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## GREEN BUSINESS: CHALLENGES AND PRACTICES IN PAKISTAN

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## Abstract

Sustainability is gradually gaining importance in Pakistan as more organizations and the government realize the importance of green business. This paper aims at reviewing the state of green business in the country with focus on renewable energy, waste management, sustainable agriculture and corporate sustainability. However, there are still some challenges such as financial issues, regulatory issues, and lack of awareness of the technology. It focuses on government support, cooperation with the international community and customer interest in sustainable business models. If these challenges are met and opportunities are harnessed, Pakistan has the potential to become a pioneer of green business in the region.

**Keywords:** Green business, sustainability, renewable energy, waste management, corporate social responsibility, Pakistan, sustainable development, environmental conservation, eco-friendly products, regulatory challenges.

## Introduction

Like many other developing countries, Pakistan has also started realizing the significance of sustainable business management. As the world is moving towards green economy, Pakistani enterprises are also following the trend to reduce environmental effects and for sustainable economic development (Ahmad et al., 2021). Green business was developed at the end of the twentieth century due to the rising concern of the sustainability of economic development due to the awareness of environmental degradation such as the depletion of natural resources and the degradation of the environment (Soomro et al., 2020). The origins of the modern “green movements” can be dated back to the mid-1960s, but it took almost two decades for businesses to incorporate the “greening” trends into their business philosophy and operations, which gave rise to the term “green business” (Yasir et al., 2020). However, to this date, the

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definition of green business is still quite vague, as there are different definitions of the term provided by various sources. Moreover, the implementation of green business practices is not universal because it depends on the economic, cultural, and political systems of the countries (Purwandani & Michaud, 2021). One of the biggest challenges is the belief that sustainability measures are costly or decrease the revenue, which discourages companies from transitioning to sustainable development (Shakir & Khan, 2023). The purpose of the current study is to define the concept of green business and to identify how the level of national economic development and public awareness affect the implementation of green business in various countries with a focus on Pakistan (Ahmad et al., 2021).

### **Green Business: Definition**

Analyzing the contemporary perception of green business, it is important to note that its definition is still rather general and may differ significantly from one field to another. In its simplest definition, a green business is a business that incorporates environmental sustainability into its operations and is financially sustainable. Ozili (2022) notes that green business is not only about environmental conservation but also includes green financing, fair employment practices, and corporate sustainability. However, one of the main issues that arise when it comes to defining green business is the conflict between economic development and environmental sustainability. Cui et al. (2020) opine that sustainability strategies are perceived by businesses as an expense and not an investment hence the reluctance to embrace them. This is especially the case in developing countries such as Pakistan where companies focus more on the short-term gains than the long-term benefits. In addition, Chien et al. (2021) note that the concept of green business strategies should be understood in relation to the economic and cultural environment of a country. In Pakistan, where the green business regulation is still in its infancy, the absence of a standard definition leads

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to the inconsistency of policies. Lack of standardized definition makes it possible for some companies to give a skewed image to their visitors by exaggerating their environmental conservation efforts. Therefore, it is crucial to establish a clear understanding of what green business is in order to incorporate it into the Pakistan economy.

### **Business Greening Agents**

The implementation of green business practices involves several greening agents such as regulatory agencies, financial institutions, consumers, and corporate management. This paper aims to establish the fact that government regulations are critical in encouraging or even requiring sustainable business practices. According to Cui et al. (2020), the tax incentives and green subsidies are some of the policies that compel enterprises to embrace sustainability. However, in Pakistan, lack of proper implementation of the laws and regulations reduces the efficiency of such policies. Another important greening agent is the financial institutions that advance green finance solutions as pointed out by Ozili (2022). While the global trend of green finance is gradually emerging, the financial sector of Pakistan has not adopted sustainable lending yet. Consumer awareness is also a key factor that affects business sustainability. According to Elshaer et al. (2023), the pressure from the consumers to purchase environmentally friendly products leads to the adoption of sustainable practices by the firms. However, in Pakistan, where price consciousness is still a major factor, the consumer tends to focus more on the price of the product rather than its sustainability. Finally, it is important to note that corporate leadership plays a crucial role in the process of change in organizations. Chien et al. (2021) posit that companies with managers who are environmentally sensitive are likely to adopt green initiatives. However, in Pakistan, most organizations do not have the top management support to drive change for environmental sustainability. It is therefore important to enhance the role of these greening agents in order to support a strong green business

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environment.

