

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countries are lagging behind in technological innovations, technology transfer and international cooperation (UN, 2024).

2024 SDG Index Scores for Central Asian Countries

Country	SDG Index Score (2024)	Global Rank (out of 167)
Kyrgyzstan	74.2	48
Kazakhstan	71.1	66
Uzbekistan	69.2	81
Tajikistan	68.1	89
Turkmenistan	67.1	94

Table 1. The SDG Index Scores are based on the Sustainable Development Report 2024.https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal17

1.3 Uzbekistan: From Isolation to Integration (2015–2024)

Uzbekistan was founded on August 31, 1991, after the collapse of communist regime in the Soviet Union. From 1991 until today, it has experienced only two administrations. Uzbekistan's first president, Islom Karimov, led a long-standing administration, and maintained limited international relations in the world economy. In 2016, the second president, Shavkat Mirziyoyev was appointed as acting president, and Uzbekistan has become progressive, open and more internationally oriented. Subsequently, Uzbekistan developed a model focused on capitalism, a liberal economy, diversification, and regional and global partnerships (World Bank, 2022). Uzbekistan has done a tremendous job in aligning with global partners by building a national strategy, and, as a result, it is engaging in trade frameworks with 137 countries in 2024 (Daryo, 2024).

In the last few years Uzbekistan's dedication to SDG 17 has been prominent. Uzbekistan has been successful in diversifying partnerships with Asian and EU countries. In 2024, Uzbekistan's top three trading partners were China, Russia and Kazakhstan (Caspian Policy Center, 2024). According to trade statistics from January 2024, Germany, France and the Czech Republic's trade volumes increased to $96.3 million, $78.3 million, and $64 million, respectively (Daryo, 2024).

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After Uzbekistan's engagement in implementing SDG Goals in 2015 and adoption of 16 SDG Goals (excluding Goal 14- *Life below water*), Official Development Assistance (ODA) also increased (United Nations, 2020; OECD, 2024). In 2015, the country received more than $384 million. After eight years, this number increased to $563 million (OECD, 2024). Uzbekistan's long-term goal is to become a high-income country by 2030. To accomplish this, the country is improving its business climate, enhancing financial and insurance systems, advancing professional development, and implementing structural, tax, and systematic reforms (United Nations, 2020).

Consequently, Uzbekistan developed infrastructural and economic partnerships through the BRI and WTO — a strategic choice for the country. In 2023 and 2024, China became the largest trading partner, $13.7 billion and $17.3 billion, respectively (Caspian Policy Center, 2023-2024). According to the Embassy of the Republic of Uzbekistan in the United Kingdom, China is Uzbekistan's largest investor. According to the Embassy of Uzbekistan in the UK (2023), China's investment reached $1.67 billion in 2022 and rose to $2.22 billion in 2023, with $739 million and $1.01 billion of that recorded as foreign direct investment, respectively (Embassy of the Republic of Uzbekistan in the United Kingdom, 2023). Between 2007 and 2023, China invested over $20 billion in Uzbekistan over 30 major projects, and bilateral trade between 2017 and 2022 increased from $4 billion to $8 billion (Khitakhunov, 2024; World Integrated Trade Solution). From 2013 to 2025 Uzbekistan is an active BRI projects participant, especially in construction sector. In 2024, Uzbekistan participated in more than 60 BRI projects, particularly the China–Kyrgyzstan–Uzbekistan railway project (CKU), which is expected to increase annual trade capacity by over $3 billion (Belt and Road Portal, 2024; Ministry of Transport, 2023).

