

Enhancing The Role Of The Mahalla In Public Service Delivery And Improving Mechanisms Of Cooperation With State Authorities

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Abstract

This article provides an in-depth analysis of the role and significance of mahalla institutions in enhancing the efficiency of public service delivery. It examines the need to strengthen cooperation between mahalla bodies and state governance institutions, the legal and organizational foundations of this process, and the potential to improve the quality of public services through the adoption of modern digital technologies. The study analyzes advanced foreign practices and explores their approaches to digitizing the activities of self-government institutions and integrating them with state bodies.

Keywords: District, public services, integration, government agencies, digital technologies, public control.

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1. Introduction

In the social life of Uzbekistan, the institution of the mahalla has historically been formed over centuries and continues to function today as the main link of the system of citizens' self-governance. The significance of the mahalla institution is not limited only to preserving traditional values, but it also occupies a high position as a social structure that acts as an effective intermediary between state bodies and citizens. In particular, the active participation of mahallas in the process of providing public services makes it possible to ensure services that are close and convenient for the population, to promptly resolve local problems, and to increase the efficiency of the state governance system. From this point of view, deepening mutual integration between mahalla institutions and state bodies is considered one of the most urgent tasks in the modern governance system.

International experience shows that the active involvement of local communities in public administration processes is an important factor in improving the quality of public services, ensuring their prompt delivery, and reducing bureaucratic barriers. In particular, in the practice of South Korea, self-governing structures, and in Japan, civic self-governing associations, have established a system of regular information exchange with state bodies through electronic platforms. This approach is manifested as an important factor in ensuring promptness, transparency, and efficiency in the process of providing public services to the population. By adapting these experiences to the conditions of Uzbekistan, it is also possible to improve the quality of services provided to the population and to ensure transparency in governance processes. Therefore, this scientific article sets as its main task the analysis of integration mechanisms between mahalla institutions and state bodies in the provision of public services, the

identification of problems encountered in practice, and the development of proposals aimed at eliminating them.

Thus, mahalla institutions are understood as urban, district, or rural settlements, as well as territorial units that have mahalla subdivisions. In this definition, primary attention is paid to the territorial boundaries of these administrative entities and their legally distinct status. However, a unified theoretical approach to explaining the systemic elements of mahalla institutions has not yet been fully formed. In scholarly views, various approaches exist: some researchers primarily emphasize financial and human resources, identifying the resource potential of mahalla institutions as the main structural component. Other scholars, in turn, distinguish entire areas related to the social sphere within the mahalla system and combine them on the basis of various criteria. This, in turn, gives rise to complexity and ambiguity in determining the elementary composition of mahalla institutions. Although the analysis of macro- and micro-level subsystems within mahalla institutions has been reflected to some extent in the scientific works of S. V. Andriyanov, A. B. Garmayev, D. S. Lvov, and other researchers, the classifications they propose differ significantly from one another.

Mahalla institutions, within which the processes of citizens' self-governance are carried out, appear as an important institutional structure operating throughout all regions of the Republic of Uzbekistan. The territorial object of this institution includes mahalla citizens' assemblies formed in cities, towns, villages, and auls. The activities of social institutions within the mahalla are not limited solely to economic processes, but also perform socially significant functions for society. Indeed, as an integral continuation of historically formed national traditions and values, they strengthen social cohesion. From this point of view, the object of this study is of particular importance not only from an economic but also from a social perspective. One of the strengths of mahalla institutions is that they increase the social activity of the population and function as an effective means of social integration by uniting citizens through nationwide collective works (hashars), electoral processes, various ceremonies, and community events.

Foreign experience shows that the broad involvement of mahalla institutions in public administration processes improves the quality of services and reduces bureaucratic barriers. For example, in the city of Seoul, community self-governance associations (RSAs) ensure the

participation of mahalla communities in information exchange with state bodies and in the decision-making process.

In addition, in Turkey, there is the concept of "Mahalle / Muhtar," where each mahalla (neighborhood) is the lowest-level local unit and is governed by the mahalla muhtarlik (Muhtarlik). Mahallas maintain contact with state bodies in terms of managing local issues, citizens' requests, and information flows.

Taking the example of South Korea, decentralization processes, that is, the transfer of state powers from the central to the local level, help increase citizens' trust in state bodies; however, in this process, problems such as regional inequalities and limited governance resources may also arise.

All of these are experiences that can also be applied in the context of Uzbekistan. Therefore, the main goal of this article is to analyze the mechanisms of integration between mahalla and state bodies in the provision of public services, to identify existing problems, and to develop proposals for their elimination.

