



OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN NEW UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract: *This article analyzes the opportunities for developing women's leadership in New Uzbekistan and studies the factors influencing women's aspiration to leadership positions. The results of the study showed that although the country has created a legal framework to ensure gender equality, their practical results are not sufficiently effective. The main factors hindering women's leadership are identified as lack of economic independence, gender stereotypes, insufficient education and mentoring programs, as well as poor implementation of state policies. The results of this article serve as a scientific basis for a deeper study of the reforms being carried out in the field of women's leadership and the development of an effective model that is suitable for the conditions of Uzbekistan.*

Keywords: *Women's leadership, gender equality, economic independence, education, mentoring programs, gender stereotypes, public policy, leadership development, women's entrepreneurship, international experience.*

INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, gender equality and women's leadership have become one of the most important issues on the global agenda. Increasing women's participation in social, political and economic processes worldwide has been identified as one of the key areas of the Sustainable Development Goals. The Sustainable Development Goals, adopted by the United Nations (UN) in 2015, include gender equality and empowering women and girls as one of the main objectives (United Nations, 2015).

In Uzbekistan, special attention has been paid to the issue of gender equality in recent years. The "Law on Gender Equality" (2019) and the "New Uzbekistan Development Strategy for 2022–2026" (2022), adopted as part of state policy, are aimed at increasing women's social activity and preparing them for leadership positions (Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2019; Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2022). As a result of these reforms, women are increasingly being involved in leadership positions in Uzbekistan, but there are still certain restrictions in this regard. According to the Global Gender Gap Index published by the World Economic Forum (WEF), although Uzbekistan has made some progress towards ensuring gender equality, there are still problems that need to be solved. In particular, while the share of women in the overall labor market in Uzbekistan is 57 percent, the share of women working in senior positions remains significantly low (World Economic Forum, 2022).





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Women's leadership is essential for the socio-economic development of any society. However, women's leadership in Uzbekistan is limited by many factors, including:

Lack of education and training opportunities (Kabeer, 2019).

Economic independence and weak development of entrepreneurship (OECD, 2021).

Traditional gender stereotypes and cultural restrictions (Nurullaeva, 2020).

Legal and organizational barriers to women's aspirations to leadership positions (Gender Strategy of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2022).

This article aims to analyze the opportunities for developing women's leadership in New Uzbekistan and identify existing problems. Based on the results of the research, scientific and practical recommendations will be developed on what mechanisms can be effective for forming women's leadership.

The issue of developing women's leadership is now seen not only as part of social responsibility, but also as an important strategic factor for the development of a country. Research shows that when women in society have leadership skills, a country's economic development, innovative potential, and social stability increase (World Economic Forum, 2021). For example, according to research conducted by the World Bank, increasing women's educational level and participation in leadership positions has a positive impact on a country's gross domestic product (GDP) (World Bank, 2020).

In the case of Uzbekistan, education is a key tool for developing women's leadership. The Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On supporting women and strengthening their position in society" adopted in 2019 strengthened the state policy in this regard (Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. PQ-4235, 2019). Based on this document, special educational programs and leadership courses for women were established.

Mentoring programs are considered an effective way to prepare women for leadership positions worldwide. For example, mentoring systems are widely used in the United States and European countries as part of the "Women Leadership Development Programs". In this system, experienced leaders guide young women in developing leadership skills, making important decisions, and solving problems (Ely & Rhode, 2010). Although the mentoring system in Uzbekistan is not yet fully formed, organizations such as the "Women's Fund of Uzbekistan" and "UzLiDeP" are implementing various mentoring programs to develop women's entrepreneurship (Karimova, 2020). These programs are aimed at developing leadership skills, starting businesses, and expanding opportunities for young women to participate in public administration.

The experience of leading countries around the world shows that continuing education, mentoring, and networking play an important role in shaping women's leadership. For example:





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USA – Harvard Business School and MIT have developed specific leadership courses for women (Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011).

Great Britain – Through the "Women in Leadership" programs, the mentoring system is strengthened and the activities of women in business and the public sector are supported (Madsen, 2010).