### **Business: Going Green**

The management of change to green business practices can be viewed as on the one hand as containing opportunities as well as risks. The first driver for businesses to go green is the compliance with the legal requirements since governments of various countries set higher standards for environmental protection. In Pakistan, the introduction of environmental regulations has forced some enterprises to change their business models. However, Tien et al. (2020) opine that compliance-based sustainability is not sustainable if businesses do not adopt sustainability values. On the other hand, firms that proactively engage themselves in the green innovation initiative benefit from it in that they enjoy a competitive edge. For instance, utilization of efficient technologies in usage of energy, and sustainably sourcing various products lead to certain benefits such as reduced costs in the business and enhanced reputation. However, Chien et al. (2021) note that financial factors are still a major challenge to green transformation, particularly for SMEs. A major challenge that most SMEs in Pakistan face is the lack of access to green finance to support sustainability efforts. In addition, Cui et al. (2020) also emphasize the role of supply chain in the context of green business. In Pakistan, the problem of supply chain management inefficiency poses a challenge to the implementation of sustainable practices. In order to encourage green business, there is a need to offer incentives, improve the legal environment, and increase corporate responsibility.

### **What is it to Be Green?**

Going Green in business does not necessarily simply involve the company to adhere to the legal provisions on environmental management; but to transform the entire business culture. Elshaer et al. (2023) argued that sustainability is deployed in green enterprises in all functions including production and disposal. However, most Pakistani businesses view green

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initiatives as expenses rather than value-added propositions. According to Tien et al. (2020), a sustainable business model should incorporate circular economy principles, which means that waste should be reduced to the minimum while resources should be utilized to the maximum. This approach is especially suitable for Pakistan because the country has a problem of resource misallocation that leads to environmental issues. In addition, Ozili (2022) opines that green businesses should adopt the practice of reporting to enhance stakeholder trust. However, in the case of Pakistan, corporate reporting on environmental issues is still not very much practiced. According to Chien et al. (2021), there is a strong relationship between employee engagement and sustainability. Researchers have pointed out that the change of behavior of employees towards the environment can work as the key to achieving sustainable goals in the company. However, in Pakistan, the absence of sustainability training within organizations hinders such progress. Overall, being green is not just a one-dimensional concept but actually an approach that covers four major areas; namely ethical leadership, consumers, finance and regulation. Lack of these elements will continue to slow down the process of transition to green economy in Pakistan and remain in a state of disconnection.

### **Case Study: Green Business Trends in Pakistan**

#### **Renewable Energy Sector**

The government's efforts towards the development of solar and wind energy have led to increased investment in the renewable energy sector. This is to mitigate the current expense of through reliance on fossil based energy sources. A good example is the Quaid-e-Azam Solar Park in Punjab which is among the largest solar power projects in the region. This initiative also helps in the creation of employment and boosting up the economy in those areas where this project is implemented. In this way, Pakistan is on the right track to become energy secure by using solar energy. Furthermore, wind power generation in Sindh is also feeding into

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the national grid and playing its part in combating climate change. Yasir et al. (2020) point out that there is a notable potential of green energy solutions to improve the environmental productivity and business efficiency in developing countries. Nevertheless, Pakistan still has some barriers such as high initial investment costs, limited infrastructure, and policy fluctuations that slow down the shift to renewable energy (Ahmad et al., 2021). The renewable energy sector attracts various kinds of foreign investment and technology and innovation, but the long term development requires sound policies and financial support.

