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THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL
PARTNERSHIP IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF A
DEMOCRATIC LEGAL STATE IN UZBEKISTAN

Akhmadalieva Sevinch

PhD student of the National University of Uzbekistan

Abstract: This article examines the evolution, essence, and institutional foundations of civil society and social partnership in Uzbekistan. It highlights the growing role of citizens’ self-governance bodies, particularly, the mahalla - within the political, social, and economic modernization processes of the country. The study analyses theoretical perspectives of national scholars, explores constructive and destructive forms of social participation, and evaluates Uzbekistan’s model of social partnership in comparison with international experiences. The article concludes by emphasizing the importance of civic engagement, legal culture, and cooperation among the state, non-governmental organizations, and citizens in building a democratic legal state.

Key words: civil society, social partnership, democratic legal state, mahalla institution, civic engagement, public governance, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), legal culture, social responsibility.

Аннотация: В данной статье рассматриваются эволюция, сущность и институциональные основы гражданского общества и социального партнёрства в Узбекистане. Особое внимание уделяется растущей роли органов самоуправления граждан, в частности махалли, в процессах политической, социальной и экономической модернизации страны. В исследовании анализируются теоретические взгляды отечественных учёных, изучаются конструктивные и деструктивные формы общественного участия, а также оценивается узбекская модель социального партнёрства в сравнении с



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международным опытом. В заключение подчёркивается важность гражданской активности, правовой культуры и сотрудничества между государством, негосударственными организациями и гражданами в построении демократического правового государства.

Ключевые слова: гражданское общество, социальное партнёрство, демократическое правовое государство, институт махалли, гражданская активность, государственное управление, негосударственные организации (ННО), правовая культура, социальная ответственность.

Annotatsiya: Ushbu maqolada O‘zbekistonda fuqarolik jamiyati va ijtimoiy hamkorlikning evolyutsiyasi, mazmuni hamda institutsional asoslari tahlil qilinadi. Unda fuqarolarning o‘zini o‘zi boshqarish organlari, xususan, mahalla institutining mamlakatning siyosiy, ijtimoiy va iqtisodiy modernizatsiya jarayonlaridagi tobora ortib borayotgan roli yoritiladi. Tadqiqotda milliy olimlarning nazariy qarashlari tahlil qilinadi, ijtimoiy ishtirokning konstruktiv va destruktiv shakllari o‘rganiladi hamda O‘zbekistonning ijtimoiy hamkorlik modeli xalqaro tajribalar bilan solishtiriladi. Maqola yakunida demokratik huquqiy davlat barpo etishda fuqarolar faolligi, huquqiy madaniyat va davlat, nodavlat notijorat tashkilotlari hamda fuqarolar o‘rtasidagi hamkorlikning ahamiyati ta’kidlanadi.

Kalit so‘zlar: fuqarolik jamiyati, ijtimoiy hamkorlik, demokratik huquqiy davlat, mahalla instituti, fuqarolar faolligi, davlat boshqaruvi, nodavlat notijorat tashkilotlari (NNTlar), huquqiy madaniyat, ijtimoiy mas’uliyat.

Introduction

In modern Uzbekistan, significant political reforms aimed at building a democratic legal state and a strong civil society have been implemented. Human



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rights, freedoms, and legitimate interests have been prioritized as the primary objectives of state-building and societal development. As several scholars note, a civil society marks a new era in the state's development. It ensures that governance is based on legality, justice, and the active participation of citizens. Civil society, being a universal socio-political concept, encompasses diverse institutions, norms, and interactions that mediate relations between individuals and the state. The complexity of these relations necessitates a deeper examination of social partnership mechanisms, the role of citizens' self-governance institutions, and the legislative framework that shapes these processes in Uzbekistan. Civil society can be defined as a system where all social issues are solved through legal norms and fair mechanisms, with the rule of law regulating relationships among all members of society. Without legality, internal discipline, and respect for rights, a democratic state becomes impossible. Therefore, improvements in legal culture, consciousness, and social responsibility constitute the backbone of civil society development in Uzbekistan.

