Country and Government Context

Uzbekistan is located in the central part of Central Asia. To the northeast, it shares a border with the Kyrgyz Republic; to the north and northwest, with Kazakhstan; to the southwest, with Turkmenistan; to the southeast, with Tajikistan; and to the south, with Afghanistan. The total length of its border is 6,621 kilometers. Uzbekistan was a member of the former Soviet Union, and the Republic of Uzbekistan gained its independence on 1 September 1991.

Uzbekistan’s population exceeded 28.5 million in April 2011, of which 51% was urban and 49% rural. The average population density is 59.4 persons per square kilometer. In terms of population size, Uzbekistan is the third largest country in the Commonwealth of Independent States (after the Russian Federation and Ukraine). There are 120 cities and towns and 115 urban centers in the country.

Uzbekistan is headed by the President. The Oliy Majlis (Parliament) of the Republic of Uzbekistan is the supreme representative body of government, exercising legislative power. It comprises two chambers, the Legislative Chamber (the lower house) and the Senate (the upper house). The Senate is represented by 100 senators, of whom 16 are appointed by the President and the rest are elected by local councils of People’s Deputies from provincial and district governors, the mayor of Tashkent City, and the chair of the Parliament of Karakalpakstan.

Civil Society: An Overview

Civil society in Uzbekistan has been primarily associated with mahallas, which are self-governing bodies. The mahalla system in Uzbekistan is an important institution of local self-governance, which plays a significant socioeconomic development role. The mahalla is a community-driven organization responsible for helping members of the community and other social work (conflict resolution, overall community upkeep, etc.). At the present time, the mahalla structure and functions are based on the law on Institutions of Self-Government of Citizens (the Mahalla Law of 1999). Civil society in Uzbekistan today is broader than the traditional mahalla system. It covers businesses, grassroots initiatives, government initiatives, and political parties, among others.

Civil society began developing during 1991–1995. The Business Women Association of Uzbekistan, Tadbirkor Ael (which has offices in Tashkent and each province), the Association of Pediatricians (Bukhara), Perzent (Nukus), the Association of Accountants and Auditors (Tashkent), the Female Resource Center (Tashkent), and Kridi (Tashkent) were among the first nongovernment organizations (NGOs) who formed in this period.

The government also encouraged the creation of NGOs. To support women, the Women’s Committee was established. Kamolot Fund supports the youth; Sogloam Avlod works on the health of children; Ecosan looks at ecological issues; Mahalla Fund works at the community level, while the Chamber of Commerce and Industry supports local entrepreneurs.

In the second half of the 1990s, international organizations, including NGOs and development agencies, began to support civil society initiatives. These included the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), United States Peace Corps, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Oxfam Novib, Technical Assistance for the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS) Program of the European Union, Konrad Adenauer Foundation, International Center for

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b An urban center has a population of fewer than 50,000 residents, whereas cities have a population of more than 100,000 and towns a population of 50,000–100,000.
Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL), and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). Later, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) began operations to help improve welfare in the country.

There are many women’s NGOs in Uzbekistan, the majority of which were established in 1995–1996. This includes the Tashkent Center of Female Leaders, the Association of Veteran Women, the Samarkand Center of Trust Sabr, and others. By the end of 2001, there were 98 women’s NGOs in Uzbekistan. Through the support of international organizations, NGO leaders from Uzbekistan visited and learned about NGO experiences in Germany, Poland, the United Kingdom, and the United States. They also participated in various international conferences, seminars, and meetings.

Business associations, such as associations of arbitration tribunals, tourist companies, professional consultants, farmers, restaurateurs, and hairdressers, have been established. The activities of such associations are aimed at protecting professional interests and improving professional skills.

In broader terms, civil society in Uzbekistan today is represented by the following types of organizations:

- NGOs established by grassroots initiatives, including 120 NGOs throughout the country;
- NGOs that mainly work on government programs and initiatives;
- NGOs associated with political parties; and
- NGOs based on community-driven organizations like mahalla.

Government–Civil Society Relations

The government is continuing to support the creation of new local NGOs to strengthen the role of the civil society and address social issues. Recent examples include the Institute of Civil Society and the National Association of Non-Government Non-Commercial Organizations of Uzbekistan (NANGOUZ), which was created at the initiative of 150 NGOs around the country. NANGOUZ was established to encourage the adoption of democratic principles in the country, representing the rights and interests of nongovernment noncommercial organizations, and their protection and comprehensive
support, and uniting the democratic forces. The number of active NGOs in Uzbekistan varies from 330 to 5,100, depending on the way they are defined.

The government has also taken steps to deepen democratic reforms and develop civil society. In 2011, notable measures were taken in organizing elections of the heads of mahallas.

NANGOUZ was created at the initiative of 150 NGOs... to encourage the adoption of democratic principles in the country, representing the rights and interests of nongovernment noncommercial organizations.