The governance processes within the mahalla institution essentially represent the activity of citizens independently resolving issues of local importance. In this, citizens' own interests, the specific features of historical development, national and spiritual values, local customs, and traditions are taken into account. This activity is guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan and relevant legislative acts, and serves to implement in practice the citizens' right to self-governance. "Towns, villages, and auls, as well as mahallas in cities, towns, villages, and auls, citizens' assemblies are the citizens' mahalla institutions". From the content of this definition, it is understood that mahalla institutions, by their nature, are composed of citizens' assemblies. In other words, citizens' assemblies are recognized as the main organizational and legal structure in the citizens' self-governance system. Therefore, citizens' assemblies are the central element of the mahalla institution, and through their activities, the citizens' right to self-governance is realized in practice.

It should be separately emphasized that citizens' assemblies, which operate as mahalla institutions, are not part of the system of state authority bodies. Their activities are carried out independently, in accordance with current legislation, based on local issues taking into account the interests of the population, as well as the

specific features of historical development, national and spiritual values, local customs, and traditions. Citizens' assemblies exercise the rights of a legal entity, have a seal with their name, and operate in accordance with the procedure established by the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

The significance and unique role of citizens' assemblies for the economic and social life of the country are characterized by the historical features of their emergence and development. Understanding them is of particular importance in assessing their current state and developing directions for improvement.

2. Methods

Analysis of existing literature on mahalla governance shows that in modern scientific research, the improvement of local governance mechanisms is widely highlighted as a separate scientific and practical issue. In particular, the role of mahallas in strengthening cooperation between society and the state is being studied more deeply. Literature acknowledges that the mahalla governance system today develops under the influence of both global processes and local trends.

In such conditions, the social functions of mahallas, particularly their capabilities in assessing the living standards of the population, identifying social problems, and resolving them, require the application of modern approaches and innovative governance mechanisms. Therefore, in studying mahalla governance, it is of pressing importance to integrate not only historical and legal foundations but also international experience and social innovations.

In foreign scientific literature, local governance institutions are mostly analyzed based on global experiences, and studying their role and functions in social governance is considered an important scientific and practical task. For example, in Japan, community self-governance systems, relying on the direct participation of the population, have been observed to achieve high efficiency in solving local problems. In the German experience, local self-governance bodies have achieved the implementation of democratic principles in governance processes through their constitutional status, financial independence, and broad citizen participation.

Among foreign studies, the research conducted by John Smith on local governance systems in European countries is of particular importance. According to him,

mahalla and community governance institutions serve as an important factor in deepening democratic reforms, expanding citizens' participation in state governance, and ensuring social justice. In addition, Anna Muller, in her research, analyzed the application of innovative technologies in local governance, the expansion of electronic services, and approaches to improving the quality of social services. She paid particular attention to the challenges faced by local governance systems in adopting modern innovations and the mechanisms for overcoming them.

Analysis of these foreign experiences serves as an important theoretical basis for improving mahalla governance in the context of Uzbekistan, delivering public services to the population in a convenient manner, and expanding citizens' participation in state governance.

Analysis of local literature shows that in scientific research conducted in the field of mahalla governance, the Decrees and Resolutions of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan as well as normative-legal acts aimed at organizing the activities of local governance institutions effectively occupy a central place. In national practice, mahallas perform important functions in social protection, supporting cultural events, and preserving moral and spiritual values, which further enhances their significance in social life.

Among scientific studies in the field of local governance in Uzbekistan, the works of A. Ahmedov are particularly noteworthy, as he presents in-depth analyses of the legal foundations of mahalla institutions, their national specificity, and their role in ensuring social stability. Ahmedov's views justify the need for legally strengthening the institutional structure of mahalla governance, the distribution of powers, and the mechanisms for engaging local communities.

The scientific research of B. Vahobov is focused on analyzing the role and significance of local governance institutions in forming and developing social cooperation, and his studies illuminate the legal and organizational foundations of the interaction mechanisms between local governance entities and state bodies.

In addition, S. Karimova's scientific research is aimed at analyzing the role of mahalla governance in providing economic and social services, as well as the issues of establishing effective cooperation with the private sector in these processes. According to the scholar, achieving

economic stability in mahallas' activities is directly linked, first of all, to the rational and transparent distribution of available financial resources and their allocation to meet social infrastructure and population needs.