Bilateral trade between Uzbekistan and China (2017- 2022, billion $)

Year	Exports (billion $)	Imports (billion $)	Total Trade (billion $

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2017	1,313	2,700	4,014
2018	2,121	3,539	5,660
2019	1,768	5,052	6,820
2020	1,282	4,426	5,708
2021	1,744	4,861	6,605
2022	1,753	6,321	8,075

Table 2. Uzbekistan's bilateral trade with China based on World Integrated Trade Solution 2017-2022.

https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/UZB/Year/2022/TradeFlow/EXPIMP

Simultaneously, Uzbekistan is preparing to join the World Trade Organization (WTO). Negotiations began in 1994, but resumed in 2020 after an almost 15-year break (World Trade Organization, 2024). However, the WTO accession process is gradual due to structural, institutional and political barriers. Uzbekistan still maintains a centralized governance model, and a presidential authoritarian regime (Freedom House, 2024). In addition, state-owned enterprises (SOEs) play an important role in business, telecommunications, banking, and energy sectors (World Bank, 2023). According to WTO documentation, Uzbekistan is actively participating in bilateral negotiations with 15 WTO members (WTO Working Party, 2024). However, limitations remain that hinder the process. Strategically and selectively, Uzbekistan is focusing on short-term cooperation with China and the BRI (UNDP Uzbekistan, 2024).

1.4 Research aim, objectives, question and limitations

The aim of this research is to analyze Uzbekistan's progress on Sustainable Development Goals 17 from 2015 to 2024 by examining indicators such as official development assistance (ODA), foreign direct investment (FDI), purchasing power parity (PPP), internet access, export and import performance. The study also analyzes Uzbekistan's participation in the BRI initiative and multiple barriers to becoming a member of the WTO.

The study's objectives are to analyze SDG performance of the country by examining ODA, FDI, GNI, trade, and internet usage. The analysis evaluates the

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role of BRI initiative in international partnership, and identifies limitations to WTO accession. Additionally, the research offers key policy recommendations to improve Uzbekistan's performance on SDG 17- *Partnership for the Goals*.

Research question: What are the economic and institutional drivers that impact Uzbekistan's performance on SDG 17, and how do the BRI initiative and WTO accession barriers affect the Uzbekistan's international development partnerships?

This analysis has limitations due to the small sample size, which affects the regression analysis, and which limits the statistical power of descriptive statistics, pairwise correlation and graph matrix analysis. In addition, political factors are not directly included in the empirical model.

1.5 Research Structure

This study has five sections that focus on different areas. First section is the introduction, the second is the literature review, followed by the methodology section. The fourth section presents the analysis and results, and the fifth is the conclusion and recommendations.

II. Literature review

The concept of SDG 17- Partnership for the goals is built around the idea for sustainable development for all countries under the 2030 Agenda (Maltais et al., 2018). It calls for action to ensure that no one is left behind - low and middle-income countries (United Nations, 2019). Achieving this goal requires global partnerships in finance, technology, capacity building, trade, working on systemic issues including political and institutional coherence, multi-stakeholder partnership, data, monitoring and accountability (United Nations, 2024).

There are numerous studies addressing the challenges of SDG 17 in developing countries. For instance, Sachs et al. (2023) stated "SDG 17 is the backbone of global sustainable development efforts, and yet remains underfunded and under-monitored in most low- and middle-income countries" (Sachs et al., 2023). In recent years the implementation of SDG Goals has been a fast-moving

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process in Uzbekistan, particularly regional integration (Daryo, 2025). There is a limited body of research on SDG 17 in Uzbekistan. Most of the available studies focus on descriptive and policy analyses, and there are very few adopt a quantitative empirical approach with similar studies, which analyses Uzbekistan's SDG 17 score by using descriptive, pairwise correlation and graph matrix analysis. For instance, Rahmetov and Rakhmetova (2022) said that Uzbekistan's strength lies in its motivation for reforms, and enhanced relations with their neighbours. However, they highlighted key challenges; including government's focus on exports and imports, significant barriers in job creation, monopoly, corruption, and economic mercantilism (Rahmetov and Rakhmetova, 2022).

