



The University of World Economy and Diplomacy
**Institute for Advanced
International Studies**



THE WORLD BANK

THINK ROAD FORUM

**RETHINKING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN
CENTRAL ASIA IN THE AGE OF EMERGING
REGIONALISM**

18-19 November 2025

Rethinking Sustainable Development in Central Asia in the Age of Emerging Regionalism

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About the Forum

THINK ROAD FORUM is the flagship annual event of the Institute for Advanced International Studies (IAIS), designed as a dynamic platform for exchanging ideas among think tanks, civil servants & civil society, and business leaders across the historical Silk Road region and beyond. The name reflects our dedication to thoughtful engagement as a think tank committed to creating a roadmap for development along – and beyond – the historic Silk Road. Each year, the Forum centers around critical themes shaping the future of the region. In 2025, we focus on Rethinking Sustainable Development in Central Asia in the context of strengthening regional cooperation.

Conceptual Framework of 2025 Theme

Central Asia stands at a pivotal crossroads in its journey toward sustainable development. With vast resources, rich cultural diversity, and strategic location, the region holds immense potential for leading a sustainable development agenda. However, persistent challenges—ranging from environmental degradation to geopolitical volatility—require integrated, forward-thinking solutions.

As sustainability became a global imperative, Central Asian states must rethink their development paradigms. Achieving long-term, inclusive growth in the region demands cross-border and cross-sector collaboration, informed policy innovation, and active intergenerational participation and cooperation.

Our Vision

To establish a sustainable platform that brings together strategic actors across the policy ecosystem, including Think Tanks generating evidence-based insights, the Business Community contributing funds and applied expertise, Civil Society advancing inclusive and grassroots engagement, and the Civil Service ensuring policy implementation and institutional coherence, to collectively shape and sustain long-term development in Central Asia.

Format

The event will center around interactive panel discussions, where speakers will address questions posed by the panel chair. This will be followed by an audience Q&A session. Over the course of two days, the program will include keynote speeches, thematic panels, closed-door discussions, and hands-on workshops. Participants will collaborate to reimagine a sustainable future for Central Asia—one that is inclusive, innovative, and resilient.

PROGRAMME

Conference language: *English*

DAY 1

Tuesday, November 18, 2025

09:00 – 09:30	Registration
OPENING SESSION <i>Chaired by: H.E. Sodyq Safoev, First Deputy Chairman of the Senate of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Rector of the University of World Economy and Diplomacy</i>	
09:30 – 10:20	Opening Remarks by H.E. Sodyq Safoev, First Deputy Chairman of the Senate of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Rector of the University of World Economy and Diplomacy Keynote Address by Government official (tbc) Keynote statement by Jennifer Brick Murtazashvili, Director of the Center for Governance and Markets University of Pittsburgh
10:20-10:30	Photo Opportunity
10:30-11:00	Coffee Break & Networking
SESSION I: Geopolitical and Security Considerations for Sustainable Development in Central Asia <i>Chaired by: Akram Umarov, Director of IAIS and the First Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs of the University of World Economy and Diplomacy</i>	
11:00-12:00	<i>Guiding questions:</i> - What are the key geopolitical dynamics shaping Central Asia today? - How do major powers (e.g., Russia, China, the US, EU, Türkiye) influence the region's development and security? - What role do regional organizations (e.g., SCO, CSTO, OTS) play in Central Asia's stability? - What strategies can Central Asian countries adopt to enhance sustainable development and mitigate external pressures? <i>Panelists:</i> - Duman Zhekenov, Associate Professor, Al-Farabi National University, Kazakhstan - Yang Cheng, Executive President, Shanghai Academy of Global Governance and Area Studies (SAGGAS), Shanghai International Studies University - Fabienne Bossuyt, Associate Professor at Ghent University, Belgium - Elena Korosteleva, Professor of International Politics and Director of the Institute for Global Sustainable Development, University of Warwick, UK
12:00-12:15	Q&A
SESSION II: Sustainable Economic Development of Central Asia <i>Chaired by: Bakhrom Mirkasimov, Development Economist / Advisory Board Chair Chapter Zero Uzbekistan</i>	
12:15 – 13:15	<i>Guiding questions: Investment, Trade, Business, Transport</i>