In analyzing the normative-legal frameworks regulating mahalla governance, the Decrees, Decisions, and Laws of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan serve as important sources. For example, in the Decree PF-29 of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated December 3, 2021, "On Priority Directions of State Policy for Developing Entrepreneurship in Mahallas, Ensuring Employment, and Reducing Poverty", it is envisaged to enhance the role of mahallas in providing social services and to strengthen their legal status. The main objective of this document is to ensure employment of the population, reduce poverty, and introduce new mechanisms for supporting entrepreneurial initiatives.

According to the Decree, the position of assistant to the district (city) mayor is established in each mahalla, and their main areas of activity are clearly defined. In particular, mayoral assistants are expected to study the socio-economic conditions in households, analyze the population's sources of income and employment levels, mobilize available labor resources, develop family and small entrepreneurship, and guide youth and women towards vocational training and entrepreneurship.

Furthermore, the Decree sets priority tasks such as utilizing vacant buildings and land plots in mahallas, developing household farming, expanding cooperative-based production activities, and implementing preferential credit and subsidy mechanisms.

The Decree also envisages organizational and legal mechanisms to incentivize the performance of mayoral assistants, expand opportunities for their promotion to higher positions, and establish the "New Uzbekistan Reformer" badge.

Overall, this Decree is an important normative-legal document aimed at increasing the effectiveness of state governance by promoting entrepreneurship at the mahalla level and strengthening the social protection system.

As many scholars and practitioners have noted, the main goals and objectives of reforms in local self-governance have still not been fully achieved.

Apart from situations related to the increase in unfunded powers and limitation of responsibility, the formation of citizens' assemblies allows for the establishment of an effective governance system capable of achieving high results through independent and collegial management.

At the same time, there are still a number of problems in managing citizens' assemblies, the main one being that the role of the population in this system has not been fully enhanced. However, as a result of state-level reforms, the governance process in citizens' assemblies is gradually changing. Examples include the introduction of new structures and changes in powers and responsibilities.

Another issue is that the support for low-income, socially vulnerable populations and those registered in social registries in mahallas is increasing. This indicates that policies within mahalla institutions are becoming more socially oriented.

Another specific problem in managing citizens' assemblies is the continuous growth of the population. This indicator is considered one of the main benchmarks for a self-governing organization. The increase in population not only complicates the management of citizens' assemblies, but also raises the need for financial support and leads to significant differentiation in wealth and other indicators among citizens. The main solution to these problems requires further improvement of self-governance within citizens' assemblies.

Research conducted shows that mahalla institutions and local self-governance bodies have a complex and multifaceted nature of governance, which determines the diversity of approaches. Therefore, before analyzing them, it is appropriate to review the key concepts applied in this field. The essence of mahalla institutions and their distinctive characteristics directly affect governance processes and give rise to a number of new qualities.

Public oversight by mahalla institutions is carried out based on decisions adopted by the citizens' assembly or its commissions. Such decisions can be formed on the basis of appeals from individuals or legal entities, but anonymous appeals cannot serve as a basis. Mahalla institutions have the right to address state bodies or their officials, request explanations, or express their opinion on issues concerning the interests of the population. Appeals are sent on behalf of the citizens' assembly, their content is clearly stated, and they are signed by the head of the assembly and stamped.

As a result of public oversight, discussions, public hearings, debates, and appearances in mass media may be organized. Representatives of the monitored state body are also involved in these events. Consequently, the adopted decisions, proposals, and conclusions must be considered by state bodies within thirty days, and the response must be provided in writing to mahalla institutions.

This procedure expands the ability of mahalla institutions to protect territorial interests, convey the demands and needs of the population to state bodies, and exercise transparent oversight of their activities.

In this study, the activities of mahalla institutions in submitting appeals and requests to state bodies are thoroughly examined, and their effectiveness and role in protecting citizens' interests are analyzed. The methodology of the research is based on several scientific approaches.

Firstly, by analyzing literature and legal sources, the legislative framework regulating the interaction between mahalla institutions and state bodies is studied. This approach allows evaluating the effectiveness of current normative-legal documents.

Secondly, using sociological methods, the practical experience and opinions of mahalla activists, citizens, and representatives of state bodies are identified through surveys and interviews. This method provides accurate information on real-life problems and their solutions.

Thirdly, the comparative method is applied to compare the experience of cooperation between mahalla governance and state bodies with the functioning of self-governing institutions in foreign countries.

In addition, using the case study method, appeals sent by certain mahallas to state bodies and their outcomes are studied as practical examples.

Within the research, specific mahallas are selected at the territorial level, involving their governance bodies, citizens, and state representatives. The results of surveys and interviews are systematically analyzed, and generalized scientific conclusions are drawn regarding the effectiveness of cooperation between mahalla governance and state bodies.