There are also studies analyzing China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway project. For instance, Khitakhunov (2024) said that project was driven by internal, global, and regional factors. Moreover, this railway network can give landlocked Central Asian countries access to the Pacific Ocean, and accelerating the introduction of their products to the global market (Xinhua, 2025). In addition, several studies have addressed the benefits and challenges of WTO accession to Uzbekistan. For instance, Abduazizov (2024) examined positive impacts of becoming a WTO member. There he said that it provides security, certainty of access to other member countries' markets, promotes trade liberalization, strengthens Uzbek institutions and supports reform, and greater consumer variety (Abduazizov, 2024).

III. Methodology

3.1 Theoretical Framework

Sustainable Development Goals 17 – *"Partnerships for the Goals"* focus on global collaboration and includes 19 targets (United Nations, 2017). It directly addresses issues related to finance, technology, capacity building trade and systematic issues. The image below provides a brief overview of these targets.

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Finance (Targets 17.1 to 17.5): *17.1*: Improve domestic resource mobilization through international support. *17.2*: Encourage developed countries to meet their ODA commitments of 0.7% of GNI. *17.3*: Mobilize additional financial resources from multiple sources. *17.4*: Assist with long-term debt sustainability. *17.5*: Promote investment in least developed countries.	**Capacity Building (Target 17.9):** 17.9: Strengthen international support for national implementation of all SDGs. **Trade (Targets 17.10 to 17.12):** *17.10*: Promote a fair, rules-based multilateral trading system (WTO). *17.11*: Increase developing countries' exports. *17.12*: Implement duty-free and quota-free market access for LDCs.
Technology (Targets 17.6 to 17.8): *17.6*: Enhance cooperation and access to science, technology, and innovation. *17.7*: Promote transfer of environmentally sound technologies. *17.8*: Operationalize technology banks and ICT mechanisms.	**Systemic Issues (Targets 17.13 to 17.19):** *17.14*: Enhance policy coherence for sustainable development. *17.16-17.17*: Foster multi-stakeholder partnerships. *17.18-17.19*: Improve data, monitoring, and accountability.

Picture 1. Brief overview of the SDG 17 targets

https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/globalpartnerships/

3.2 Data Sources and Variable Measurement

This research examines Uzbekistan's performance on SDG 17 from 2015 to 2024 and has limitations due to the small sample size. The secondary data includes the following variables:

1. Uzbekistan's SDG score (dependent variable)
2. Net ODA received (% of GNI)
3. Foreign direct investment net inflows (% of GDP)
4. Trade (% of GDP)
5. GNI per capita PPP (current international $)
6. Individuals using the Internet (% of population)

The data were collected from World bank and the United Nations Sustainable Development Reports. These variables were selected because they directly align

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with the components of SDG 17: finance (ODA, FDI), trade (export-import share in GDP), and technology (internet usage).

Table 3: Data Sources and Measurement

Variables	Description of Variables	Source
SDG	Uzbekistan's SDG score	United Nations SDG reports
ODA	Net ODA received (% of GNI)	World Bank
FDI	Foreign direct investment net inflows (% of GDP)	World Bank
TR	Trade (% of GDP)	World Bank
GNI	GNI per capita PPP (current international $),	World Bank
INT	Individuals using the Internet (% of population)	World Bank

$$SDG_t = a_0 + \beta_1 ODA_t + \beta_2 FDI_t + \beta_3 TR_t + \beta_4 GNI_t + \beta_5 INT_t + \varepsilon_t$$

This research includes descriptive statistics and a pairwise correlation analysis between the variables. In addition, the relationship between variables are visually presented using a graph matrix.

IV. Results and Discussion

This section of the analysis is limited due to the small sample size, and relies on time series data from 2015 to 2024. The primary objective of this part is to examine how finance, trade, technology and income indicators influence Uzbekistan's global partnership progress by using descriptive statistics, pairwise correlation, and graph matrix analysis. Table 2 summarizes the descriptive statistics. The mean values of SDG, ODA, FDI, TR, GNI, and INT are 65.757, 1.439, 2.297, 53.774, 8903, and 67.35, respectively. The standard deviations of SDG, ODA, FDI, TR, GNI, and INT are 3.028, 2.465, 0.568, 0.763, 14.291, 1508.038, and 17.766, in turn. On the one hand, average SDG score ranged from a minimum of 62.41 to a maximum 69.24, indicating gradual but steady progress over time. On the other hand, the descriptive statistics of GNI, Internet usage, and Trade show an upward trend, and statistics of ODA, and FDI illustrate a downward trend.