	- What are the key sectors attracting foreign and regional investment in Central Asia? Why is investment crucial for sustainable economic development, and what risks deter investors? - Why is regional economic integration (e.g., Eurasian Economic Union, Economic Corridors) vital for Central Asia's growth? Why are economic corridors geopolitically and economically significant? When will Central Asia fully capitalize on its potential as a Eurasian transit hub? - Which national/regional policy initiatives or partnerships best promote long-term prosperity and environmental sustainability? - How can economic development strategies be made inclusive—benefiting youth, women, and vulnerable communities?
	<i>Panelists:</i> - Asif Razzak, Senior Researcher, CAREC Institute - Kamalbek Karymshakov, Vice-Rector Kyrgyz Turkish Manas University - Adham Khudaykulov, President, Tashkent University of Technology (TashTech) - Mansurjon Rasulev, Director, Investment Promotion Agency
13:15– 13:30	Q&A
13:30 – 14:30	Buffet Lunch
SESSION III: From Fossil Fuels to Renewables: Accelerating Central Asia’s Energy Transformation <i>Chaired by: Shakhboz Akhmedov, Head of Centre for Sustainable Development, IAIS, UWED</i>	
14:30 – 15:30	<i>Guiding questions:</i> - What are the key challenges hindering the sustainable transformation of Central Asia's energy sector? How do geopolitical factors and regional cooperation (or lack thereof) impact energy security and transition efforts? - How can governments and private sector stakeholders accelerate the shift from fossil fuels to clean energy while ensuring economic stability? - What policies, incentives, or regulatory frameworks are needed to attract investment in renewables? - How can think tanks, civil society, and youth contribute to shaping a future-oriented energy strategy in Central Asia?
	<i>Panelists:</i> - Otaboev Abdullajon, Deputy Director of Energy Market Development and Regulatory Agency (EMDRA) of the Republic of Uzbekistan - Farhod Aminjonov, Associate Professor of Strategy and Security Studies, National Defence College, Abu Dhabi, UAE - Nargiz Azizova, Senior Research Fellow, Institute for Development and Diplomacy, ADA University - Roman Vakulchuk, Head of the Research Group for Climate and Energy, the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs
15:30 – 15:45	Q&A
15:45 – 16:00	Coffee Break
SESSION IV: Regional Climate Change Adaptation and Water Resource Management <i>Chaired by: Barbara Janusz-Pawletta, IWMI Country Representative -Uzbekistan</i>	
16:00 – 17:00	<i>Guiding questions:</i> - How can Central Asian countries strengthen cooperation on shared water resources (e.g., Amu Darya, Syr Darya) amid growing climate pressures?

	- What role should regional organizations (e.g., ICWC, IFAS, SCO) play in facilitating sustainable water governance? - What are the key obstacles to effective transboundary water agreements, and how can they be overcome? - How can climate adaptation and water management policies be better integrated at regional and national levels? What new approaches can improve data sharing, science-based decision making, and technology adoption for water management in Central Asia? - How can capacity building, youth engagement, and civil society participation strengthen resilience against floods, droughts, and water scarcity?
	<i>Panelists:</i> - Dinara Ziganshina, Director of the Scientific Information Center (SIC) of the Interstate Commission for Water Coordination of Central Asia (ICWC) - Iskandar Abdullaev, Senior Researcher, IWMI - Takayoshi Kato, Environmental Economist, OECD - Jenniver Sehring, Associate Professor of Water Governance and Diplomacy, IHE Delft Institute for Water Education
17:00 - 17:15	Q&A
17:15 - 17:30	Wrap up of the day
19.00 - 21:30	Reception by invitation only

DAY 2

Wednesday, November 19, 2025

SESSION V: Social Dimensions of Sustainable Development in Central Asia

Chaired by: **Gulnoza Ismailova**, Executive Director of the "El-Yurt Umidi" Foundation

10:00 – 11:00	<i>Guiding questions: Education, Youth, Social Protection</i> - What are the key challenges (quality, access, digital divide) in Central Asia's education systems? What strategies (entrepreneurship programs, skills training, digital literacy initiatives) are most effective for engaging youth in economic and social development? - How can governments ensure inclusive social protection for vulnerable groups (women, rural populations, disabled individuals)? How can promoting gender equality, civic engagement, and youth leadership strengthen regional sustainable development? - What policies or partnerships can better integrate marginalized groups into mainstream education, employment, and social safety nets? - How is technological innovation reshaping access to education and social services in remote and underserved areas? What role can civil society, academia, and multilateral organizations play in building resilient communities and responsive social policy? <i>Panelists:</i> - Simon Sottas, Sr. Social Development Specialist, the World Bank - Khurshid Zafari, Director of Social Policy Lab, under the National Agency for Social Protection, Uzbekistan - Aigerim Kopeyeva, Deputy Chairperson, TALDAU National Centre for Education Research and Evaluation, Kazakhstan - Dr Ventzeslav Sabev, Associate Director of the Observatory on Security, Geneva University
11:00 -11:15	Q&A
11.15 -11.45	Coffee Break & Networking

SESSION VI: Harnessing AI and Digital Connectivity for Sustainable Development: Opportunities and Ethical Challenges

Chaired by: **Dr Muzaffar Djalalov**, Vice-Rector for Digital Transformation and Economy, UWED

11.45-12.45	<i>Guiding questions:</i> - What policies are needed to ensure digital connectivity supports SDGs and inclusive development? What are the risks of AI dependency for sustainability efforts, including exclusion, bias, and resource use? - How can developing nations leverage AI and digital tools without falling further behind in the global digital divide? How should governments and regulators approach AI ethics, data protection, and transparency? - What impacts can AI have on education, health, and climate action in Central Asia? How can multistakeholder partnerships (public-private-academic-civil society) drive equitable digital transformation within the region? - What lessons can be drawn from other regions on building responsible, resilient, and ethical AI ecosystems? <i>Panelists:</i>
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	- Gabriele Carboni, Co-Founder, CEO and Impact Manager, WEEVO S.R.L. Benefit Corporation - Behzod Ismoilov, Managing Director, Central Asian Association for Artificial Intelligence (AICA) - Nino Gomarteli, Founder, Ego Consulting, Georgia
12:45 -13:00	Q&A
13:00 -13:30	Closure of the Conference