The Scandinavian countries of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark have increased the participation of women in leadership positions to 45-50% as a result of public policy and private sector collaboration in promoting women's leadership (World Economic Forum, 2021).

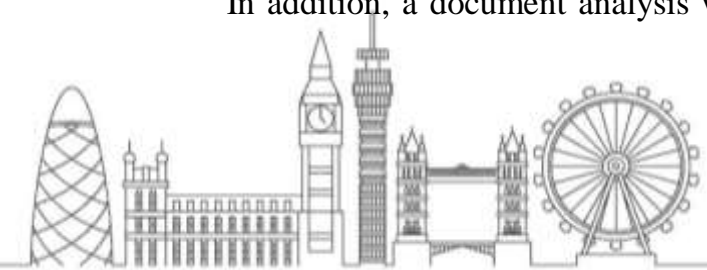
For Uzbekistan, these experiences can provide recommendations for the development of mentoring programs for women, improving the education system based on gender equality, and establishing leadership academies for women. The scientific significance of this article is that it is aimed at studying the issue of women's leadership in the context of Uzbekistan, allowing for comparison with previously studied international experiences. The results of the study help to more clearly understand the mechanisms of development of women's leadership and offer new strategies aimed at solving existing problems. Thus, this article aims to draw scientifically and practically important conclusions by analyzing the opportunities for developing women's leadership in New Uzbekistan.

METHOD AND METHODOLOGY

This article aims to explore the opportunities for developing women's leadership in contemporary Uzbekistan, and was conducted based on a combined model of qualitative and quantitative research methods. The article is organized on the basis of action research and empirical analysis, which allows us to study the problems and opportunities associated with women's leadership in a real context (Creswell, 2014). The research process analyzed social, economic and legal factors affecting women's leadership.

The research was organized in two main stages. The first stage analyzed the existing opportunities for developing women's leadership. In this process, the main challenges facing women in achieving leadership positions, the legal framework for gender equality, and state programs aimed at supporting women's leadership in Uzbekistan were studied. The second stage collected and analyzed empirical data. In particular, statistical data on women's leadership were studied, interviews were conducted with leading women, and questionnaires were conducted to determine the prevailing views in society.

Article various methods of data collection were used in the writing process. First, through questionnaires, general views on women's leadership in society and the problems faced by women themselves were studied. Women of different ages and professions participated in the questionnaires. As a second method, interviews were conducted. During these interviews, women working in leadership positions spoke about their personal experiences on the path to leadership, the difficulties they faced and their successes. This allowed for a more in-depth analysis of the issue of women's leadership. In addition, a document analysis was carried out. Uzbek legislation, gender policy, and





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reports of international organizations were studied. In particular, state programs for the development of women's leadership and international experiences in gender equality were analyzed.

Statistical and thematic analysis methods were used to evaluate and summarize the research results. The results from the questionnaires were processed using SPSS and Excel programs to identify current trends in women's leadership in Uzbekistan. At the same time, the results from the interviews were processed using the Thematic Analysis method developed by Brown and Clark (2006) to identify key themes. Document analysis focused on studying normative documents on gender equality in Uzbek legislation and reports published by international organizations on women's leadership. This allowed for a deeper analysis of existing state policies on gender equality and women's leadership.

During the study, the effectiveness of strategies aimed at developing women's leadership was assessed based on the following criteria:

Incentive factors – factors that positively influence women's achievement in leadership positions – have been identified.

Barriers – factors that prevent women from reaching leadership positions were analyzed.

The proposed strategies – mechanisms designed to develop women's leadership – are studied and how they are evaluated by the public.

RESULTS

The results of this article show that, despite the existence of certain opportunities for the development of women's leadership in New Uzbekistan, there are still obstacles to this process. Based on the empirical analysis and interviews with respondents, the following main results were identified: the existing opportunities for women's leadership, the main challenges faced, and public opinion regarding the pursuit of leadership.