3. Results

In recent years, digital transformation processes have

been steadily developing in the Republic of Uzbekistan. In particular, within the framework of the "Uzbekistan – 2030" strategy, extensive reforms are being implemented to introduce digital governance mechanisms at all levels of state administration, including the local government system. This strategy identifies improving public service governance, expanding public participation, and strengthening the role of mahallas in society as one of the priority directions.

The "Uzbekistan – 2030" strategy, approved by Presidential Decree PF-158 of the Republic of Uzbekistan (September 11, 2023), outlines the main priority directions for comprehensive national development, enhancement of human capital, ensuring economic stability, environmental safety, digital transformation, and the implementation of the "state in the service of the people" principles.

Within the framework of this strategy, special attention is paid to organizing state governance based on modern digital principles, implementing the concept of a state in the service of the people, and strengthening the role of the mahalla system in governance. Furthermore, the strategy emphasizes the development of mahallas as a "supporting bridge" between the public and state bodies, directing their funds based on community initiatives, and providing over 100 state services digitally under the "one-stop" principle.

In practice, these approaches allow for strengthening the role of the mahalla institution in state governance, promptly addressing population issues, and improving the transparency and efficiency of state services. In particular, a mechanism has been introduced to direct mahalla funds to infrastructure projects based on residents' proposals and initiatives, with measures taken to increase the allocated resources for these purposes severalfold.

Additionally, it is planned to establish "electronic service points" in each mahalla, provide state services to residents through digital platforms, and implement online monitoring systems for citizens' appeals and proposals.

As a result of these reforms, citizens' assemblies of mahallas are forming not only as territorial self-governing bodies but also as an important component of the modern digital governance system. Consequently, opportunities for proximity, promptness, and transparency in service delivery are expanding, and the

role and authority of the mahalla institution in state governance are being further strengthened.

In the 21st century, the rapid development of digital technologies necessitates a fundamental renewal of governance systems and their adaptation to modern requirements. This process is particularly evident in local governance, since citizens primarily access state services in their place of residence. The quality and speed of public services directly determine citizens' trust in state institutions. Therefore, digital transformation processes in local governance systems serve not only as a means of modernizing governance but also as a critical guarantee of social and economic development.

Looking at foreign experiences, Estonia is currently one of the leading countries in building a digital state. Through the "E-Estonia" project, 99% of state services are provided online. Local government bodies perform tasks such as population registration, distribution of social assistance, and tax collection entirely in a digital format.

Currently, electronic portals such as my.gov.uz, onlays-mahalla.uz, and soliq.uz provide state services to the population in a simplified manner. In addition, within the framework of the "mahalla yettiligi" system, electronic reporting has been initiated. However, a fully digital ecosystem has not yet been established in this direction. The technical infrastructure of local authorities, staff qualifications, and internet infrastructure in some regions are insufficient, which hinders the effective operation of digital services.

According to Presidential Decree PQ-62 of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated December 24, 2021, the Agency for Mahalla Affairs and Entrepreneurship Development was established under the Ministry of Economic Development and Poverty Reduction. Based on this decree, the "Onlays Mahalla" electronic platform was developed to digitize the mahalla-based governance system, analyze citizens' economic and social status in real time, and efficiently organize employment support and entrepreneurship initiatives.

The implementation of the "Onlays Mahalla" platform is one of the important steps in the practical application of digital technologies in mahalla governance. This system allows for real-time management of a mahalla-based approach, systematically addressing citizens' economic and social problems, providing targeted social assistance, and enhancing the convenience and transparency of state

services.

Overall, the "Onlays Mahalla" system serves as a practical manifestation of digital transformation in local governance, contributing to regional development, social stability, and improvement in citizens' quality of life.

In addition, it can be seen that this platform is integrated with several state bodies and organizations. Namely:

Electronic Government Project Management Center – contains information on citizens' passport, address, criminal record, registration at narcological and psychological dispensaries, tax debt, registration with state tax authorities, ownership of residential property, cadastral documents, pensions, benefits, birth, death, marriage, status in the "Unified Social Protection Registry", "Youth Registry", "Women's Registry", and "Iron Registry", as well as registration as an entrepreneurial entity and disability information.

State Services Center under the Ministry of Justice – provides information on citizens' registration as entrepreneurial entities. This center also participates in ensuring the effectiveness of state services.

Ministry of Internal Affairs – provides information on citizens' registration at permanent and temporary places of residence, serving as the main state system for citizen regulation and used for integration into various social services.

Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations – includes information on vacant job positions, citizens' hiring or dismissal, employment status, and enrollment in vocational training programs.

