

THE RISE OF WOMEN'S SOCIAL STATUS DURING THE YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE (THE CASE OF SURXONDARYO REGION)

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Abstract. *This article presents reflections on the rise of women's social status within the family and society during the years 1999–2004, as well as the legal protection of their labor. It discusses the Resolution No. 117 adopted by the Cabinet of Ministers on March 17, 1999, "On Preferential Taxation of the Income of Women Working in Extremely Harmful and Heavy Working Conditions," along with many other decisions made during the years of independence aimed at protecting women's interests. The article also emphasizes the significance of these policies in the lives of women. Special attention is given to the role of the 1999 State Program "Year of Women" in improving the lives of women in the Surxondaryo region.*

Keywords: "Year of Women", State Program, "Surxon-Ajanta", Surkhandarya Drilling Plant, Shargun Coal Mine, Sanitary and Epidemiological Station.

During the years of independence, it is well known that numerous state programs have been adopted in our country to strengthen the role of women in the family and to create a healthy family environment. In 1999, in connection with the declaration of the "Year of Women," a State Program was adopted aimed at strengthening the status and role of women in the political, socio-economic life of the country, in the development of a market economy, and in stabilizing the spiritual and educational foundations of society. More than 72 billion soums were allocated for the implementation of this program from the state budget, trade unions, enterprises and organizations, sponsors' funds, foreign loans, and the humanitarian assistance of international organizations.¹

Within the framework of the "Year of Women" State Program, 51.2 billion soums were allocated for the implementation of the measures carried out in our republic.

Of this amount, 40.7 billion soums were spent on assistance to large and low-income families.

3.5 billion soums were used to provide first-grade students with school supplies and to supply clothing to children from low-income families. 7 billion soums were allocated for improving the health of women and children, constructing healthcare facilities, and equipping medical institutions with the best medical equipment. A series of measures were implemented under the program to improve the working and living conditions of more than 350,000 women, increase the incomes of women nearing retirement, veterans, and mothers with young children, and expand opportunities for child-rearing. Measures were also taken to introduce additional benefits for women engaged in hard labor. 142 million soums were allocated from the state budget to provide such benefits². In accordance with the "Year of Women" State Program in 1999, aimed at easing women's labor and improving their living conditions, the Cabinet of

¹ Surxondaryo viloyat davlat arxivi. 1091-аштв, 1-ро'yxat, 465-yig'ma jild, 56-varaq

² Fan va turmush.1999y .488 bet.

Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan adopted Resolution No. 73 on February 18, 1999, titled "On Measures of the State Program to Strengthen the Role of Women in the Construction of Family, State, and Society, and to Improve the System of Protecting Their Legal, Social, Economic, and Spiritual Interests." Following this, the Governor of Surxondaryo Region issued Resolution No. 68 on March 1, 1999, regarding the implementation of the program. Of particular importance are also the Cabinet of Ministers' Resolution No. 117 dated March 17, 1999, "On Preferential Taxation of the Income of Women Working in Extremely Harmful and Heavy Working Conditions," and the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Additional Benefits for Women," among others³. Additionally, on May 4, 1999, the Cabinet of Ministers adopted Resolution No. 212 titled "On Measures to Promote the Production and Sale of Goods for Children's and Women's Hygiene," which also played an important role in the development of the sector⁴. Recommendations were developed for the promotion and dissemination of the meaning and content of these laws and resolutions. Propaganda and outreach groups consisting of the regional women's committee, city and district women's committees, organization leaders, legal experts, and active women were established, and explanatory work was carried out at the local level⁵. For example, to ensure the implementation of Resolution No. 117 dated March 17, 1999, "On Preferential Taxation of the Income of Women Working in Extremely Harmful and Heavy Working Conditions," Resolution No. 94 of the Surxondaryo Regional Administration was adopted on March 30, 1999⁶. A large number of measures were defined and their implementation ensured within the framework of these resolutions. In the region, conditions were created to increase the income level of women working in difficult labor conditions, strengthen the protection of their economic interests, provide timely preventive medical examinations for women, adequately equip hygienic rooms for women working in labor, rest, nutrition, winter seasons, and night shifts, and arrange facilities for women deemed necessary to receive treatment in sanatoriums and rest homes.

