



UNDERSTANDING THE PRACTICAL CHALLENGES OF GENDER EQUALITY INITIATIVES IN UZBEKISTAN'S EDUCATION SECTOR

Abdunazarov Abdulkhay

(School counselor of the Presidential school in Nurafshon in Uzbekistan, abdulkhaycounselor@gmail.com)

Shahlo Xatamova

*(Human resource manager of the Presidential school in Nurafshon in Uzbekistan,
shahloxatamovahr@gmail.com)*

Feruz To'laganova

*(Deputy director for Spirituality of the Presidential school in Nurafshon in Uzbekistan,
ftolaganova2@gmail.com)*

Abstract. The advancement of modern science and education is intrinsically linked to women's participation. Uzbekistan has implemented various reforms and programs aimed at enhancing women's involvement in social transformation and leadership. While recent years have witnessed significant progress in women's development across Uzbekistan, certain challenges continue to impede women's full participation in society and their contribution to global economic growth. This research explores the various initiatives undertaken to strengthen the position and capabilities of women and girls in society.

Аннотация. Развитие современной науки и образования неразрывно связано с участием женщин. Узбекистан осуществил ряд реформ и программ, направленных на повышение участия женщин в социальных преобразованиях и лидерстве. Хотя в последние годы в Узбекистане наблюдается значительный прогресс в развитии женщин, определённые проблемы продолжают препятствовать полноценному участию женщин в жизни общества и их вкладу в глобальный экономический рост. В этом исследовании рассматриваются различные инициативы, предпринятые для укрепления положения и возможностей женщин и девочек в обществе.

Key words: Women, Higher education, Gender equality, UNICEF, investment.

Ключевые слова: Женщины, Высшее образование, Гендерное равенство, ЮНИСЕФ, инвестиции.

The post-independence reforms in Uzbekistan have been fundamentally driven by public welfare and societal needs. While improving living standards remained the cornerstone of all developmental initiatives, 2017 heralded an unprecedented acceleration in the nation's progress across all spheres. This new phase brought comprehensive reorganization and transformative changes, specifically targeting solutions to deeply-rooted social challenges. The modernization of scientific research, educational frameworks, and social development stands as a testament to this revolutionary period in Uzbekistan's contemporary history. Notably, enhancing women's active participation in these developments has become an integral part of this national agenda.

In today's world, the development of any field cannot be imagined without innovative ideas and scientific achievements. The greatest wealth of Uzbekistan is the high intellectual and spiritual potential of the people, and women among the people. On the initiative of the head of our state, the large-scale work on improving the education and science system in the republic has become one of the socio-political priorities of our country. On this basis, in today's rapidly developing society, wide opportunities are being created for active women in every field or in their community. With such progress, science and education have found

their place and opened their doors for women.

Today, a number of reforms and initiatives are being implemented in Uzbekistan to support the participation of women in the management of changes in society. Discrimination against women in participation in education, health, business and political processes in the country still persists. Many stereotypical problems are used to describe discrimination against women, the most common of which is discrimination in education, particularly in higher education. In society, the image of women is evaluated as mothers, housewives and passive observers participating in changes.

In Uzbekistan, the employment rate among single women (52 percent) is higher than among married women (36 percent). In the 2020 survey, 43 percent of unemployed women said they were not looking for work because they had to do housework, and only 7 percent of men gave the same reason. In 2021, one-third of registered marriages had a bride under 20 years old. Females are expected to give birth within a year or two of marriage. However, public universities are not equipped with crèches or nursing homes. Uzbekistan's gender imbalance in education can also be observed in the education sector. In the 2021-2022 school year, 68 percent (343,961) of general education teachers will be women, while 32 percent (158,726) will be men. Currently, as of 2020, only 44.1 percent of teachers and professors in higher education institutions with high income and social status are women. In some regions, this figure is much lower. For example, only 29% of professors at higher education institutions in Syrdarya are women.

Women with low levels of education worsen their financial situation, making them, among other problems, more vulnerable to domestic violence. In the 2021 survey, 42 percent of respondents reported tolerating domestic violence for financial reasons - they fear they will not be able to provide for themselves and their children if they divorce. They have reason to think so: as of 2022, 172,000 of the 290,000 men legally obligated to pay alimony were not paying alimony despite court orders. Tashkent has taken steps to close the gender gap and attract more female students. For example, in 2021, 2,000 girls from low-income families will receive state funds for undergraduate education. In March 2022, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev announced the adoption of the National Program to Support Women's Education for 2022-2026. The program will provide girls with interest-free loans for up to seven years to pay for university tuition, and will create new women-only universities and technical schools. In addition, master's degree programs for women in Uzbekistan's state universities are now free of charge. Tashkent annually allocates at least 200 billion soums for this purpose. Every year, the El-Yurt Umidi fund allocates funds for 60 women to receive higher education abroad.