### **Waste Management Innovations**

The organizations for waste management are undergoing a radical change in Pakistan due to emergence of new technological startups and recycling businesses. Waste Busters is a prominent startup that aims at proper waste collection and recycling in urban areas. Green Earth Recycling is a company that deals with the recycling of plastics and converting them into useful products. These measures are intended to decrease the amount of waste that is sent to landfills and increase the use of circular economy. By raising people's awareness, by encouraging segregation at the source they are, therefore improving recycling rates. The government is also backing these initiatives through policies and incentives, and promoting the development of public-private partnerships to address the increasing problem of waste. Soomro et al. (2020) share the opinion that mainly consumer behavior is essential for advancing green schemas because consumer concern is high, especially among the young people, to buy environmentally friendly products and decrease waste production. However, some of the barriers that are still evident include poor waste disposal, lack of proper recycling facilities, and poor attitude towards recycling (Ahmad et al., 2021). The waste management sector in Pakistan is gradually improving with time, but there is a need to enforce waste management policies more effectively and increase awareness among the public.

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## **Sustainable Agriculture**

The change towards sustainable agriculture is also contributing to the decrease of ecological footprint in the rural areas of Pakistan. The island is now witnessing emergence of organic farming where farmers are turning to natural fertilizers and pesticides. Population growth forces the use of water conservation techniques like drip irrigation in an attempt to improve the yields while using water sparingly. This way, farmers are preserving the quality of the soil and the surrounding environment from the negative effects of chemical fertilizers. In the same way, some government programs are availing incentives for small farmers to adopt suitable measures to shift towards climate-smart agriculture whereby training is conducted to improve understanding of climate-smart crops and soils management. The article by Purwandani and Michaud (2021) indicates that although there are economic and environmental gains from sustainable agriculture practices, there are usually financial and technical constraints to adoption. Small-scale farmers in Pakistan are not able to adopt modern technology and financial services for their farming practices (Ahmad et al., 2021). This way, it supports food security while at the same time reducing the effect of such climatic change. To achieve long-term goals, there is a need to increase the incentives for sustainable farming practices, increase awareness among farmers, and offer subsidies for green farming equipment.

## **Corporate Sustainability Practices**

Today, the large scale organisations based in Pakistan are integrating themselves with green certifications and sustainability. Companies such as Unilever Pakistan have come up with water-saving schemes and waste-control measures within the company under sustainable living programme. These are meant to help the company to minimize its impact on the environment and act as a responsible manufacturer. In this way, Unilever ensures that it sources raw materials from the farmers and communities in a sustainable manner. Other firms are also involved in



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generation of renewable energy and use of efficient energy technologies. Shakir and Khan (2023) note that GHRM is an important component of corporate sustainability as it fosters sustainable behavior among employees and integrates sustainability into organizational culture. Nevertheless, the majority of Pakistani corporations have not been able to incorporate sustainability into their strategic business management plans because of cost factors and absence of legal compliance (Ahmad et al., 2021). Green certifications play role of ensuring that these corporations conforms to international standards on environmental conservation and at the same time increasing their reputation among the customer. CSR initiatives are now involving employees and communities in environmental conservation, thus promoting the green economy and innovation. Corporate sustainability is gradually emerging as a major factor for economic growth and development, but more efforts are required from the companies and the government to promote sustainable business practices.

### **Business for Green Actions**

#### **Renewable Energy Adoption**

Businesses in Pakistan are now focusing on the use of renewable energy sources in order to minimize carbon footprint and encourage sustainable business practices. Engro Energy being one of the leading companies in the power sector has invested in renewable energy such as wind energy and solar energy (Engro Polymer & Chemicals, 2022). The Thar Coal Power Project is a source of controversy because of its reliance on coal but it uses cleaner technologies to reduce the negative impacts. The transition to renewable energy sources is in line with the global sustainable development goals and is backed by partnerships and incentives from the international financial institutions and the government of Pakistan (IFC, 2022). However, there are still some barriers that have not been overcome, for instance, high capital investment and inconsistent policies are some of the challenges that have

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been noted to slow down the adoption of clean energy solutions (Unilever Pakistan, 2023).