By 1999, the activities of women working mainly in the cotton cleaning plants of Surxondaryo region, the "Surxon-Ajanta" pharmaceutical enterprise, printing houses in Angor and Denov districts, the Surxondaryo Regional Sanitary Epidemiological Station, disinfection departments, biological laboratories, the Surxonparmalash plant in Qumqo'rg'on district, the Surxontekstil joint-stock company in Jarqo'rg'on district, the reinforced concrete products factory, and several other enterprises operating under heavy and extremely heavy conditions were thoroughly analyzed by the regional women's committee⁷. A five-day workweek was introduced for women working in extremely heavy labor conditions. In addition, the resolution stipulated that the tax on their wages should not exceed 20%, and allowances of 15% to 25% were applied to their salaries⁸.

³ Gasanova M. Ayol huquqi va erkinliklari// Ijtimoiy va iqtisodiy huquqlar sohasida xotin-qizlarga nisbatan tahqirlanishning yo'l qo'yilmasligi.-T.: Adolat, 2002.-B37..

⁴ G. G'aniyeva. O'zbekistonda xotin-qizlar masalasi: yangicha yondashuv, muammolar va yechimlar. Tarix.fan..nom.-T., 2006. B.-64

⁵ Surxondaryo viloyati davlat arxivi. 1091-fond. 1-ro'yxat.830-yig'ma jild. 7-varaq.

⁶ Surxondaryo viloyati davlat arxivi. 1091-fond, ro'yxat-1,236- yig'ma jild-1474, 104-varaq.

⁷ Сурхондарё вилоят давлат архиви. 1091-fond, 1-рўйхат, 1474-йиғма жилд, 105-варақ

⁸ Сурхондарё вилоят давлат архиви. 1091-fond, 1-рўйхат, 1474-йиғма жилд. 107-варақ.

Specifically, the number of women working in harsh labor conditions was identified, and their working conditions were reviewed. During this period, the number of women working in difficult and extremely difficult conditions amounted to 39 in Sariosiyo district and 42 in Boysun district. Among them, 9 women worked at the Sharg'un city brick factory, 5 women at the Sariosiyo rental printing house, 24 women at the Sharg'un coal mine, 25 women at the Boysun district sanitary epidemiological station, and 15 women at the Health Department.

In Denov district, 4 women worked in the Suvoqava system, 21 in the district health department, 5 at the Sanitary Epidemiological Station, 19 at the Khayrabod cotton factory, 13 at the Denov cotton factory, 8 at the cotton ginning factory, and 37 women at the Oil Extraction Plant worked in heavy and extremely heavy labor conditions, and their working conditions were classified as severe⁹.

Additionally, women working in harsh labor conditions were granted additional benefits. According to the law on additional benefits for women adopted at the 19th session of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan, women working in budget-funded institutions and organizations caring for children under the age of three were granted a reduced working time not exceeding 35 hours per week without reducing their wages. Furthermore, women with at least 20 years of work experience were given the right to retire at the age of 54, which is one year earlier than the general retirement age. These provisions were communicated to women by propaganda and outreach groups¹⁰.

Additionally, in all districts of the region, activities based on monitoring developed by the Ombudsman—the Human Rights Commissioner of the Oliy Majlis—aimed at a thorough analysis of the implementation of laws related to women's rights, maternity, and child protection have been under the constant supervision of women's committees and relevant organizations. Work in this area has continued¹¹.

In the first nine months of 1999, 275 women were employed, and 258 women were trained in professional skills. A total of 759.5 million soums from the Unemployment Assistance Fund was allocated to support their employment. Furthermore, during the year, 723 women who could not compete in the labor market under market economy conditions were officially declared "employed" by the decision of the regional administration or placed in newly created minimum-wage jobs.

Additionally, in rural areas, girls who graduated from school were provided with opportunities to gain knowledge at "Business Schools," where entrepreneurial skills and competencies were taught, thus promoting an increase in the number of entrepreneurial women in villages.

In 1999, the region had a total population of 1,701,800 people, of which 846,100 were women. The number of women living in difficult conditions was 34,192 in 1999, and special attention was given to directing them towards employment and improving their social status.

⁹ Surxondaryo viloyati hokimligi joriy arxivi. 2002 yilgi xotin-qizlar va ularning mehnat sharoitiga oid hisobot.

¹⁰ Surxondaryo viloyati davlat arxivi. 1091-fond, 1-ro'yxat, 830-yig'ma jild. 45- varaq

¹¹ Surxondaryo viloyat davlat arxivi, 1091-jamg'arma, 1-ro'yxat, yig'ma jild-830, 56-varaq.

