

STRATEGIES FOR INCREASING EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL WELL-BEING IN RURAL AREAS OF UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract: *This article discusses current strategies and measures aimed at improving the level of employment and general social well-being of the rural population in Uzbekistan. The main attention is paid to the analysis of state initiatives and international programs, their impact on the economic and social development of rural areas, and also discusses key challenges and opportunities for further development. Particular attention is paid to the issues of infrastructural development, Education, Entrepreneurship and Climate Change Adaptation. The article is a comprehensive review of existing approaches and prospects for improving employment policies that contribute to the sustainable development of rural areas of Uzbekistan.*

Keywords: *Uzbekistan, rural development, employment, state policy, international programs, socio-economic well-being, infrastructure, education, entrepreneurship.*

Introduction

The agricultural sector plays an important role in the economy of Uzbekistan, being one of the main sources of employment and income for a large part of the country's population. In recent years, the level of employment in rural areas of Uzbekistan has faced a number of challenges, including the need to modernize agriculture, increase labor productivity and improve the living conditions of the population.

In 2024, the government of Uzbekistan has set an ambitious goal of creating employment opportunities for five million people, with statistics showing that the unemployment rate at the beginning of the year was 1.3 million. An additional 2.4 million people are expected to enter the



labor market.¹ These figures underscore the need to develop and implement effective employment strategies, especially in rural areas.

The agricultural sector remains key to the country's economy, accounting for a significant portion of Uzbekistan's GDP. However, the poverty rate among rural populations remains high compared to urban dwellers, due to low productivity, outdated infrastructure, and limited access to technical and financial services. This underscores the importance of initiatives aimed at improving the efficiency of agricultural production and creating new jobs. [8]

Programs and initiatives aimed at improving employment conditions in rural areas not only contribute to poverty reduction, but also ensure social stability and sustainable development of regions. These programmes include both national and international efforts to improve the skills of the workforce, develop infrastructure and support entrepreneurship.

Continuing the analysis of employment in rural areas of Uzbekistan, it is important to consider the contribution of the agricultural sector to the country's economy. Agriculture has traditionally played a key role in Uzbekistan's economic development, providing a significant part of the gross domestic product and being the main source of employment, especially in regions far from large urban centers.

According to the latest data, the agricultural sector accounts for approximately 25% of Uzbekistan's GDP, highlighting its importance to the country's economy. This means that the successful implementation of policies to increase efficiency and productivity in agriculture not only has a direct impact on improving the livelihoods of rural populations, but also has a positive impact on the economy as a whole. [8]

Agriculture in Uzbekistan also plays an important role in exports, especially in the segments of fruits, vegetables and textile products, which further highlights its importance for the country's economic stability and growth. However, despite significant potential, the sector faces a number of challenges, including inadequate funding, an outdated technological base, and the need to improve infrastructure. These factors limit opportunities for sustainable development and increasing the contribution of agriculture to the economy.

Preserving and developing the agricultural sector in Uzbekistan requires a comprehensive approach that includes investment in modern technology, improved infrastructure, improved workforce skills, and improved market access. Such measures can not only increase the productivity and competitiveness of the agricultural sector, but also create new jobs, thereby improving overall employment in rural areas.

Current Employment Status of the Rural Population

Understanding the current state of rural employment in Uzbekistan requires an analysis of the latest statistical data. In 2023, Uzbekistan faced significant employment challenges, especially in rural areas. As we mentioned, the unemployment rate at the beginning of 2024 was 1.3 million, with an

¹ Gazeta.uz (2024). "In 2024, Uzbekistan plans to provide employment for five million people" [Electronic resource]. – Mode of access: <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2024/employment-five-million>.



expected increase in the labor force of 2.4 million. These findings highlight the need to implement effective strategies to improve rural employment.

In response to these challenges, the Government of Uzbekistan has planned to create five million new jobs, with a significant share in the agricultural and service sectors. Such an approach is key for the sustainable socio-economic development of the country, since the provision of employment in rural areas directly affects the reduction of poverty and the improvement of the quality of life.

It is also worth noting that these initiatives focus on entrepreneurship and private sector development. This includes support for small and medium-sized businesses, which contributes to the creation of jobs and the development of an innovative economy in rural areas.

Data on rural employment in Uzbekistan in 2024 shows significant efforts by the government to create new jobs and support economic growth in rural areas. These measures are an important step towards improving the overall standard of living of the population and the development of the country's economy.

In general, the analysis of statistical data on rural employment in Uzbekistan in 2023 demonstrates the active efforts of the state to create new jobs and develop the economy in rural areas. These actions are important for the sustainable development of the country, reducing poverty and improving the quality of life of the rural population.

