



THE MAHALLA INSTITUTION IN UZBEKISTAN: TRADITIONS, GOVERNANCE, AND WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT

Khalikulova Khulkar Yuldashevna

Associate Professor of the Department of Social and Humanitarian
Sciences, Academy of Law Enforcement of the Republic of Uzbekistan

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role and significance of the Mahalla institution in Uzbekistan's social and administrative system, focusing on its contribution to public participation, community cohesion, and social justice. As a traditional and culturally rooted form of local self-governance, the Mahalla serves as a crucial link between the state and civil society, ensuring citizens' active engagement in local decision-making processes. The study analyzes historical developments, legislative reforms, and statistical data, emphasizing the growing participation of women in Mahalla leadership positions. This inclusion has fostered innovative governance approaches and strengthened gender equality within the community structure. The research underscores that ongoing state reforms have transformed the Mahalla into a modern, legally grounded institution integral to Uzbekistan's civic and social framework.

KEYWORDS: Mahalla institution, local self-governance, women's participation, social justice, state administration, national traditions.

INTRODUCTION

The Mahalla institution is one of the distinctive administrative systems that has become an integral part of the centuries-old values of the Uzbek people. This institution represents a significant branch of public administration, playing a vital role in strengthening community solidarity, maintaining public order and safety, combating crime, and preventing offenses. It also enhances cooperation between local communities and law enforcement agencies. Local self-governing bodies ensure citizens' active participation in state affairs and create a foundation for protecting the rights and interests of every member of society.

According to researchers, the increasing presence of women in Mahalla leadership positions contributes to the advancement of social justice and innovative approaches within the framework of local self-governance.

The Mahalla is a traditional social institution characteristic of Eastern civilization—particularly of the peoples of Central Asia—reflecting their lifestyle, mentality, and values. The term Mahalla originates from the Arabic language, meaning “place,” “location,” or “area.” It refers to a specific part of a city whose residents form a self-governing community. The inhabitants of a given Mahalla are known as its members, bound by social and territorial unity.

In recent years, numerous practical measures have been taken to transform the Mahalla institution into a genuine partner and supporter of the people. In particular, 43 legislative acts have been adopted in this area, including four laws, five decrees and resolutions issued by the



President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, and 33 decisions by the Cabinet of Ministers. In addition, more than 50 regulatory and legal documents have been improved.

Currently, more than 9,000 local self-governing bodies operate across the country (8,846 Mahallas, 161 villages, 95 rural communities, and 43 small town citizens' assemblies), with women comprising 30 percent of their total members. Since the early years of independence, the reorganization and revitalization of Mahallas—both socially and economically—have been defined as a key priority, aimed at restoring national customs and traditions.

After Uzbekistan gained independence, a unique system of state and social administration emerged. On September 12, 1992, the First President of the Republic of Uzbekistan issued a decree "On the Establishment of the Republican Mahalla Charity Foundation." The main purpose of the decree was to promote and preserve historically developed national and traditional values, as well as to expand cultural and educational activities among Mahallas.

To further strengthen the Mahalla institution socially and economically, the Law "On Self-Governance of Citizens' Bodies" was adopted in September 1993. The revised version of this law, which came into force in May 1999, granted Mahallas broader rights and powers. It defines local self-governance as an independent social structure that ensures citizens' participation in resolving local issues of importance based on their interests, historical development, and national traditions, guaranteed by the Constitution and laws of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

In the early years of independence, when the Mahalla institution was still in its formative stage, the number of women involved in this sphere was very limited. Initially, only the positions of Mahalla elder (aksakal) and two assistants were established—roles traditionally held by men. Therefore, statistics from 1993–2000 indicate that women accounted for only about 5 percent of Mahalla staff. This was due to the limited number of official positions and the absence of specialists dealing with women's issues, which were not yet recognized as pressing matters within the Mahalla structure. Moreover, in sectors such as health, education, and social services, opportunities for women to assume leadership roles in local governance were even more restricted.

Today, the Mahalla institution serves as a vital bridge between the state and civil society, embodying national values and uniting communities. It fosters citizens' active engagement in governance, enhances legal awareness, and strengthens cooperation in crime prevention. Particularly in recent years, women's growing participation in Mahalla leadership has played a crucial role in promoting social justice and innovative governance. The reforms and legislative acts adopted by the state have consolidated the legal and institutional foundations of the Mahalla system, making it an integral component of modern civil society in Uzbekistan.

References

1. Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan. (1992). Tashkent: Government of Uzbekistan.
2. Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Self-Governance of Citizens' Bodies. (1993, revised 1999). Tashkent: Oliy Majlis (Parliament) of the Republic of Uzbekistan.
3. Presidential Decree of the Republic of Uzbekistan. (1992, September 12). On the Establishment of the Republican "Mahalla" Charity Foundation. Tashkent: Official Gazette.
4. Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Uzbekistan. (2022). Report on the Development of the Mahalla System. Tashkent.

5. The Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan. (2023). Decree on Strengthening Local Self-Governance and Community Institutions. Tashkent.