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Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables

Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
SDG	10	65.757	2.465	62.41	69.24
ODA	10	1.439	.568	.515	2.196
FDI	10	2.297	.763	1.064	3.442
TR	10	53.774	14.291	29.192	64.964
GNI	10	8903	1508.038	6910	11020
INT	10	67.35	17.766	42.8	89

Table 5 describes strong and weak relationships between the variables. SDG score has a strong relationship with year and verifies Uzbekistan's progress over the years. FDI shows the weakest correlation with SDG score, Trade and ODA are moderately correlated. This may be due to year-to-year volatility and development aid support progress. Internet usage and GNI are highly correlated, and highlight the important role of digital technologies and increased income level.

Table 5: Correlation Matrix of Variables

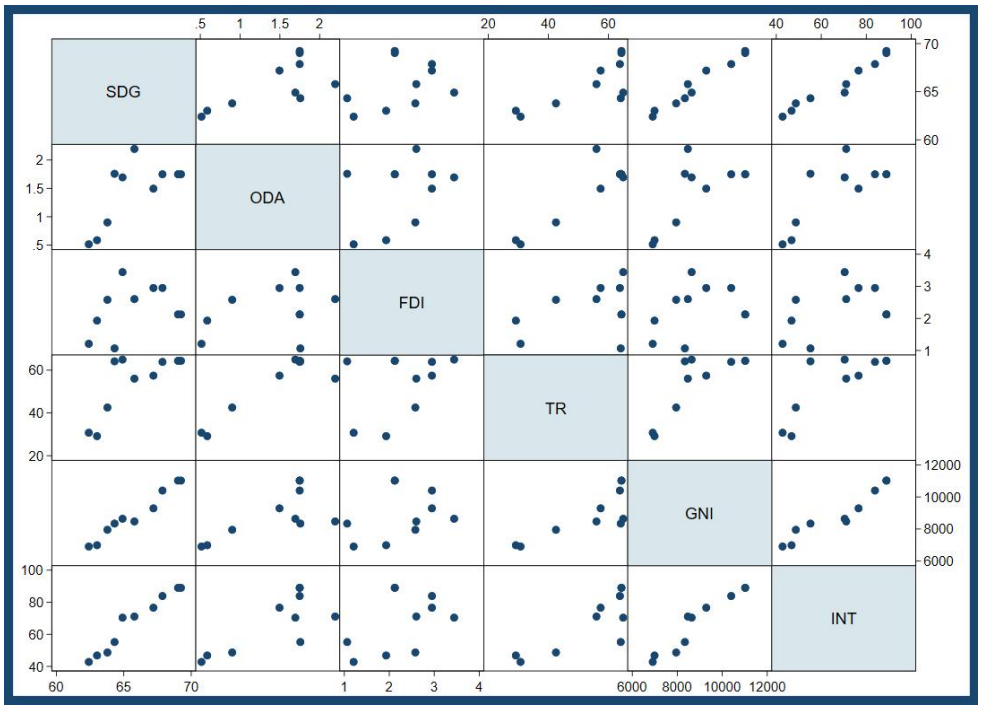
Pairwise correlations

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
(1) year	1.000						
(2) SDG	0.993	1.000					
(3) ODA	0.750	0.688	1.000				
(4) FDI	0.391	0.357	0.366	1.000			
(5) TR	0.804	0.758	0.905	0.376	1.000		
(6) GNI	0.975	0.981	0.676	0.324	0.800	1.000	
(7) INT	0.983	0.976	0.761	0.475	0.812	0.956	1.000

The graph matrix analysis shows visual relationship between the variables. On the one hand, SDG result suggests strong linear trends with GNI and Internet usage. On the other hand, FDI has a weak correlation with SDG progress and suggesting foreign investment alone is not impactful for advancing SDG 17 Goals.