Main problems and challenges related to employment in rural areas

Despite the government's significant efforts to improve the employment situation in rural areas of Uzbekistan, the sector continues to face a number of serious problems and challenges. One of the main obstacles is the lack of infrastructure and modern technologies in the agricultural sector, which leads to low productivity and limits opportunities for development. This, in turn, reduces the attractiveness of the countryside as a place to work and live, especially for young people.

Another significant problem is labour migration. Many people in rural areas are moving to cities in search of better job and education opportunities, leaving farmland without the necessary manpower. This leads to demographic imbalances and reduces economic activity in rural areas.

In addition, limited access to financial and educational resources is also a critical issue. Farmers and entrepreneurs in rural areas often face difficulties in obtaining loans and investments to develop their businesses, as well as limited opportunities for vocational training and upgrading and upskilling. This factor limits their ability to adapt to changing market conditions and innovate, which is necessary for the sustainable development of the agro-industrial complex.

It is also necessary to consider the impact of climate change on agriculture. Extreme weather conditions, such as droughts and floods, severely threaten crop yields and food security, putting additional pressure on rural employment.

Finally, the lack of social infrastructure, including health, education and transport, is also a major challenge. The lack of these basic services reduces the quality of life in rural areas and hinders the attraction and retention of skilled workers.



These challenges require a comprehensive approach, including improved infrastructure, access to education and financial resources, and adaptation to climate change. Addressing these challenges will contribute to the creation of a sustainable and prosperous economy in rural areas of Uzbekistan.

Government Initiatives and Programs

In response to the problems of employment in rural areas of Uzbekistan, a number of State programmes and initiatives have been developed. These programs are aimed at creating jobs, developing infrastructure and supporting the agricultural sector. An important objective of these initiatives is to improve the living conditions of rural populations and stimulate economic growth.

One of the key initiatives is the program to create new jobs. In 2024, the government of Uzbekistan has set a goal of creating five million new jobs, of which a significant part is in the agricultural sector and the service sector.² This program includes the development of the private sector and support for small and medium-sized businesses, which is key to creating sustainable jobs and developing the economy in the regions.

In addition, the development of infrastructure in rural areas is an important component of public policy. Within the framework of various programs, it is planned to improve transport accessibility, develop communal infrastructure, as well as modernize agricultural production. These measures are aimed at making rural areas more attractive for living and working, as well as improving economic activity.

Also, the government of Uzbekistan is actively working on the introduction of educational and training programs aimed at improving the skills of the rural population. Particular attention is paid to vocational training and retraining programmes, which enable rural residents to adapt to the changing demands of the labour market and improve their employment prospects.

These government initiatives and programmes play an important role in improving the economic situation of rural areas of Uzbekistan by providing new employment opportunities and stimulating socio-economic development.

Contribution of International Organizations and Partnership Programs to Rural Development (USAID, OPEC, World Bank)

International organizations and partnership programs play a key role in the development of rural areas of Uzbekistan, making a significant contribution to the economic and social improvement of these areas. Programs implemented with the participation of USAID, OPEC and the World Bank are examples of effective international cooperation.

USAID (United States Agency for International Development) is active in Uzbekistan, implementing projects aimed at improving economic opportunities for women in rural areas. These initiatives include vocational training programs, entrepreneurship skills and support for small and medium-sized businesses. [9]

² Gazeta.uz (2024). "In 2024, Uzbekistan plans to provide employment for five million people." Available at: <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2024/employment-five-million>.



The OPEC Fund for International Development provides financing to improve the living standards of rural populations in Uzbekistan. As part of its programs, the OPEC Fund focuses on improving infrastructure and providing access to quality services, including roads, water and energy. Such initiatives contribute to the sustainable development of rural communities and improve their economic activity. [8]

The World Bank also makes a significant contribution to the development of rural areas of Uzbekistan, in particular through programs aimed at improving farmers' access to finance and supporting the development of agricultural enterprises. These initiatives are aimed at supporting the sustainable development of the agro-industrial complex and improving food security. [10]

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has launched a new project in the Aral Sea region aimed at improving the living conditions and development of rural communities. This project includes measures to strengthen local governance, improve infrastructure and use innovative technologies to increase the resilience of rural areas to environmental and social challenges. [11]

The joint EU-UNESCO project on skills development in rural areas of Uzbekistan focuses on improving skills and employability of rural populations. The project includes the development of quality educational programs and support for the implementation of new standards in the field of vocational training, which contributes to increasing employment and economic growth in rural areas. [12]

International cooperation in these areas has a significant impact on improving the living standards of the rural population, contributing to the creation of jobs, the development of infrastructure and the increase in productivity in the agricultural sector. These initiatives demonstrate the importance of global partnership in achieving sustainable development and poverty alleviation in rural areas of Uzbekistan.

