

Executive summary

This case study analyses the economic and environmental performance of the City of Kitakyushu, identifying best practices for green growth in policy and governance, and providing recommendations to further strengthen its potential for green growth. The unit of analysis is the City of Kitakyushu, the Kitakyushu metropolitan area (for the discussion of land use and density), or Fukuoka prefecture, when data is not available for the City of Kitakyushu.

Green growth aims to steer economic growth in a different direction that ensures that natural assets continue to provide the resources and environmental services on which our well-being relies. Urban green growth can be understood as fostering economic growth and development through urban activities that reduce negative environmental externalities, the impact on natural resources and the pressure on ecosystem services. These activities, including policies and programmes, are intended to reduce either: *i*) negative “environmental externalities” (for example, air pollution and carbon dioxide emissions that arise from urban activities); or *ii*) the consumption of natural resources and environmental services, including water, energy and undeveloped land.

Once a polluted industry zone, Kitakyushu is now a modern industrial city pursuing green growth. Since the 1960s, the city, under sustained pressure from its citizens, has made a concerted effort to reduce industrial pollution and clean up accumulated environmental degradation, massively improving water and air quality. This transformation has been achieved even as industrial output increased, through reducing the carbon intensity of production in the city’s heavy manufacturing industries, and through a strong vision of sustainable development towards a low-carbon society.

In the past decade, the service sector has become a main pillar of the city’s economy, but exports of manufacturing products are still driving economic growth. Important challenges remain with respect to the city’s declining and ageing population and high greenhouse gas emissions. Green growth potential lies in increasingly specialised manufacturing, waste and water recycling, the port, and emerging industries, such as semiconductors, electric vehicle components, and energy systems. Kitakyushu has remarkable research and development assets for green innovation, and could play an important role in the regional innovation system of northern Kyushu.

The city’s green growth initiatives include an “Eco-Town” recycling cluster and ongoing investments in green city demonstration projects, such as the “smart community” trial in the Higashida area. Kitakyushu has also implemented international city-to-city co-operation for sustainable development in Asia and has steadily built up a reputation among cities aiming for green growth. Much as for past achievements, future green growth in Kitakyushu will have to rely on strong citizen engagement.

Despite major achievements, the report’s findings also point to room for improvement in Kitakyushu. Harnessing the city’s local resources, such as its green innovation assets, exploiting the green growth potential of urban sectors and industries, and leveraging multi-level governance for green growth will be crucial. Focus areas should include a more collaborative approach with the central government, stronger regional co-operation and increased international collaboration.

Key findings and recommendations

- The city could more explicitly identify environmental and sustainable development initiatives as sources of growth. Horizontal collaboration between different departments in the local administration could contribute significantly to aligning environmental and economic policies towards common goals.
- Kitakyushu faces a declining and ageing population and has difficulty attracting a young, skilled workforce. City centre revitalisation is a priority, and could be enhanced through better integration of land use and transportation planning that focuses on infill and redevelopment and expanding the public transport network.
- Energy supply has been shifted to a significant extent from coal to oil and gas, but could be further diversified. The new national feed-in-tariff for renewable energies presents an opportunity to increase the share of renewable energy. A city-wide smart grid could help ensure a stable power supply, including from renewable energy sources.
- The Kitakyushu Eco-Town makes efficient use of waste-to-energy generation, notably from industrial waste. The city could further exploit waste-to-energy and heat generation, focusing on residential and commercial use. Buildings in the commercial and residential sector also offer significant potential for energy efficiency gains.
- The Eco-Town recycling cluster has been a success, but it needs to improve economic viability. Therefore, a focus on higher value added segments and measures to increase waste imports is needed.
- The city's longstanding experience in wastewater treatment could be better exploited to develop and export water technologies, as demonstrated in the Kitakyushu Water Plaza.
- There is a need to comprehensively assess and systematically co-ordinate the numerous green innovation actors and assets in the northern Kyushu region. A stronger regional innovation system should target policies to improve conditions for innovative SMEs.
- Kitakyushu could do more to exploit its local resources and strengthen its position regionally. The city could play a role in reinforcing and diversifying the northern Kyushu Recycle and Environmental Industry Plaza (K-RIP).
- Links between universities and businesses could be expanded, and the research potential of higher education institutions needs to be better attuned to the innovative potential of local companies. Kitakyushu Science and Research Park could help co-ordinate higher education institutions and commercial R&D.
- Strengthening collaboration with Asia and expanding international outreach beyond Asia could enable Kitakyushu to tap into more export markets for green goods and services. International outreach should also be strengthened in higher education institutions.
- The city's early environmental achievements were driven by citizens' initiatives and facilitated through dialogue between multiple stakeholders. Securing future citizen participation will require new incentives, such as for increasing the energy efficiency of residential buildings.



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