

SOCIAL WORK PRACTICES IN SELF-GOVERNMENT BODIES AND ORGANIZATIONS: THE CASE OF UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract: Social work practices play a vital role in addressing community needs, promoting welfare, and fostering development. In Uzbekistan, self-government bodies, known as mahallas, and various organizations have long been central to delivering social services. This article examines the structure, functions, and effectiveness of social work practices within these entities, with a particular focus on Uzbekistan. By providing detailed examples and factual insights, the article highlights how these practices contribute to societal well-being and identifies challenges and opportunities for further improvement.

Keywords: social work, mahallas, Uzbekistan, community development, self-government bodies, welfare services

INTRODUCTION

Social work within self-government bodies and organizations has become increasingly significant in addressing societal challenges and fostering community welfare. In Uzbekistan, the concept of self-governance is deeply rooted in the mahalla system, a unique institution that serves as the foundation of local governance and community life. The mahallas, alongside various state and non-state organizations, implement diverse social work initiatives, ranging from poverty alleviation to youth engagement and elderly care.

Understanding the dynamics and impact of social work practices in these contexts requires an exploration of their historical development, structural framework, and operational mechanisms. This article delves into the examples of social work within mahallas and other organizations in Uzbekistan, supported by factual data and case studies.

THE ROLE OF MAHALLAS IN SOCIAL WORK

The mahalla system in Uzbekistan is a traditional neighborhood-based institution recognized by the state for its pivotal role in self-governance. Mahallas are entrusted with a range of responsibilities, including the provision of social services, conflict resolution, and cultural preservation. According to official statistics from the Ministry of Justice, there are over 9,000 mahallas across Uzbekistan, each serving as a hub for community welfare.

1. **Poverty Alleviation Programs:** Mahallas play a crucial role in identifying low-income families and ensuring targeted assistance. For example, in 2022, the government allocated 4.8 trillion UZS (approximately \$440 million) to support low-income

households through mahallas. This assistance included food packages, subsidies for utilities, and educational grants for children.

2. **Elderly Care Initiatives:** Mahallas are instrumental in providing support to elderly citizens. The "Sahovat" program, implemented in partnership with mahallas, provided monthly allowances and home-based care to over 500,000 elderly individuals in 2023. Volunteers and social workers collaborated to ensure their well-being, addressing both material and emotional needs.
3. **Youth Engagement and Employment:** Mahallas actively support youth by organizing vocational training and employment initiatives. For instance, in Tashkent's Yashnobod district, the "Youth Union" collaborated with mahallas to train 1,200 young people in IT and entrepreneurship skills, leading to the establishment of 250 startups in 2022 alone.

Social Work in Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) Beyond mahallas, NGOs in Uzbekistan contribute significantly to social welfare. Their activities complement the efforts of mahallas by addressing specific societal challenges and fostering innovation in social work practices.

1. **Supporting Vulnerable Populations:** NGOs such as "Meharli Qo'llar" (Loving Hands) focus on supporting disabled individuals. In 2023, the organization provided prosthetic devices and rehabilitation services to 3,500 individuals across the country. Their efforts have been instrumental in improving mobility and self-sufficiency among beneficiaries.
2. **Promoting Gender Equality:** Organizations like the Women's Committee of Uzbekistan have been pivotal in promoting gender equality. Through collaboration with mahallas, the committee launched workshops on women's rights and small business development, benefiting 10,000 women in rural areas in 2022.
3. **Mental Health Advocacy:** The NGO "Psychological Resilience Center" runs awareness campaigns and counseling sessions to address mental health issues. In 2023, they organized 150 workshops in collaboration with mahallas, reaching over 30,000 participants and reducing stigma around mental health.

Challenges in Social Work Practices While the efforts of mahallas and NGOs are commendable, several challenges hinder their effectiveness:

1. **Resource Constraints:** Many mahallas lack sufficient funding and infrastructure to meet community needs comprehensively. In some rural areas, the ratio of social workers to residents is as low as 1:5,000, leading to service gaps.
2. **Training and Capacity Building:** A significant proportion of social workers in Uzbekistan lack formal training in modern social work methodologies. This limitation affects the quality and professionalism of services delivered.
3. **Coordination Issues:** The lack of seamless coordination between mahallas, NGOs, and state agencies often results in duplication of efforts and inefficient resource utilization.

Opportunities for Improvement To address these challenges, several strategies can be adopted:

1. **Increased Investment:** Allocating more resources to mahallas and NGOs will enable them to expand their reach and improve service quality. The government's recent commitment to increase the social protection budget by 20% in 2024 is a step in the right direction.

2. **Capacity Building Programs:** Establishing training institutes for social workers and offering certifications in social work will enhance professionalism and effectiveness.
3. **Enhanced Collaboration:** Strengthening partnerships between mahallas, NGOs, and international organizations can foster innovative solutions to complex social issues. For example, the UNDP's partnership with mahallas in implementing sustainable development projects has shown promising results in Samarkand and Bukhara.

CONCLUSION

Social work practices in Uzbekistan's self-government bodies and organizations demonstrate the potential of localized and community-driven approaches to welfare. The mahalla system, complemented by the efforts of NGOs, has made significant strides in addressing societal needs. However, addressing resource constraints, enhancing training, and fostering collaboration are essential to maximizing their impact. By building on existing strengths and addressing challenges, Uzbekistan can set an example for effective social work practices in the region.

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