The Legal Framework for Civil Society

NGO operations are governed by the Law “On Non-Government Non-Commercial Organizations,” which was passed on 14 April 1999. The draft law was actively discussed by the public. In addition to this law, there are several other regulatory documents, such as the Resolution “On Measures for Supporting the Development of Institutions of Civil Society” and “Regulations on the Procedure for Placing Social Orders among NGOs and Other Institutions of Civil Society.”

Tax Treatment of NGOs

On 1 January 2008, a new tax code, which regulates the taxation of NGOs, came into force. NGOs are exempt from taxes and other mandatory charges for legal entities. NGOs have to allocate funds for paying wages to their staff in accordance with the Labor Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan, which requires that the monthly wage of an employee should not be below the legally mandated minimum wage level.
Civil Society Funding

Currently, development partners support a number of small-scale grant programs with NGO participation. For instance, the Small Grants Program administered by the World Bank allocates $35,000 per annum, and the International Financial Corporation provides small grants for organizations for business trainings. OSCE is implementing partnership projects with NGOs. The Public Fund for Supporting Print Media provides grants to journalists and conducts competitions on subjects, such as democracy awareness raising, human rights, and rights of women. The Fund for Supporting Social Initiatives provides small grants of up to $1,000 to NGOs for addressing social issues.

The international organizations that work with NGOs are as follows:

- ADB
- Democracy Commission Small Grants Program of the US Embassy
- Institute of Education for Adults (Germany)
- International Finance Corporation
- Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)
- Regional Program for Supporting Culture and Arts of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
- UNDP
- World Bank

Analysis of the grants made available to the nongovernment sector, particularly for the purposes of gender development, has revealed that with the help of small-scale, short-term funding programs, it is possible to achieve targeted and effective implementation of projects.

ADB–Civil Society Cooperation in Uzbekistan

ADB supports initiatives of the government in a number of sectors, encompassing education, water supply, health, agriculture and rural development, small businesses, and transport. This support is bringing tangible results. The analysis of the grants made available to the nongovernment sector, particularly for the purposes of gender development, has revealed that with the help of small-scale, short-term funding programs, it is possible to achieve targeted and effective implementation of projects.

ADB-Supported Activities Involving Civil Society

Civil society has been involved in the preparation and implementation of a number of loans and grant-funded technical assistance projects in Uzbekistan, including those financed from the Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction (JFPR). A brief description of these projects, the nature of the civil society involvement, and the outputs is given below.
Design of Transport Corridor III (Dushanbe–Uzbekistan Border Road), under the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) Program included participatory exercises with a range of stakeholders —community members and local groups, NGOs, line agencies involved in road subsector development, and businesses. Participatory tools, such as focus group discussions, participatory workshops, and community-level rapid assessment, ensured that local concerns and priorities were included in the design and implementation arrangements of the road project.

ADB’s Gender and Development Cooperation Fund supported a regional technical assistance (RETA) project RETA 6431: Promoting Rural Women’s Entrepreneurship in Transition Economies. The project started in June 2008 and was completed in 2010. The impact of this RETA project was enhanced rural women’s economic empowerment in three central Asian countries: the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. One main project output has been strengthening of women’s associations, women’s self-help groups, NGOs, and networks through social mobilization; intensive capacity development activities; and technical and financial support in agribusiness processing in selected project areas.

In the three loan projects, namely, Grain Productivity Improvement, Amu Zang Irrigation Rehabilitation, and Land Improvement, ADB helped establish and worked with several water users’ associations (WUAs) throughout Uzbekistan to build their capacities through training; workshops; and field demonstrations of new technologies, including precision land leveling using a laser technique, direct seed drilling, deep ripping, zero and minimum tillage, mulching, new crop rotation schemes, crop/water requirements, preparation of water management plans, and introduction of water-
saving irrigation practices. ADB also provided guidance on legal aspects, WUA staffing, financial management and accounting, preparation of business plans, and applications for commercial credits.

With ADB support, grant funds were made available to several women’s NGOs for development activities throughout the country. For example, the Association of Business Women of Bukhara conducted three training programs: Organization of Training for Woman Entrepreneurs in Rural Areas (2000); Legal and Economic Education of Women Managers of Dehkan Agricultural Enterprises and Farms (2002–2003); and Financial and Credit Management, Training, and Information Support of Entrepreneurs (2004).

The Association of Business Women of the Tashkent Province provided training to women in the rural areas of Uzbekistan in 2000–2003. As a result of these projects, women acquired business skills in such areas as drafting business plans, the basics of management and marketing, taxation issues, and the basics of accounting.

Overall, 3,106 people received advice, 789 people were trained, 278 people received credit, 302 people started new businesses, and 73 new jobs were created.