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Graph 1: Graph Matrix Analysis



According to the statistical and visual analysis, rising income level (GNI per capita), increased digital access, trade openness and Official Development Assistance (ODA) are the most important influencers of Uzbekistan's SDG 17 performance. Only foreign direct investment (FDI) shows a weak impact on SDG progress. However, it means BRI related foreign investment may not align with Uzbekistan's SDG progress, and mainly focus on developing infrastructure, and trade growth. Simultaneously, Uzbekistan's WTO accession is in progress, and it can increase trade between countries, reduce trade barriers, and facilitate the trading process. But, BRI investment is already showing the good results, and in short-term it has a significant effect on trading. Plus, BRI is flexible and bilateral cooperation, whereas the WTO operates through a rule-based negotiation process, right now Uzbekistan uses state-owned enterprises (SOE) subsides, WTO has limit for them, and obliges its members to implement transparent legal reforms, and independent dispute systems.

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V. Conclusion

This study was motivated by the need to empirically evaluate Uzbekistan's progress on Sustainable Development Goal 17 (SDG 17) — *Partnership for the Goals* by considering the roles of the Belt and Road initiative (BRI) and the World Trade Organization (WTO). This research analyzed Uzbekistan's SDG score by examining Uzbekistan's Net ODA received (% of GNI), foreign direct investment net inflows (% of GDP), trade (% of GDP), GNI per capita PPP (current international $), and individuals using the Internet (% of population) from 2015 to 2024, using descriptive statistics, pairwise correlation and graph matrix analyses. These indicators directly align with the components of SDG 17: finance (ODA, FDI), trade (export-import share in GDP), and technology (internet usage). Descriptive statistics indicated gradual but steady improvement in Uzbekistan's SDG score. The pairwise correlation showed that FDI had the weakest correlation with SDG score, while trade, ODA, GNI per capita and Internet access were moderately or strongly correlated. The graph matrix also visualized these patterns. These findings lead to the following key policy recommendations.:

- Foreign direct investment, which currently focuses on building infrastructure, and trade growth, it should be redirected into emerging sectors, such as green energy, sustainable constructions, and advanced technologies.
- Uzbekistan should place greater attention on Net ODA received (% of GNI) and trade facilitation policies.

From a geopolitical and economic point of view, this research shows that BRI related foreign investment does not directly align with Uzbekistan's SDG 17 targets but significantly contributes to infrastructure development and trade expansion. BRI is flexible and generates visible short-term benefits for Uzbekistan's development. At the same time, the ongoing WTO accession process offers opportunity to diversify Uzbekistan's partnership and expand its access to

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global markets. However, there are multiple barriers make WTO accession a complex process.

Comparison of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and World Trade Organization (WTO)

Features	**BRI**	**WTO**
Rate of impact	Fast, project-based	Rule-based
Control over time	Flexible, bilateral	Requires implementation of transparent legal reforms, and independent dispute systems
Governance	centralized governance model, state-owned enterprises (SOE) subsides	reduces state control and subsidies
Outcomes	Clear, short-term benefits	Uncertain, with many delays in negotiations and membership processes

Focusing on the Belt and Road initiative aligns more closely with Uzbekistan geopolitically and economically. This study provides quantitative and policy-based assessment of SDG 17 in the context of Uzbekistan's transition to an industrialized economy. To improve SDG 17 performance, Uzbekistan should implement key policy reforms. First, foreign direct investment should be more strategically directed toward green energy, sustainable construction, and advanced technologies. Second, the country should pay attention to ODA and trade development. In conclusion, Uzbekistan SDG 17 - Partnership success will depend on how it balances external cooperation with internal reforms, and which global partnership model it chooses to prioritize.

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