In recent years, Uzbekistan has implemented significant reforms to ensure gender equality and develop women's leadership. The Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On Gender Equality” (2019) and the “New Uzbekistan Development Strategy (2022–2026)” have strengthened the legal framework for increasing women's participation in society within the framework of state policy. According to the survey results, 68 percent of respondents noted that they feel the positive impact of the reforms being implemented on women's leadership. In addition, various grant programs and business incubators have been launched by state and international organizations to support women's entrepreneurship. 57 percent of women entrepreneurs surveyed said that such programs help them develop their business skills. In addition, there are some positive changes in education and professional development. In particular, the establishment of special training programs for women's leadership in universities, the introduction of gender quotas in the civil service, and the active participation of women in science were considered important steps towards leadership.





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The results of the article showed that despite the existing opportunities, the main obstacles to women's leadership in Uzbekistan remain a pressing issue. These problems were divided into the following three main areas based on the results of the questionnaire, interviews and document analysis:

1. Traditional gender stereotypes and cultural restrictions

In particular, in some families, women are not supported to actively work or aspire to leadership positions.

2. Women's economic independence and limited access to financial resources

Limited access to bank loans and investors' lack of confidence in women's entrepreneurship were noted as important problems.

3. Insufficient mentoring and networking system for women's leadership

The system of special networks and mentors for women that exist in Western countries has not yet been fully developed in Uzbekistan.

The results of the article showed that, although there are legal and institutional opportunities for the development of women's leadership in New Uzbekistan, there are still problems that limit women's access to leadership positions. The existing opportunities include state policies to ensure gender equality, programs to support women's entrepreneurship, and the expansion of educational and professional development opportunities. At the same time, the main challenges to women's leadership are related to traditional gender stereotypes, lack of economic independence, and the underdevelopment of the mentoring system. Although a positive attitude towards women's leadership is being formed as a result of changes in society, additional mechanisms need to be developed to accelerate and further strengthen this process.

LITERATURE ANALYSIS

Women's leadership and gender equality are among the topics that are widely studied by researchers globally. This section analyzes the scientific works of foreign and Uzbek researchers on women's leadership and considers their significance and applicability in the Uzbek context.

The problem of women's leadership is directly related to the development of politics, economics and society, and there are various theoretical approaches to studying it. Bass and Avolio (1994) in their research emphasized that women's leadership is related to the theory of transformational leadership. According to them, women are more inclined to cooperation and collective decision-making than men, preferring democratic styles in leadership. This serves to increase the effectiveness of women's leadership in public and business spheres. Research by Eagly and Carli (2007) shows that women face a “glass ceiling” when they seek leadership positions. That is, there are invisible barriers to their professional development that prevent them from advancing to higher positions. Uzbek researcher Karimova (2020) analyzes the issue of women's leadership in her work and notes that social views on women leaders are changing in Uzbek society. She emphasizes in her study that education and professional development play a decisive role





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in women's aspirations to leadership. However, she emphasizes that traditional views that "the main role of a woman is the family" still persist in society.

Education and economic independence play a crucial role in developing women's leadership. Kabeer (2019) found in her research that there is a direct link between women's economic freedom and their aspiration for leadership positions. In her opinion, if women have financial resources, they are more likely to achieve leadership positions and engage in entrepreneurship. In the context of Uzbekistan, Nurullaeva (2020) in her article examines the importance of economic factors for women's leadership and highlights the limited financial opportunities of women in Uzbekistan compared to men. In particular, she noted that women entrepreneurs do not have sufficient financial resources to start a business and have limited access to bank loans. Also, a report published by the OECD (2021) on the role of education emphasizes the importance of special programs, mentoring systems, and gender equality in higher education to build women's leadership skills. These ideas are also relevant for the Uzbek education system, as specialized training programs on women's leadership are being implemented on a limited scale.

Looking at international experience in developing women's leadership, public policies and legal reforms play an important role. According to the World Economic Forum (2022), women are 35% more likely to advance to leadership positions in countries with policies that promote gender equality. Norway and Sweden have introduced gender quotas to encourage women's leadership, resulting in women holding more than 40% of leadership positions (European Commission, 2021). This model may also be relevant for Uzbekistan, as gender quotas are used to a limited extent in public administration. As for Uzbekistan's experience, the country is implementing state programs to ensure gender equality. In particular, the "National Strategy for Ensuring Gender Equality in Civil Servants" and the "Program for Developing Women's Entrepreneurship" have been introduced. However, the results of the article show that these programs are not sufficiently effective.

