

Women in Today's *Mahallas*: From “Beneficiaries” to “Providers” of Support Asuka KAWANO (Uzbekistan)

Uzbekistan today is building a nation on a core of traditional communities known as “*mahallas*”. Each *mahalla* has an executive council under which are subcommittees for education, welfare, etc. The women’s committee is one such committee. Spearheaded by a committee head, they develop various activities aimed at solving problems related to families and women, awareness for women, etc. In recent years, not only committee heads and the women’s committee members but also other women living in the *mahallas* have begun playing a constructive part in activities. A former women’s committee head was interviewed had this to say about a recreational trip that was being planned for the *mahalla*. “When I was head of the women’s committee, I often took women from the *mahalla* on short trips to the city of Tashkent. One time, a woman from the *mahalla* had said she had never been to the theater before and would like to go, so we rented a bus and went to watch a show at the Hamza Drama Theater. 38 women from the *mahalla* took part. In Uzbekistan, you drink and eat while at the show, but while the women were buying their snacks and drinks, a number of them looked a bit nervous. When I asked, ‘What’s the matter?’ they said that they “did not have any money to buy anything.” “In that case, use this,” I said, handing them some sum. And, it was not just money for food and drink that I handed out. We rented the bus for the trip by ourselves and bought tickets for those without money. I always had UZS5,000 (approx. USD4) sum in my pocket to give to women in financial difficulty whenever the situation presented itself.”

From this story, it is obvious that there are women in this *mahalla* that can openly express their needs. In general, the *mahalla* has an environment in which those wishes can be easily expressed. And there is a women’s committee that addresses the demands of women. The head of the women’s committee obviously also plays a central role in all of this.

Even today, the head of the women’s committee often spearheads support activities for women in the *mahalla*. The impact of women having their needs addressed through the women’s committee should further increase the participation of women in community activities. It is time for the women of today’s *mahallas* to change the way they view themselves as the “beneficiaries” to “providers” of support, as was seen in the case of openly expressing one’s desire to go to the theater. Moreover, the women of the *mahallas*

themselves must voice their opinions and listen to what other women around them are saying in order to conduct activities that meet their needs in the *mahalla*.



▲ In various *mahallas*, a women's committee head spearheads activities to solve family problems, educate women about health, support women in their child raising, and provide others support services to women.