In regional organizations, collective farms, institutions (including small businesses and individual activities), the total number of employees was 360,255, of whom 133,837 were women (according to 1999 data). Among these, 40 of the 732 existing self-government bodies in the region were led by women, and 82 women served as responsible secretaries.

By sectors: in industry – 5,053 women; agriculture – 71,521 women; forestry – 100 women; transport – 1,132 women; communications – 370 women; trade and public catering – 1,374 women; domestic services – 577 women; healthcare and sports – 17,877 women; public education – 27,280 women; culture – 1,808 women; finance – 956 women; construction – 1,615 women; science – 60 women; arts – 139 women; material and technical supply – 260 women; training sector – 531 women; administrative bodies – 2,983 women; information and computing systems – 25 women; geology – 58 women; other sectors – 176 women.

To prepare a reserve of cadres for promotion to leadership positions, measures were taken to improve the professional skills of women actively working in various fields and to promote them to higher positions according to their abilities.

Ensuring women's employment has always been a top priority in our country. In 1999, the regional finance department employed 138 low-income women, and 225 women were trained and employed in professions such as sewing, weaving, cooking, nursing, and others. During their vocational training, they received a monthly stipend of 705.5 thousand soums from the Unemployment Assistance Fund.

Additionally, 413 women who could not compete equally with others in the labor market were officially declared “employed” or placed in minimum-wage jobs by decisions of regional and district administrations. Among those employed were 202 women with many children, 221 women who graduated from educational institutions, one disabled woman, and one woman who had served a prison sentence. Their employment and working conditions were continuously monitored by the regional women’s committee and responsible organizations.

A total of 475 women who remained unemployed were officially recognized as unemployed and registered to receive unemployment benefits. They were paid 1,805.0 thousand soums from the Unemployment Assistance Fund, and 235 women who applied for jobs were temporarily employed in paid positions, receiving 365.8 thousand soums from the fund.

As a result, by the end of 1999, a total of 6,268 new jobs were created in Surxondaryo region, and the issue of women’s unemployment was thoroughly analyzed. In subsequent years, special attention continued to be given to ensuring women's employment and improving their social conditions.

Specifically, by 2000, 3,062 jobs were created for women in Surxondaryo region, of which 492 were allocated to women with many children and single mothers, and 247 to women with many children. During this period, several initiatives for women’s health improvement were also implemented; in 2001, 350 mothers and children were rehabilitated at the Honjiza sanatorium.

For 1,125 families considered in urgent need, the regional women’s committee and sponsoring organizations allocated funds amounting to 54,000 US dollars. In 2000, a total of 4,377 marriages were registered in the region, and by 2001, the number of registered marriages increased slightly to 4,383.

In 2001, based on precise data on women's employment and unemployment in the region, and analyzing local opportunities, labor resources, and demands, 124 women were trained for employment at the Adaptation Center located in Termez city with the aim of providing jobs for unemployed women.

That year, 9,198 citizens applied to labor departments for unemployment benefits, of whom 3,347 were women. Among them, 2,180 women were employed. Additionally, out of 1,204 people engaged in public works, 588 were women. In total, 15,539 jobs were created across the region in 2001, including 4,108 jobs specifically for women.

In 2003, alongside efforts to improve the social life of families, elevate the status of women in society, and develop small and medium-sized businesses, 6,300 women were provided with employment in Surxondaryo region. Furthermore, 300 skilled women were given opportunities to engage in handicraft activities.

As a result of the development of small and medium businesses and private entrepreneurship, on the initiative of the regional women's committee and through the activities of district women's committees, more than 2,000 women were employed.

In 2004, to further strengthen and promote small and medium business enterprises managed by women in Surxondaryo region, practical seminars were held in Qumqo'rg'on and Boysun districts.

The regional women's committee planned and implemented specific measures in cooperation with the Regional Labor and Social Protection Department to employ unemployed women, creating 375 new jobs. Additionally, contracts were concluded with textile enterprises at the regional level to create new job opportunities for women, steadily increasing employment.

In conclusion, it is important to emphasize that protecting women's labor, ensuring their employment, and creating favorable working conditions has become a top priority of the national policy. Laws and decrees developed to protect the labor rights of women contribute to increasing their active participation in all sectors.

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