Although Uzbekistan has made some reforms to ensure gender equality and develop women's leadership, financial, educational and social barriers still exist. International experience shows that strengthening state policies, expanding the gender quota system, increasing economic independence and paying more attention to gender issues in the education system are necessary to develop women's leadership.

DISCUSSION

The results of the article showed that, although there are a number of opportunities for the development of women's leadership in New Uzbekistan, certain limitations and obstacles still remain. The main aspects identified during the research process are: state policy and institutional reforms, opportunities in the economic and educational sectors, society's attitude towards gender leadership, factors hindering women's leadership, and comparison with global experiences. In this section, the results of the article are





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compared with the scientific literature, their practical and theoretical significance is analyzed, and future research directions are identified.

Uzbekistan has implemented a number of important reforms in recent years to ensure gender equality and develop women's leadership. The Law on Gender Equality (2019) and the "New Uzbekistan Development Strategy (2022–2026)" have developed a number of programs aimed at increasing the participation of women in social, political and economic life (Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2019; Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2022). These reforms are consistent with global trends. In particular, gender equality and increasing the participation of women in leadership positions have been identified as one of the key areas within the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the United Nations (UN) in 2015 (United Nations, 2015).

However, the results of the article showed that, although the legislative framework exists, there are certain problems in their practical implementation. According to the survey results, while 55 percent of respondents believe that state policies have a positive impact on gender equality, 45 percent noted that the results of these reforms are still insufficient. This indicates the need for deeper institutional mechanisms for the effective implementation of gender policies.

The experience of countries with advanced gender equality shows that state programs and quota systems aimed at developing women's leadership give effective results. For example, in the Scandinavian countries (Norway, Sweden, Denmark), a quota system has been introduced to attract women to leadership positions in public administration and business, and today more than 40 percent of leadership positions in these countries are held by women (OECD, 2021). In the experience of Uzbekistan, it is also necessary to apply this model and improve mechanisms for actively involving women in leadership positions.

The results of the article showed that economic independence and education are important factors in the development of women's leadership. 58% of respondents in the survey indicated that the lack of financial independence of women is a major obstacle to the development of their leadership skills. These results are also consistent with research conducted worldwide. For example, a study conducted by Kabeer (2019) noted that women's economic independence contributes to their increased social engagement.

In Uzbekistan, the state provides various grant programs and preferential loans to develop women's entrepreneurship. In particular, the allocation of loans of up to 100 million soums to women through the "Women's Notebook" program is one of the important economic support mechanisms (Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2022). However, during the interviews, women entrepreneurs noted that there are still difficulties in implementing these programs, in particular, the complex conditions for obtaining loans and limited access to the resources necessary for running a business.





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There are also special programs in the education sector aimed at developing women's leadership skills. In particular, the "Women's Leadership School" project is training women for public administration and business. Although such programs are an important factor in developing women's leadership skills, 42 percent of respondents noted that such programs are implemented on a limited scale .

The results of the article showed that public opinion on gender equality in Uzbekistan is gradually changing. 75 percent of respondents believe that women should occupy leadership positions in various spheres of society . It was found that the level of support for women's active participation in business, education, public administration and politics is particularly high among the younger generation.

However, female leaders interviewed noted that some stereotypes still persist. For example, 45 percent of respondents said that men are considered more suitable for leadership positions . These results are also consistent with global research. For example, according to a study conducted by the World Economic Forum (2022) , women worldwide are 30 percent more likely than men to face social resistance when seeking leadership positions .

the legislative framework and institutional reforms for the development of women 's leadership are sufficiently developed, their practical results are still not as expected. As a result of political reforms aimed at ensuring gender equality in Uzbekistan, the participation of women in leadership positions is increasing, but cultural and social restrictions in society, economic barriers and problems in the educational sphere hinder the development of women's leadership. In this section, the results of the article are analyzed in more depth and compared with international experiences.