Civil society in Uzbekistan is developing. Support may be provided by engaging operations-oriented NGOs and working with them... for delivery of concrete development results on the ground.
Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction

The Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction (JFPR) is an untied grant facility established by the Government of Japan and ADB in May 2000. From an initial contribution of $90 million, the Fund now stands at well over $392 million, of which $335 million has been committed. The JFPR assists ADB clients to provide direct relief to the poorest and most vulnerable segments of society while building up their capacities for self-help and income generation. Specifically, the JFPR initiates and supports innovative programs with high potential for improving the affected countries’ situations; provides relatively rapid, demonstrable benefits through initiatives that can be developed and sustained in the long term; and helps local populations and civil society design and implement programs.

The JFPR provides an opportunity for local communities and CSOs, including NGOs, to actively participate in the development.

NGO participation is deeply ingrained in JFPR operations—the JFPR is widely recognized as one of the primary grant facilities available to NGOs. NGOs and community groups are routinely involved in project cycles’ different stages. They take part as an executing agency; implementing agency; resource NGO providing information, community organizing, or some other specialized service; or a consultant to ADB during the course of the project’s supervision.

Under JFPR 9054: Affordable Services and Water Conservation for the Urban Poor, $1.5 million assistance was provided to local housing associations in the cities of Gulistan, Djizzak, and Karshi for improving water delivery services through better plumbing and fitting works, water conservation awareness campaigns, and promoting better participation of communities in water management. This also included establishment of a community-based revolving fund to address urgent needs for repair and training of housing associations in the three cities.

Under JFPR 9010: Support to Innovative Poverty Reduction, a $2.54 million grant was provided for implementation of nonconventional welfare improvement activities in the ecologically affected Karakalpakstan Republic in Western Uzbekistan. The project helped provide livelihood opportunities for low-income groups through vocational training, establishment of small-scale private businesses, creation of microcredit organizations, improvement of rural water supply and sanitation, as well as small community-based infrastructure improvement.

Regional JFPR: Improving Nutrition of Poor Mothers and Children in Central Asia is a $6 million grant project that promoted fortification of salt with iodine and flour with an iron-based premix to improve the micronutrient content in the daily diet of rural population in Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Mongolia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. This helped reduce the incidence of iodine deficiency and anemia among pregnant women and had a positive impact on infant health.

JFPR 9091: Basic Education for Children with Special Needs provided $1.5 million to help improve learning performance and social integration of children in selected specialized schools. The project scope included development of new teacher training modules and learning aids and rehabilitation/upgrading of school facilities with ramps for wheelchairs, guide rails, clear signs and signals, and special information and communication technology (ICT) facilities. Three local NGOs with expertise in special education assisted in the development and implementation of public awareness programs in the three project regions. These NGOs worked closely with parents of children with special needs, schools, and communities and helped successful integration of the children with special needs.

Civil society in Uzbekistan is developing. Support may be provided by engaging operations-oriented NGOs and working with them, in coordination with other ADB
activities, for delivery of concrete development results on the ground. Appropriate legal and regulatory framework for NGOs is in place. Practical collaboration with NGOs and demonstration of results will be the next step. Working with NGOs will be with realistic time lines for delivery of results.

Endnotes

1. The Business Women Association of Uzbekistan conducted a comparative analysis of lists of nongovernment organizations (NGOs) prepared by two organizations: NANGOUZ and the Social Initiatives Support Foundation.

2. These NGOs are self-established but work to support mainly government programs and initiatives.

For more information on ADB’s work in Uzbekistan, visit www.adb.org/publications/uzbekistan-fact-sheet

Definition and Objectives of Civil Society Collaboration

Civil society is a very important stakeholder in the operations of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and its borrowers and clients. It is distinct from the government and the private sector and consists of a diverse range of individuals, groups, and nonprofit organizations. They operate around shared interests, purposes, and values with a varying degree of formality and encompass a diverse range—from informal unorganized community groups to large international labor union organizations. Of particular relevance to ADB are nongovernment organizations, community-based organizations and people’s organizations, foundations, professional associations, research institutes and universities, labor unions, mass organizations, social movements, and coalitions and networks of civil society organizations (CSOs) and umbrella organizations.

ADB recognizes CSOs as development actors in their own right whose efforts complement those of governments and the private sector, and who play a significant role in development in Asia and the Pacific. ADB has a long tradition of interacting with CSOs in different contexts, through policy- and country strategy-level consultation, and in designing, implementing, and monitoring projects.

In 2008, ADB launched Strategy 2020, which articulates the organization’s future direction and vision until 2020. Above all, Strategy 2020 presents three complementary strategic agendas to guide ADB operations: inclusive economic growth, environmentally sustainable growth, and regional integration. These agendas reflect the recognition that it is not only the pace of growth, but also the pattern of growth, that matters in reducing poverty in the region. In this new strategic context, partnerships with a range of organizations, including CSOs, will become central to planning, financing, implementing, and evaluating ADB projects.

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