Socio-Economic Effect and Development Prospects

The implementation of State and international programmes in rural areas of Uzbekistan has had a significant impact on the socio-economic situation and the standard of living of the population. These programmes, which are aimed at creating new jobs, developing infrastructure and improving the skills of the workforce, have contributed to the improvement of economic and social conditions in rural areas.

One of the main achievements of these initiatives is the reduction of poverty in rural areas. Through the creation of new jobs, especially in the agricultural and service sectors, employment among the rural population has increased, which has led to an increase in their incomes and an improvement in their overall standard of living.

Infrastructure development, including improvements to the road network, water supply and electrification, has also had a positive impact on the lives of rural residents. Improved infrastructure has not only made access to markets and services easier, but has also made rural areas more attractive for living and working.



Training and skills development programmes have also contributed to socio-economic development by providing rural residents with new skills and opportunities for self-fulfillment. This has contributed to the development of entrepreneurship and small businesses, which is a key factor in the sustainable development of the economy.

In general, the implemented programs contributed to the sustainable development of rural areas of Uzbekistan, creating conditions for economic growth, social stability and improving the quality of life of the population. These initiatives demonstrate the importance of an integrated approach to rural development, including improving infrastructure, access to education and health care, and supporting economic activity and entrepreneurship.

Prospects for further development include continued investment in infrastructure, education and health, as well as the strengthening of institutional mechanisms to support agriculture and entrepreneurship. This will further improve the standard of living in rural areas and contribute to the sustainable socio-economic development of Uzbekistan.

Discussion of opportunities and prospects for further development and improvement of employment policy

For further development and improvement of employment policy in rural areas of Uzbekistan, it is necessary to consider a number of opportunities and prospects that can contribute to sustainable economic growth and improve the standard of living of the population.

Private Sector and Entrepreneurship Development: This includes providing financial support and training for small and medium-sized enterprises, which will create new jobs and stimulate economic activity in rural areas.

Investing in infrastructure: Continued investment in roads, water, electrification and digital infrastructure will help improve access to markets, education and health, which will significantly improve the quality of life in rural areas.

Education and Training: Strengthening the education system and providing vocational and technical training opportunities will help rural populations adapt to changing market conditions and increase their competitiveness in the labour market.

Supporting the agro-industrial sector: Improving the conditions for the agricultural sector, including access to innovative technologies and markets, can contribute to increasing the productivity and sustainability of agricultural production.

Adapting to climate change: Developing and implementing climate change adaptation strategies, especially with regard to water management and agricultural practices, will help protect agriculture from the negative effects of climate change.

Strengthening Local Governance and Community Participation: Increasing the role of local communities in the planning and implementation of rural development contributes to a more efficient and targeted use of resources and the development of local economies.

Integration with the global economy: The development of export opportunities and integration with international markets can open up new prospects for agricultural producers and entrepreneurs.



The adoption of these measures will further improve the employment policy and socio-economic development of rural areas of Uzbekistan, ensuring the long-term sustainability and well-being of the rural population. Such measures will help create the basis for sustainable development and well-being of the rural population, which, in turn, contributes to the strengthening of the economy of Uzbekistan as a whole.

In summary, the successful implementation of these strategies will require coordinated efforts by the government, local communities and international partners. Given current and future challenges, these measures promise not only to improve the immediate living conditions of rural populations, but also contribute to the creation of a more just and inclusive society in Uzbekistan.

Conclusion

In this article, we conducted a comprehensive analysis of the current employment situation in rural areas of Uzbekistan, assessed the impact of implemented state and international programs, and discussed prospects for further development and improvement of employment policy. The problems and challenges identified, such as lack of infrastructure, high levels of labour migration and climate change, require an integrated approach and coordinated efforts at all levels.

Government initiatives and international cooperation are already demonstrating a positive impact on improving the economic and social situation in rural areas. However, in order to achieve sustainable development and the full well-being of the rural population, these efforts need to be further strengthened. This includes developing the private sector, supporting small and medium-sized businesses, improving infrastructure and educational opportunities, and adapting to environmental challenges.

In conclusion, the prospects for the future development of rural areas in Uzbekistan depend on integrated strategies that take into account both economic and social aspects. The success of these initiatives will not only determine the fate of the rural population, but will also contribute to the sustainable development of the entire country as a whole.

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