



ENHANCING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC ACTIVITY IN UZBEKISTAN: A LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

The article analyzes the legal and institutional foundations of state policy aimed at promoting gender equality and enhancing women's economic activity in Uzbekistan. It examines the role of women's professional training, participation in entrepreneurship, access to credit resources, and the effectiveness of state programs since the 1990s. Presidential decrees and regional programs are evaluated as key instruments in strengthening women's participation in the labor market and improving their social status.

Keywords: Gender equality, women's policy, entrepreneurship, legal framework, economic activity.

Introduction

In the context of current global development, the issue of gender equality is recognized as one of the key factors of sustainable social progress. During the transition to a market economy, ensuring the socio-economic and legal protection of women and enhancing their economic activity has become one of the priority directions of Uzbekistan's state policy. In this regard, the adoption of various legal documents, state programs, and economic initiatives has contributed to strengthening women's participation in the labor market and the development of their entrepreneurial potential.

Methodology

This research employs systemic analysis and historical-comparative methods. First, legal documents, presidential decrees, and state programs adopted within the



framework of policies supporting women were analyzed. Second, based on statistical data from the labor market, the dynamics of women's economic activity were examined. Third, the socio-economic outcomes highlighted in academic and public sources were studied comparatively.

Literature Review

The review of the literature shows that the issue of women in Uzbekistan has been widely discussed in both scholarly works and mass media. For instance, an article published in the newspaper Hurriyat emphasized state support as a significant factor in the development of women's entrepreneurship [1]. M. Maksudova, in her article, focused on the role of women in society and the evolution of social attitudes towards them [2]. Likewise, O. Abdullayeva's research elaborated on the functions of the mahalla institution in supporting women [3; 6]. A. Ivanova analyzed the activities of women's organizations and their involvement in social and economic processes [4; 5]. N. Sobirov, on the other hand, highlighted women's employment as one of the priority tasks of state policy.

Analysis and Results

At present, the issue of gender equality holds priority significance for social progress and sustainable development. In particular, during the transition to a market economy, ensuring the socio-economic and legal protection of women and enhancing their activity has become increasingly urgent. In this regard, the Kokand City "Women Entrepreneurs" Association, established in 1991 and granted legal status in 1994, carried out important initiatives. This association united professionals such as entrepreneurs, doctors, teachers, cultural and art workers, and lawyers, and effectively promoted the development of entrepreneurial potential among women and youth, provided legal and informational assistance, as well as coordinated cooperation among non-governmental organizations [1].

In addition, labor authorities implemented targeted measures every year to train women in new professions and improve their existing qualifications. For example, during the 1990s, female students constituted about 39 percent of the total student population, which later facilitated their employment. Specifically, between 1994 and 2000, more than 60,000 women received professional training, and by 1994, the



proportion of female students reached 40.2 percent, with 92 percent of them securing positions in the labor market [2].

In Uzbekistan, gender equality and support for women have been designated as one of the priority directions of state policy. With the initiative of the President, 1999 was declared the “Year of Women” and 2001 the “Year of Mothers and Children,” which strongly stimulated women’s social engagement, strengthened their health, and encouraged their active participation in the processes of renewal taking place in the country [3].

Furthermore, the Presidential Decree of May 25, 2004, issued by Islam Karimov, “On Additional Measures to Support the Activities of the Women’s Committee of Uzbekistan,” served as an important legal and institutional foundation for the policy of supporting women. This document became a significant step in enhancing the status of women in society, coordinating and developing measures aimed at effectively addressing their socio-economic and spiritual issues [4].

At the same time, the Presidential Decree of June 14, 2005, “On Measures to Further Improve the System of Legal Protection of Business Entities,” as well as the Decree of May 5, 2005, “On the Establishment of the Joint-Stock Commercial Bank Mikrokreditbank,” created additional legal and financial opportunities to enhance women’s economic activity. These documents provided favorable conditions for citizens, including women, who sought to start entrepreneurial activities, thereby contributing to the realization of their economic potential. During this process, it was noted that the number of enterprises established by women increased, and opportunities for home-based employment expanded [5].

As a practical outcome of this policy, in 2007, in cooperation with district labor departments and mahalla citizens’ assemblies, through the Chamber of Commerce and Industry and commercial banks, a total of 69 million 930 thousand soums in loans was allocated to 29 women to support their entrepreneurial activities. In the same year, two job fairs were organized, which enabled 3,552 citizens, including 2,010 women, to secure permanent employment [3].

In Uzbekistan, enhancing women’s economic activity has been identified as one of the priority directions of state policy. In particular, regional programs for 2009–2010 explicitly included the task of providing employment for women, to be implemented mainly through the creation of new jobs, the development of small business and private entrepreneurship, the expansion of the service sector, and the effective use of



opportunities for home-based labor [6]. By 2017, the employment ratio among women aged 15–24 was recorded at approximately 31.25 percent [7]. Moreover, as of 2024, 2.1 million women entrepreneurs were operating in Uzbekistan, which is seven times more compared to 2020 [8]. By early 2025, it was identified that 43,860 enterprises among small businesses and micro-firms were headed by women [9].

Conclusion

The policy aimed at increasing women's economic activity in Uzbekistan has been gradually improved step by step. Legal and institutional reforms initiated since the 1990s created new opportunities for women's professional training, participation in entrepreneurship, and employment. Presidential decrees, the microcredit system, and regional programs played a decisive role in realizing women's economic potential. At the same time, practical measures implemented in cooperation with mahalla institutions and labor authorities contributed to expanding women's share in the labor market. Thus, ensuring gender equality and enhancing women's economic activity in Uzbekistan emerges as an integral component of social stability and democratic reforms.

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