### **Recycling and Waste Management**

The management of waste and recycling is an important aspect of sustainable business, and Packages Limited is a good example. Recycling and material reuse are also practiced at Packages Limited to reduce waste, which is in line with the circular economy (Packages Group, 2020). They have environmentally friendly production methods that help in minimizing the emission of carbon and the efficient use of resources. It has also partnered with other organizations such as Unilever Pakistan and UNDP to fight the menace of plastic pollution and improve waste management (Unilever Pakistan, 2023). Nevertheless, Pakistan still has some issues with waste management because of the insufficient development of the necessary infrastructure, low awareness among the population, and weak control by the authorities (Transparency International Pakistan, 2024). The following are some recommendations that can help in improving sustainable waste management: Policies should be strengthened and the private sector encouraged to support sustainable waste management.

### **Eco-Friendly Products and Services**

The textile industry is one of the most important industries in Pakistan and it is now going green. Sapphire Textile Mills has incorporated environment friendly fabrics and has adopted water saving, energy saving and environment friendly dyeing processes (Sapphire Textile Mills, 2023). This is a clear indication of the increasing awareness of sustainable development in the industrial sector of Pakistan as more and more companies embrace green technology. Nevertheless, the large-scale incorporation faces some challenges like; financial constraints and poor access to green technologies of sustainable textile production (Sapphire Textile Mills, 2023). There has been a rise in the market demand for green products due to consumer awareness on environmental

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conservation hence creating market niche from market segmentation for organizations and firms to develop and compete in the international market.

### **Sustainable Living and Resource Management**

Sustainability has been embedded into Unilever Pakistan through elements within supply chain and products through minimizing on use of plastics, water conservation and sustainable materials (Unilever, 2021). The company has also implemented measures to support the circular economy by encouraging the consumption of products and waste management. Moreover, Unilever engages with other stakeholders such as government and non-governmental organizations to enhance environmental sustainability at the national level (Unilever Pakistan, 2023). However, there are some challenges that businesses encounter in the implementation of green initiatives such as regulatory hurdles and financial constraints (IFC, 2022). Improving corporate sustainability initiatives and fostering cooperation between the private sector and the government can help Pakistan advance towards a sustainable economy.

### **Challenges**

- Lack of Awareness – Most of the businesses in Pakistan are not aware of the advantages of green practices hence the low uptake (Transparency International Pakistan, 2024).
- Lack of capital – The high initial costs of implementing sustainable technologies are a major factor that makes SMEs shy away from adopting sustainable technologies (Unilever Pakistan, 2023).
- Legal System Constraints – There is lack of consistency in formulation of environmental policies besides the weak implementation that hampers the shift to environmental friendly business (IFC, 2022).

### **Opportunities**

- Government Incentives – The subsidies and tax incentives offered to various firms would prompt the companies to follow sustainable business models (IFC, 2022).

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- International Partnerships – It is possible to partner with green technology firms from other countries to foster innovation and knowledge exchange (Engro Polymer & Chemicals, 2022).
- Consumer Demand – An increasing demand for green products can force organizations to adopt sustainable practices (Sapphire Textile Mills, 2023).

### **Sustainable Business Practices in Pakistan**

#### **Unilever Pakistan**

Being a part of the Unilever group, Unilever Pakistan also follows the sustainability policies of the company and has been involved in water conservation, waste management, and sustainable procurement of raw materials (Unilever Pakistan, 2023). The company has acted effectively in aspects such as avoidance of plastics, energy conservation and fostering of green products portfolio. Unilever Pakistan has a goal of reducing its environmental impact while at the same time satisfying the consumers' demand for sustainable products. However, there are still some barriers like regulatory issues and high cost of sustainable packaging that have limited the large scale adoption (IFC, 2024).

#### **Engro Energy**

Engro Energy is involved in the development of clean energy in Pakistan through investing in renewable energy projects including wind energy projects and Thar Coal Power Project (Engro Polymer & Chemicals, 2022). However, there are still issues with the environmental effects of coal-based energy generation that the company is also working to minimize. However, Engro Energy is still in the process of seeking other solutions that meet the energy demands while at the same time embracing sustainability. Investment in the future of solar and wind energy will be important for the long-term environmental impact and to decrease the use of fossil fuels in Pakistan.

