



A NEW STAGE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY INSTITUTIONS IN NEW UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract: This article analyzes the status and role of civil society institutions in the life of renewing Uzbek society. Based on empirical examples, it examines key dimensions such as improving the legal framework for civil society development, mechanisms of state assistance and support, creating the necessary conditions for the active participation of civil society institutions in state and public governance, their involvement in state social projects, and ensuring transparency in their activities.

Keywords: Uzbek society, civil society, institutions, legal framework, improvement, support mechanism, state and public governance.

In the contemporary world, civil society institutions (non-governmental non-profit organizations, public associations, independent media, and active civic groups) serve as a vital bridge and a balancing force between the state and the people. They help establish effective public oversight over the activities of state bodies, curb corruption, and ensure transparency in decision-making processes. Furthermore, these institutions play an essential role in protecting human rights, reducing social inequality, and bringing the legitimate interests of diverse social strata-particularly vulnerable segments of the population-to the governmental agenda.

At the same time, civil society stands as one of the primary drivers of socio-economic development and stability. By promptly identifying local issues that fall beyond the direct reach of the state budget or administrative resources, these organizations implement significant social initiatives across ecology, education, healthcare, and volunteerism. By reinforcing citizens' sense of ownership regarding their destiny and the future of the nation, civil society institutions prevent social conflicts, fostering peace, tolerance, and sustainable development within society.

Under Presidential Decree No. UP-6181 of March 4, 2021, "On Approval of the Concept for the Development of Civil Society in 2021–2025," a dedicated foundational document was adopted. The Concept outlined strategic priorities, according special emphasis to systematically refining the legal framework of civil society, enhancing mechanisms of state assistance and financial support for civil society institutions, creating necessary conditions for



their active engagement in state and public governance, further expanding their participation in state social projects, and guaranteeing institutional transparency [1].

Through the implementation of the tasks established in the Concept, effective cooperation with civil society institutions was operationalized; the efficiency of allocating subsidies, grants, and social orders, as well as transparency in the utilization of assets and financial resources, was ensured; and the statutory participation of non-governmental non-profit organizations at all stages of drafting legislative acts was legally codified. Concurrently, the legal framework governing the mass media was refined, the authority of local Kengashes (Councils) of People's Deputies was enhanced, active public oversight mechanisms were accelerated, and volunteer and philanthropic activities were substantially advanced.

As Head of State Sh. Mirziyoyev emphasized: "Organizational and legal measures are being carried out to strengthen the role of parliament, civil society institutions, and the media, and to implement the principles: 'The people are the sole source and true author of laws' and 'All critical decisions are made directly through dialogue with the people, taking public opinion into account'" [2, p. 69]. From a philosophical standpoint, the involvement of civil society institutions in lawmaking is a direct practical manifestation of the social contract theory advanced by J.-J. Rousseau and J. Locke, signifying that the ultimate source and legitimacy of law originate from the free will of the people. Within this framework, law ceases to be an authoritarian directive imposed from above; instead, it becomes the product of the "general will," articulating justice and a balance of interests among diverse social groups. "Only the general will can direct the powers of the State in accordance with the purpose for which it was instituted-the common good... A person is free only when they obey a law they have prescribed for themselves" [3, p. 206]. The institution of civil society elevates the individual from a passive subject merely submitting to laws to an active agent shaping normative standards, thereby mitigating the problem of alienation (*Entfremdung*) between the individual and the state.

Furthermore, this participatory dynamic is articulated through the prism of J. Habermas's theory of communicative action: legitimate norms are forged not through monologue, but through unconstrained, open public discourse. Civil society serves as a discursive and normative sphere where divergent perspectives, values, and ethical paradigms intersect before arriving at consensus. "The legitimacy of legal norms is ensured only when the process of their formulation and adoption is anchored in open, equal, and unrestricted discourse accessible to all interested citizens" [4, pp. 138–140]. Consequently, laws do not remain abstract dogmas; rather, they harmonize with the genuine



moral consciousness, objective needs, and natural rights of society, transforming into legitimate, vital regulators of social justice embraced through internal conviction.

In the Development Strategy of New Uzbekistan, the transition from the paradigm of "state – society – individual" to "individual – society – state" elevated civil society institutions into equal partners in reform. Following the adoption of the Concept for the Development of Civil Society in 2021–2025, institutional ties between state bodies and non-governmental entities advanced to a qualitatively new tier. Today, independent Public Councils operate permanently under ministries and government agencies, ensuring that significant policy and social decisions are finalized in consultation with them.

Social partnership between the state and non-governmental non-profit organizations (NGOs) is realized through targeted sector-specific programs. For instance, in cooperation between the Ministry of Poverty Alleviation and Employment, women's committees, and youth organizations, training projects in vocational trades, IT, and applied crafts have been established for thousands of women and youths in remote regions. Such practical cooperation guarantees that state assistance reaches the most vulnerable segments of the population swiftly and purposefully.