All these measures are aimed at financial support of women with higher education. Secondary education in Uzbekistan is free and compulsory. In Uzbek society, university fees are largely paid by parents, and due to widespread patriarchal values, parents have no problem shouldering the financial burden of sending their sons to college, but not always their daughters. They don't do that. According to local custom, the youngest son stays with his parents and takes care of them in their old age. Girls, on the other hand, are often seen as a "burden" both financially (food, clothing, shelter) and in terms of honor (girls must marry young and virgins, otherwise they bring shame to their families). Compulsory education is a measure that prevents many parents (especially in the regions) from marrying off their daughters as early as possible. In 2021 alone, more than 93,000 girls under the age of 20 got married.

The government encouraging more women to obtain university degrees is the right step at the right time. Until now, increasing the number of higher education institutions in our country is bearing fruit. As the number of universities increased, so did the percentage of educated women. In 2016, only 5.6 percent of women nationwide had a college degree; now it is 17.7 percent. Their number is expected to increase dramatically in the coming years, which will help further narrow the gender gap. But whether educated women enter the labor market, especially after marriage, remains to be seen.

On International Women's Day, UNICEF called for investment in girls' education, access to information, capacity building, empowerment of young women and equal employment, to shape a more equal future for girls and women in leadership. This year's theme, Women in Leadership: Achieving an Equitable Future in a World of COVID-19, seeks to unite efforts to ensure the equal participation of girls and women in all sectors. "The women we see in leadership today had opportunities in the past: access to education, access to resources, employment opportunities. Let's create such opportunities for girls and

young women in Uzbekistan today," said Munir Mammadzoda, head of UNICEF's office in Uzbekistan.

Although much has been achieved for girls and women, more needs to be done to create equal opportunities. Recent data show that girls in Uzbekistan are more likely to drop out of higher education than boys, with only 37 percent of university students being girls. In addition, in the field of employment, young women are significantly excluded from the labor market. After completing compulsory secondary education, 56% of 19-24 year olds are not in education, work or training.

However, evidence also shows the barriers girls and young women face in accessing information online. The number of young women aged 14-30 who have never used the Internet is twice that of men of the same age - 68.1% and 34.3%, respectively. Research has shown that it is important to strengthen the social protection of girls from low-income families and support women in obtaining preferential loans for higher education. In Uzbekistan, the government has made great efforts to combat violence against women and ensure equal opportunities for boys and girls to realize their potential.

Today, it is natural that the role and activities of intelligent women in higher educational institutions, the regular implementation of new generation textbooks, training manuals and tools will increase the quality and efficiency of education. The process of globalization cannot be imagined without intelligent women. It is natural that it will be difficult to achieve the intended field of activity and the intended perspective. However, thanks to the achievement of independence, the women of Uzbekistan achieved real equality. Although at first there were few people who made a worthy contribution to science, in the following years, the attention and recognition shown by our state played a big role in the expansion of their ranks.

In the development of our country, important work has been done to increase the role of women working in the education system in the construction of the state and society, to determine their socio-political activity, initiative, leadership, and professional skills. For example, many women scientists contributing to the improvement of the higher education system and the development of science in Uzbekistan have been awarded prestigious state awards. All their efforts in the field of science and education are taken into account and encouraged accordingly.

In conclusion, it can be said that in Uzbekistan, the attitude and attention to women, especially intellectuals, women scientists, has risen to the state level, and the basis of fundamental changes in their activities is the women, women and girls of the Republic of Uzbekistan. wishes were fulfilled in the republic. It is no secret that new aspects of reforms in this regard, more suitable aspects for the country's peace and well-being are being developed at the direct initiative of the head of our state. In addition, priority tasks such as attention to the development of science, further development of the personnel training system, training of qualified specialists in the field are increasing day by day. Constant attention is being paid to ensuring the place and participation of women in such processes and creating the necessary conditions for them. After that, we can say that this attention will not be continuous, as it was until now.

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