#### **Packages Limited**

Recycling and the reuse of materials are important to Packages Limited, a

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company that operates in the packaging industry. Some of the organizational culture practices include environmental conservation or compliance with the green production techniques such as the company's focus on methods that minimize its carbon footprint and integrates sustainability in the supply chain processes (Packages Group, 2020). Packages Limited has also been involved in the reduction of plastics and environmental awareness programs in collaboration with Unilever Pakistan and other organizations. Nevertheless, there is still a long way to go in terms of waste management infrastructure and public awareness to enhance the recycling rate in Pakistan (Transparency International Pakistan, 2024).

### Sapphire Textile Mills

Sapphire Textile Mills has become one of the leading textile industries by providing environment friendly fabrics and production processes. Water conservation, energy efficiency, and environmentally friendly dyes are also used in the company to minimize the effects on the environment (Sapphire Textile Mills, 2023). Their strategy is based on the use of organic and recycled materials, which will reduce the emission of greenhouse gases in the production of textiles. However, there are some barriers to sustainable textile manufacturing in Pakistan including high cost, low consumer awareness, and inadequate policy support for green innovation.

Our sustainability goals				
	Climate	Nature	Plastics	Livelihoods
Long-term ambition	Net zero emissions across our value chain by 2039.	Resilient and regenerative natural and agricultural ecosystems.	An end to plastic pollution through reduction, circulation and collaboration.	A decent livelihood for people in our value chain, including by earning a living wage by 2030.
Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Reduce absolute operational GHG emissions (Scope 1 &amp; 2) by 100% by 2030 from a 2015 baseline.</li><li>Reduce absolute Scope 3 energy and industrial GHG emissions* by 42% by 2030 from a 2021 baseline.</li><li>Reduce absolute Scope 3 forest, land and agriculture (FLAG) GHG emissions** by 30.3% by 2030 from a 2021 baseline.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>95% volume of key crops to be verified as sustainably sourced by 2030.</li><li>Implement Regenerative Agriculture practices on 1 million hectares of agricultural land by 2030.</li><li>Help protect and restore 1 million hectares of natural ecosystems by 2030.</li><li>Maintain no deforestation across our primary deforestation-linked commodities.</li><li>Implement water stewardship programmes in 100 locations in water-stressed areas by 2030.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Reduce our virgin plastic footprint – by 30% by 2026, and 40% by 2028, from a 2019 baseline.</li><li>100% of our plastic packaging to be reusable, recyclable or compostable – by 2030 (for rigids) and 2035 (for flexibles).</li><li>Use 25% recycled plastic in our packaging by 2025.</li><li>Collect and process more plastic packaging than we sell by 2025.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Help 250,000 smallholder farmers in our supply chain access livelihoods programmes by 2026.</li><li>Suppliers representing 50% of our procurement spend to sign the Living Wage Promise by 2026.</li><li>Help 2.5 million SMEs in our retail value chain grow their business by 2026.</li></ul>

<https://www.unilever.com/files/our-sustainability-goals.pdf>

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## The IFC: Climate Business

As low-carbon solutions are gradually being adopted, the world is still far from achieving the goals of combating climate change. As the countries with high development requirements and increasing energy consumption, the emerging markets can “leap forward” to build green and resilient economy (IFC, 2024). The International Finance Corporation (IFC) has assumed the role of a funding partner for firms in the emerging markets with the aim of facilitating a low-carbon transition and enhancing the industry’s resilience. Nevertheless, there are still some barriers that prevent businesses from adopting large-scale climate initiatives, including regulatory, financial, and infrastructural ones.

Over the last 5 years, IFC’s \$51bn of climate finance has achieved the following impacts:



### At a Glance

In the fiscal year 2024, IFC delivered a record \$9.1 billion in long-term climate finance through its own account. IFC further mobilized an additional \$10.2 billion of private capital from other sources, bringing the total to \$19.4 billion.