Ministry of Finance – through its activities, provides data on citizens registered in the "Unified Social Protection Registry". This information is used to deliver assistance, subsidies, or other social support to the population.

State Tax Committee – information on self-employed citizens and entrepreneurial entities monitored by the State Tax Committee. This information is important for ensuring taxpayers' lawful activities and simplifying tax collection processes.

State Assets Management Agency – information on assets listed in the "E-auction" electronic procurement system. This system enables online sale or lease of state property.

“Hunarmand” Association – information on citizens registered as artisans, including their activities, capabilities, and programs used to enhance their success in their field.

Each source is integrated with other ministries and agencies on the platform, allowing the collection and effective use of social, economic, and legal information in one place. The goal of this process is to accurately identify citizens' needs, provide timely assistance, and ensure employment and economic development.

Research shows that in the process of improving neighborhood governance, a number of factors are of decisive importance. In particular, strengthening the legal and regulatory framework, extensive implementation of information and communication technologies, and practical application of social innovations increase process efficiency. Through the active participation of neighborhood activists and the population, it becomes possible to resolve social issues quickly and effectively. Moreover, the results indicate that cooperation between local communities and state bodies, interaction with the private sector, and rational use of available resources emerge as important factors in the development of neighborhood governance.

4. Discussion

Based on the above, the activity of neighborhood governance in submitting appeals and requests to state bodies plays an important role in protecting the social, economic, and legal interests of citizens. This institution functions as an effective intermediary between citizens and the state, identifying local problems, developing proposals to resolve them, and submitting appeals to competent authorities, thereby directly influencing state policy. In this respect, neighborhood governance should be regarded as a democratic institution representing citizens' legal interests and conveying them to government bodies.

For neighborhood institutions to fully perform their functions, it is necessary to strengthen their legal status, provide them with financial resources, and develop their organizational foundations. Targeted programs implemented by the state serve to reinforce the material and technical base of neighborhoods, introduce innovative approaches into the governance system, and establish effective communication mechanisms with government bodies. As a result, neighborhoods more effectively protect citizens' rights and interests,

contributing significantly to social stability and the strengthening of legal order in society.

Institutional support provided by the state to neighborhood institutions enhances the quality of their activities, strengthens the effectiveness of communication with government bodies, and creates broad opportunities for socio-economic development at the local level. This, in turn, can be recognized as a factor contributing to the country's sustainable development and ensuring citizens' well-being. From this perspective, improving neighborhood governance holds strategic importance in ensuring Uzbekistan's socio-economic stability. In the future, to further develop neighborhood institutions, it is necessary to widely apply modern management technologies, innovative methods, and information and communication tools in their governance processes. In this regard, developing clear criteria for evaluating neighborhood performance and efficiency indicators is of crucial importance, since at present there are no uniform standards for the functioning of neighborhood institutions, and creating a universal approach is complex. Therefore, it is expedient to develop special indices and indicators taking into account regional characteristics and systematically analyze them.

Neighborhood institutions are entities that operate independently of the state governance system and are empowered to make decisions within their territorial boundaries to address socio-economic and legal issues with the participation of citizens. Their activities should be guided by the principles of subsidiarity, democracy, and the application of governance mechanisms based on advanced international practices. By thoroughly studying both national and international experiences, the management of neighborhoods can be made more effective, and advanced practices of self-governance can be adapted to local characteristics.

At the same time, neighborhood institutions must operate in close cooperation with state governance, directly participating in the implementation of state policies at the local level. Simultaneously, their institutional independence must be preserved. Indeed, the balanced integration of these two directions strengthens the legal mechanisms of neighborhood governance, ensures the protection of citizens' rights and interests, and contributes to the democratic development of society.

The results of the study showed that the effectiveness of

cooperation between neighborhood institutions and government bodies in the process of providing public services is not high enough. The existing possibilities of neighborhood management in many cases are limited only to the identification of social problems and the sending of appeals to public authorities. In reality, however, neighborhoods can serve as a strategic institution in ensuring the immediate proximity of public services to the population, their rapid, convenient and transparent provision. From this point of view, several proposals have been developed:

A special norm should be developed, which gives the chairman and activists of the neighborhood legal authority in the provision of public services to the population. For example, the right of citizens to carry out the processes of obtaining, applying for and registering certain documents directly at the neighborhood level.

Cooperation agreements (memorandums) between the neighborhood and public service centers must be strengthened on a legal basis.

It is necessary to introduce a mechanism for differential financial support of high-performing neighborhoods, assessing the activity of the neighborhood on the basis of efficiency indicators.

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