The aspiration for liberty, justice, creativity, and moral perfection forms a natural human need. Thus, the development of civil society depends not only on formal institutions but also on the inner moral growth of individuals. Democracy becomes sustainable when citizens actively participate in governance processes with a clear understanding of state strategies and national interests. One of the key features of civil society is social partnership - a mechanism that enables individuals and groups to collaborate in addressing social issues. Social partnership may take constructive or destructive forms: Constructive social partnership occurs when citizens seek to resolve contradictions within the existing legal framework. They form public associations, engage in debates, and express their interests lawfully. Destructive social engagement emerges when individuals or groups believe that their



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goals cannot be achieved within the current legal system. This form often leads to instability and conflict.

To prevent destructive tendencies, Uzbekistan has strengthened civil society institutions, especially NGOs and mahallas, which play a vital role in protecting human rights and increasing the socio-economic and legal activity of citizens. The mahalla institution - Uzbekistan’s traditional form of local self-governance - has become one of the most important pillars of civil society. Its responsibilities have expanded significantly in recent years, particularly in the following areas:

- social assistance to low-income families, the disabled, and the elderly;
- cooperation with state agencies on youth support, women’s issues, and family welfare;
- participation in maintaining public order, environmental protection, and fire safety;
- oversight of local infrastructure, utilities, and community sanitation;
- conflict resolution and social mediation.

The mahalla serves as a bridge between the state and the population, ensuring that government decisions align with local needs. It embodies national values such as solidarity, compassion, neighborliness, and cultural continuity. Uzbekistan’s Constitution and numerous laws form the legal basis for social partnership. The Law “On Non-Governmental Non-Profit Organizations,” the Law “On Public Funds,” and the Law “On Social Partnership” define mutual responsibilities and cooperation between the state and NGOs. The Law “On Citizens’ Self-Government Bodies” further specifies the mahalla’s authority to collaborate with various state agencies in addressing social and economic needs.

Internationally, social partnership is practiced in several distinct models:



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- German model (Germany, Austria, Switzerland) – emphasizes social harmony, conflict avoidance, and peaceful labor relations.

- Scandinavian model (Sweden, Norway, Denmark) – focused on welfare, equality, and strong social protection.

- American model (USA, UK) – prioritizes economic growth and market-driven cooperation.

The Uzbek model incorporates elements from all three but is unique in that it deeply reflects national mentality, traditions, and social values. It aims to ensure participation of the widest population groups, strengthen social cohesion, and maintain stability. As part of democratization, many functions previously performed by the state are gradually being delegated to civil society institutions. This shift reduces administrative burdens and promotes community-driven solutions. Citizens' assemblies (fuqarolar yig'ini) work closely with ministries, local authorities, NGOs, educational and health institutions, and business entities. Such collaboration extends to social protection and social services, family and youth support, entrepreneurship promotion, environmental protection, public order and community harmony. This partnership enhances trust, accountability, and balanced distribution of responsibilities across sectors.

Besides positive developments, several challenges persist:

- insufficient civic awareness among some population groups;
- limited resources of NGOs;
- remaining bureaucratic obstacles;
- need to enhance legal culture and social activism.

To address these issues, further strengthening of social partnership mechanisms, expanding educational programs on civic engagement, and



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institutional support for citizens’ self-governance are crucial. Sustainable development depends on the continued cooperation between the state, civil institutions, and citizens.

In conclusion, the case of Uzbekistan demonstrates that civil society and social partnership are essential components of building a democratic legal state. The mahalla, NGOs, and various public associations contribute to solving social, economic, and cultural issues through collaborative governance. The national model of social partnership rooted in historical traditions and adapted to modern needs ensures social harmony, protects citizen rights, and fosters active public participation. As reforms continue, strengthening civil society institutions and expanding civic responsibility will remain decisive factors in advancing Uzbekistan’s democratic transformation and ensuring long-term stability and development.

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