**IFC's Stocktake on Climate Action since the Paris Agreement**

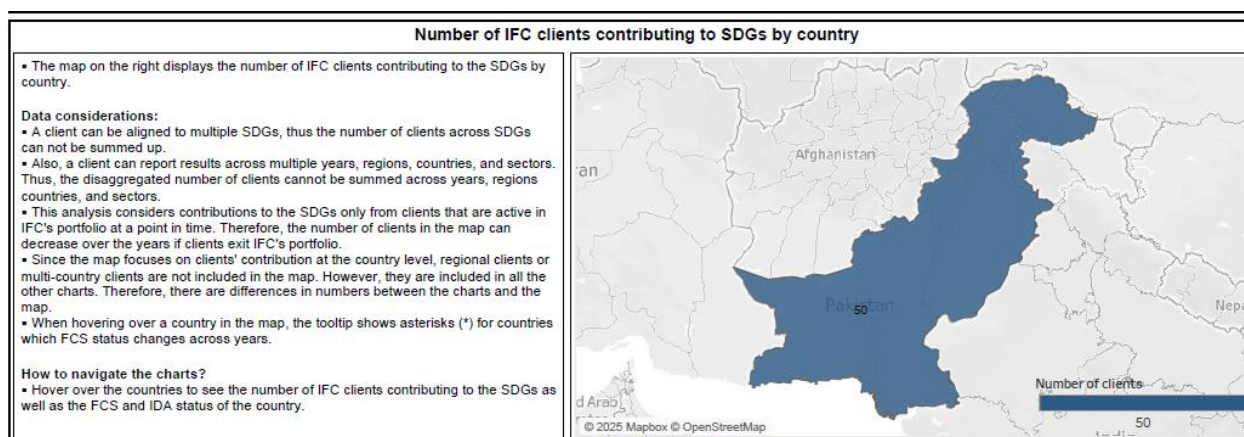
<https://www.ifc.org/en/what-we-do/sector-expertise/climate-business>

Number of IFC clients contributing to SDGs by country, target, and reporting year											
Data considerations:											
• A client can be aligned to multiple SDGs, thus the number of clients across SDGs can not be summed up.											
• Also, a client can report results across multiple years, regions, countries, and sectors. Thus, the disaggregated number of clients cannot be summed across years, regions countries, and sectors.											
• This analysis considers contributions to the SDGs only from clients that are active in IFC's portfolio at a point in time. Therefore, the number of clients in the charts can decrease over the years if clients exit IFC's portfolio.											
Country	SDG	SDG Targets	Reporting Year								
			2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Pakistan	SDG-1	1.4	7	7	6	6	4	6	5	5	4
	SDG-2	2.3 or 2.4	2	2	3	3	3	1	3	1	1
	SDG-3	3.8						1	1	1	2
	SDG-5	5.5	12	15	18	18	19	14	19	21	19
	SDG-8	8.1	7	7	7	6	5	4	4	1	3
		8.3	7	7	6	6	4	5	4	4	2

<https://www.ifc.org/en/our-impact/sustainable-development-goals>



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<https://www.ifc.org/en/our-impact/sustainable-development-goals>

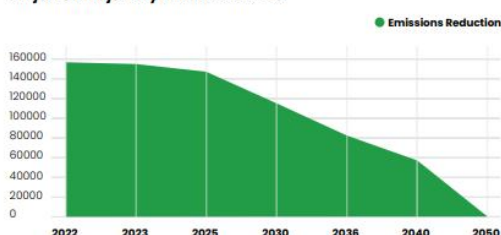
## Packages Group Decarbonization Roadmap

Packages Group has also created a decarbonization plan based on the SBTi (Science Based Targets Initiative) target-setting methodology to simulate the company's journey towards sustainability (Packages Group, 2020). Although the company has not disclosed its targets to SBTi, the roadmap shows the path to get to net-zero emissions by 2050. However, the future emissions may rise due to the Scope 3 emissions, the increase in the number of group companies, and the various growth and expansion projects. This is an indication that corporate decarbonization is a dynamic process that needs to be adjusted to reflect the growth of the business and the changing standards of sustainability. The long-term sustainability of the environmental impact reduction will require further enhancement of commitments to carbon reduction and the enhancement of the reporting system.