The institutional framework for the financial support of civil society was fundamentally restructured, dramatically increasing the volume of subsidies, grants, and social orders allocated via the Public Fund under the Oliy Majlis. While funding was previously channeled toward general awareness campaigns, priority is now assigned to the measurable, outcome-oriented impact of each project. These allocation procedures are organized around competitive open bidding, using transparent online platforms to receive applications and evaluate candidates. State grants and social commissions have proven highly effective in resolving acute societal problems. In particular, social procurement has been awarded to specialized NGOs advancing inclusive education for individuals with disabilities and delivering social rehabilitation for children with autism spectrum disorder and Down syndrome. Consequently, hundreds of families have received targeted rehabilitation services through professional NGOs in complex fields where the administrative system previously faced operational constraints.

The legal guarantees underpinning mass media activities have been reinforced; the renewed Constitution explicitly enshrines freedom of speech and information, alongside stringent liability provisions for obstructing lawful journalistic work. The Laws "On Mass Media" and "On Guarantees and Freedom of Access to Information" [5] legally guarantee journalists unhindered access to official information. Arbitrary administrative interference and



censorship are strictly prohibited, significantly amplifying the voice of independent publications and the blogosphere within the national media landscape. Informational openness has emerged as an incisive instrument for exposing bureaucratic inertia and legal violations. Through investigative reporting by journalists and civic bloggers, unlawful decisions concerning the demolition of cultural heritage sites, illegal land allocations, and artificially inflated public procurement pricing have been revoked. Elevating the status of press secretaries across state institutions and establishing rapid public response channels have materially strengthened institutional accountability.

Within local governance, the authority of local Kengashes (Councils) of People's Deputies has grown substantially, transforming them into independent representative bodies advocating local civic interests. Whereas regional and district governors (khokims) formerly chaired the respective local Councils simultaneously, constitutional amendments delineated and severed these dual roles. This structural reform introduced authentic legislative and representative oversight over local executive branches. Local Councils now maintain stringent oversight over the formulation and execution of territorial budgets. Deputies regularly review formal reporting from regional department heads concerning the expenditure of funds earmarked for road infrastructure, potable water networks, and school renovation, passing votes of no confidence against underperforming officials where warranted. This dynamic ensures that public sentiment and communal welfare remain central to local decision-making.

Structures of public oversight became substantive mechanisms following the passage of the Law "On Public Oversight" [6]. This regulatory framework is executed not merely by established NGOs, but directly by everyday citizens. A prominent illustration is the "Open Budget" (Ochiq budjet) portal, where residents directly determine budget allocations for repairing neighborhood schools, kindergartens, roads, or clinics through open voting, subsequently inspecting construction quality firsthand. Other dimensions, such as civic environmental oversight, have likewise attained critical momentum. Civic eco-activists actively document the illegal felling of trees and unlawful construction in green zones; through timely public exposure and resultant interventions by the Prosecutor General's Office and the Ministry of Ecology, numerous illegal building initiatives have been halted.

Public hearings and civic monitoring initiatives directly exert influence on legislative activity. In European practice, public oversight is also mediated via independent journalism: investigative analysis, open parliamentary hearings, and NGO ratings directly inform public policy and offer ethical appraisals of administrative leadership. The OECD has consistently emphasized this approach, recommending that oversight outcomes be published as transparent



public reports. Globally, NGOs occupy the frontline of public accountability; across the United States and Western Europe, NGOs actively auditing public institutions safeguard systems of administrative transparency and grievance redressal [7]. These institutions aggregate public opinion, perform empirical analysis, and put forward swift policy recommendations, acting as an indispensable catalyst in ethical and institutional reforms.

The volunteer movement in Uzbekistan secured formal legal status following the adoption of the Law “On Volunteer Activity”, maturing into a formidable social force. From the challenges of the pandemic to relief operations during the Sardoba dam disaster and severe winter anomalies, volunteer cohorts coordinated shoulder-to-shoulder with state agencies, delivering hot meals, clothing, and essential medications to vulnerable populations. Today, youth volunteers contribute dedicated service across environmental sanitation initiatives (such as Toza hudud campaigns), charitable centers, and pediatric medical facilities, reinforcing the bedrock of an engaged society.

Philanthropy and patronage have concurrently evolved from fragmented, ad hoc assistance into structured corporate social responsibility. Systemic mechanisms have been institutionalized through the “Vaql” Public Charity Foundation, the “Saxovat va ko‘mak” Fund, and private entrepreneurs to fund academic grants, sponsor high-cost medical treatments, and support gifted youth at prestigious foreign universities. Supported by statutory tax incentives granted to philanthropic businesses, the private sector has emerged as an essential social partner advancing public welfare.

In conclusion, civil society institutions in New Uzbekistan have entered a qualitatively new stage of development, evolving into a reliable bridge between the state and society, as well as a vital mechanism for effective public oversight and social partnership. Constitutional reforms and the established modern legal framework have substantially liberalized the activities of non-governmental non-profit organizations, the mahalla institution, and the media, thereby broadening civic engagement in decision-making processes; this, in turn, contributes to further consolidating the foundations of a legal democratic state and an open society built upon the principle of “For Human Dignity”.

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