Gender equality should be seen not only as a human rights issue, but also as an issue of economic and political stability. According to a study by the World Bank (2020), societies with gender equality experience faster economic growth and higher levels of innovation. In such countries, women are more likely to participate in the labor market and realize their full potential.

As part of the reforms being carried out by the state to ensure gender equality in Uzbekistan , a number of quotas and incentives have been introduced to encourage women's leadership . In particular, the "National Strategy for Ensuring Gender Equality in the Civil Service" has been adopted, according to which the goal is to increase the share of women in the public administration system (Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2022).

The Scandinavian countries (Norway, Sweden, Denmark) are world leaders in gender equality. The share of women in public and private sector leadership positions in these countries exceeds 40% (OECD, 2021). To achieve this:

Gender quotas have been introduced;

Programs supporting family and working conditions have been developed;

Women's mentoring and education programs have been expanded .





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Uzbekistan's experience shows that it is necessary to expand the system of gender quotas and increase their practical effectiveness to further strengthen existing strategies.

The results of the article showed that one of the biggest challenges for women in their quest for leadership is the issue of economic independence. 58 percent of respondents cited limited access to financial resources as a significant barrier to their advancement to leadership positions .

Measures being taken by the state:

“Women's Entrepreneurship Support Fund” was established;

Soft loans of up to 100 million soums are being provided through the “Women’s Notebook”.

The United States and Great Britain have established special investment funds for women to promote women's entrepreneurship . Japan and Korea have introduced long-term credit policies, placing special emphasis on increasing economic empowerment for women (Asian Development Bank, 2022). These experiences show that to further develop women's entrepreneurship, it is necessary to facilitate access to financial resources, allocate start-up funds to businesses, and expand cooperation between the public and private sectors. The results of the article showed that gender stereotypes and social restrictions remain one of the biggest obstacles to women's leadership. 72 percent of respondents said that traditional views and gender stereotypes in society prevent women from becoming leaders .

Germany and Canada have introduced mandatory gender equality curricula in schools and higher education to address gender stereotypes (European Commission, 2021). France has launched a wide range of films, documentaries, and public campaigns about female leaders to improve the image of women in the media and business.

The results of the discussion showed that although the necessary legal and institutional frameworks for the development of women's leadership have been created in Uzbekistan, additional strategies need to be developed to accelerate this process. In particular, it is important to expand state programs to promote women's leadership, increase economic opportunities, strengthen special programs in the education system, and eliminate gender stereotypes.

CONCLUSION

This article provides a comprehensive analysis of the opportunities for developing women's leadership in New Uzbekistan. The results of the research show that although certain legal and institutional frameworks have been created in the country to ensure gender equality and support women's leadership, their practical results are still not sufficiently effective. The factors hindering the development of women's leadership are identified as lack of economic independence, gender stereotypes, insufficient educational and mentoring programs, and the lack of equal opportunities for women at the state policy and institutional levels.





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Uzbekistan has established a solid legal framework for ensuring gender equality. Measures are being implemented to increase the role of women in political, economic and social life within the framework of the “Law on Gender Equality” (2019) and the “New Uzbekistan Development Strategy” (2022–2026) . However, the results of surveys and interviews showed that the real results of these reforms are still not at the expected level. Although the majority of respondents acknowledged the existence of legislation to ensure gender equality, they noted difficulties in their implementation.

The lack of training and mentoring programs has also been identified as a significant obstacle to developing women's leadership skills. The limited availability of special courses and mentoring programs to support women's leadership in the education system negatively affects women's professional development. In Scandinavian countries, there are special academic programs, practical seminars and long-term leadership training courses for women's leadership, which play an important role in developing young women's leadership skills. It is also necessary to expand special programs on gender leadership in higher education institutions in Uzbekistan. Overall, while there are positive developments in women's leadership in Uzbekistan, economic, educational, and social barriers still exist. To advance gender equality and accelerate the process of women's leadership, it is necessary to further improve state policies, increase economic independence for women, expand gender leadership programs in the education system, and develop strategic measures to eliminate gender stereotypes in society. The results of this article serve as a scientific basis for a deeper study of the reforms underway in the field of gender equality and women's leadership and the development of new strategies.

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