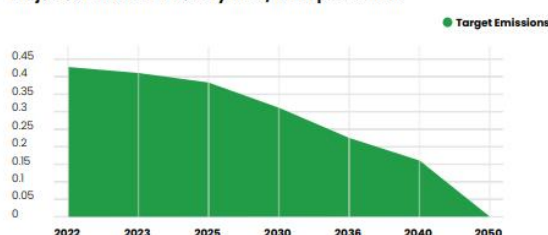
## Packages Group Emissions Reduction Plan



Projected Trajectory Emissions tCO2e



Projected Emissions Intensity tCO2/ton of production



<https://www.packages.com.pk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Sustainability-Report-2023.pdf>

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### Sapphire Textiles: Sustainable Raw Material Sourcing

Sapphire Textile Mills has a policy of procuring raw materials that are environmentally and socially responsible to meet the company's standards (Sapphire Textile Mills, 2023). The company has a policy of ethical farming, using environmentally friendly fibers, and the use of organic and recycled materials in the production of its products. Such initiatives continue right from the supply chain level to support environmental conservation and to acquire the best quality fiber. Also, Sapphire Textiles highlights the role of sourcing raw materials from the communities, which underlines the company's social responsibility. Incorporating sustainability into its business practices is helping the company to promote a cleaner and more responsible textile sector. However, challenges such as supply chain disruptions, cost constraints, and the need for greater consumer awareness still pose barriers to widespread adoption of sustainable textile practices.


## Circularity

**Recycled Plant**

1. Sapphire can produce 49,896 tons of yarn daily from the recycling plant.
2. Recycling approximately 33,264 garments daily.

**Restore**

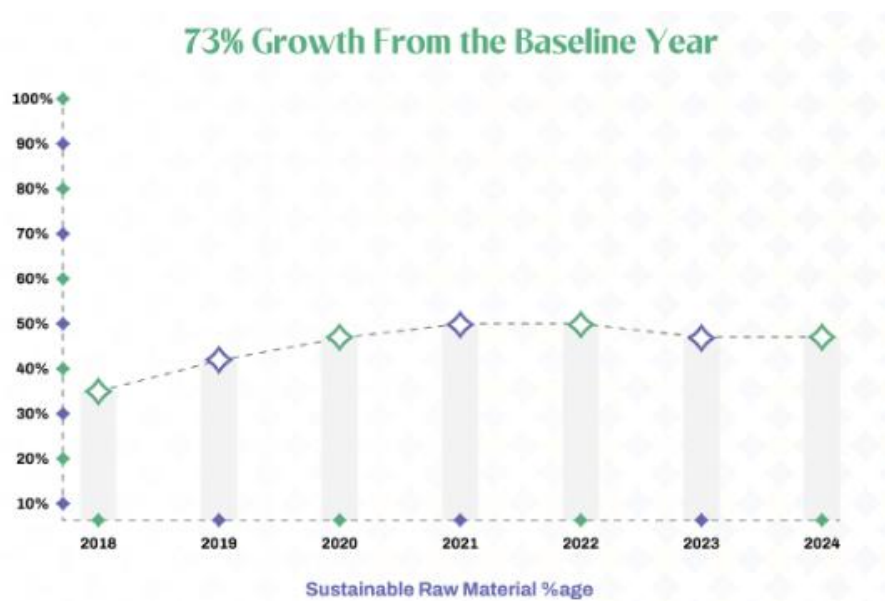
Learn more about Sapphire textiles' RESTORE project [here](#).



<https://sapphiretextiles.com.pk/sustainability/materials>



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### Conclusion

The green business movement in Pakistan is gradually on the rise due to government policies, corporate sustainability, and growing consumer awareness. Some of the Pakistani companies that are already implementing sustainable management practices include Unilever Pakistan, Engro Energy, Packages Limited, and Sapphire Textile Mills. However, there are still some barriers such as financial issues, lack of equal implementation of the laws, and lack of technology. Thus, it is high time for Pakistan to improve legal frameworks, increase financial motivators, and promote cooperation between the public and private sectors. Also, international cooperation can be very effective in attracting knowledge and funds to the green economy. Another area of positive influence is changes in the consumers' preferences for green products – this aspect has to do with consciousness-raising and awareness promotion. If these challenges are met and opportunities are capitalized, Pakistan can work towards sustainable development and become a model for green business in the region. If properly implemented, the country can achieve economic development without compromising the environment and the future generations. Management for sustainable business not only reduces the effects of climate change but also promotes generation of extra revenues, business competition, and the quality of

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people's lives.

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