



UZBEKISTAN

BACKGROUND

Since the mid-2000s, Uzbekistan has enjoyed steady economic growth and made progress in increasing per capita income, reducing malnutrition, and decreasing the gender gap in education and political participation. However, a number of challenges remain, including tackling poverty in rural areas, improving the human rights situation, and creating a more inclusive society. Like Kazakhstan

and Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan's economy is reliant on a range of commodity exports,¹ with oil, gas, gold, copper, uranium and cotton being the primary income generators. Similar to neighbouring countries, low commodity prices and recent economic slowdowns in Kazakhstan and Russia, where remittances from migrant workers are another major source of household income, are expected to impact growth and present new socio-economic challenges.

¹ Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations, Investments and Trade of the Republic of Uzbekistan, "Foreign Trade Statistics". Available from <http://www.mfer.uz/en/export/statistics/> (accessed 7 August 2016)

Uzbekistan is also faced with security risks due to the situation in neighbouring Afghanistan and tensions over the management and use of energy and water resources with the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan² in the Fergana Valley. There is particular concern with regard to the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and its splinter group the Islamic Jihad Union, which have been actively fighting alongside the Taliban and al-Qaida in Afghanistan. Although neither group has successfully launched an attack in Uzbekistan since 2004, the threat posed by these groups has been used to justify tightening security measures and increasing restrictions on civil society.

In September 2015, Uzbekistan hosted a joint meeting of Central Asian foreign ministers and the US Secretary of State. Amongst other things, this resulted in a declared commitment to protect human rights and strengthen civil society.³ How this will impact on previous restrictions imposed in those areas remains to be seen.

In March 2015, Uzbekistan held a presidential election, which was won by the long-term incumbent Islam Karimov. He subsequently passed away in September 2016, with Chairman of the Senate Nigmatilla Yuldashev currently acting as President.

ASSISTANCE AND IMPACT

One of UNDP's priorities in 2015 was to boost public engagement with the legislative process. A significant achievement on this front was the launch, promotion and enhancement of a public consultations platform in both Uzbek and Russian, www.regulation.gov.uz. By the end of 2015, almost 300 draft laws and regulations had been put on the platform, with over 500 comments and proposals received from citizens and experts for consideration. This feedback has enhanced the quality of government legislation, facilitated a reduction in impractical and costly regulations, and strengthened citizen and business participation in decision-making.

The decentralization of power to local government bodies is also seen as an effective way to encourage political engagement. To this end, UNDP supported an initiative to strengthen the oversight role of locally-elected bodies (Kengashes) by improving their legal frameworks. Based on the results of a pilot initiative in the Tashkent region Kengash, a package of proposals has been developed that aim to reform how the activities of Kengashes and their interactions with local executive bodies and communities are regulated. These proposals have been submitted to the Senate.

To improve public service delivery, UNDP, in a collaborative effort with the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (now the Ministry of Labour), piloted a redesign of the provision of social service for the elderly and persons with disabilities, focusing on interagency cooperation and data exchange, as well as streamlining back office procedures. The pilot resulted in a new model, which significantly reduced administrative burdens, eliminating redundant steps, and shortening the duration of many procedures.

UNDP also worked with the E-Government Development Centre and the Ministry for the Development of Information Technologies and Communications to develop a Cabinet of Ministers' resolution that seeks to "improve procedures for public service delivery and interagency information sharing". The resolution was adopted in May 2015. This streamlining of public service delivery has since been expanded to a number of line min-



Uzbek delegation in Estonia to learn about the globally recognized E-Toimik E-Justice system

Photo by: UNDP Uzbekistan

² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan, "Press Release", 19 July 2016. Available from <http://mfa.uz/en/press/statements/2016/07/7923/>

³ US Department of State, "Joint Declaration of Partnership and Cooperation by the Five Countries of Central Asia and The United States of America, Samarkand, Uzbekistan", 1 November 2015. Available from <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2015/11/249050.htm>

istries and local governments that provide services to businesses through one-stop shops. In a further E-Governance initiative, a six-day study tour of Estonia was undertaken to learn from the best practices of the globally recognised Estonian E-Justice system, 'E-Toimik', and help guide the ongoing development of the E-SUD system.

Like most countries in Central Asia, corruption remains a significant issue in Uzbekistan. In a step forward for the prevention of corruption, UNDP collaborated with the Ministry of Justice to co-design a new anti-corruption screening policy, which came into force in December 2015. The new policy requires and regulates how draft legal acts are to be assessed for corruption risks (of which 23 are identified), with conclusions and recommendations to be provided by an anti-corruption specialist. Once risks are identified, they are to be addressed by the relevant agency. This mechanism will also be applied to adopted legal acts and international treaties.

In another step to reduce opportunities for corruption, open data and government transparency were given a boost in 2015. With UNDP support, the Cabinet of Ministers' resolutions on an open data portal and the transparency of state bodies were adopted, and an official open data portal launched in March. The Portal (<http://data.gov.uz>) is now populated with 748 datasets from 64 government agencies, and the datasets downloaded over 294,000 times.⁴ This move towards increased transparency was picked up at the local level where, in November, a newly developed website for the Tashkent regional coun-

"This is a giant step forward, because it allows for a direct route of inquiry about the available information, and opens doors for the data's greater use in academia, the mass media, and individuals looking for other constructive uses of the information through innovative professionals like IT programmers. The commitment by government officials in making sure the available data is complete and accountable shows their important commitment to greater transparency."

– **Mr. Avazbek Niyazov**, senior expert at the Uzin-focom Center

cil was presented to deputies and the public as part of council efforts to disclose local public information through open data formats.

Finally, with a plan to harmonize domestic legislation with international commitments, UNDP facilitated an interagency initiative from the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Senate to create an inventory of more than 4,000 ratified treaties, and to enhance procedures for their implementation through national legislation. This assistance included providing support and international expertise to the interagency working group, drafting new methodologies for an inventory of international treaties, and supporting the enhancement of the international treaties online database at www.lex.uz. This initiative will result in the institutionalization of a monitoring tool for implementing international treaties, and the creation of a unified database for collecting and tracking all international agreements and treaties relating to Uzbekistan.

1st Hackathon to promote data.gov.uz – held by the Ministry of Communication and Information Technologies with UNDP support



Photo by: UNDP Uzbekistan

⁴ as of 4 March 2016



*Access to 4,000
ratified interna-
tional treaties
enhanced*



*Public consul-
tation platform
www.regulation.
gov.uz launched
and receives
over 500 com-
ments on 300
draft laws*



*Open Data
Portal [http://
data.gov.uz](http://data.gov.uz)
launched and
now has 748
datasets from
64 agencies*



*New stream-
lined model of
public service
delivery piloted*

CHALLENGES, LESSONS LEARNED AND THE WAY FORWARD

Despite progress in 2015, key governance challenges remain for Uzbekistan. These include the need for further decentralization, increased independence and efficiency of the judiciary, improvements in government transparency and accountability, increased citizen participation in public life, and bridging differences between diverse population groups. Alongside these challenges, new legal frameworks for law enforcement and increased quality of law making are key priorities for Uzbekistan. It also remains unclear what impact the loss of long-term leader Islam Karimov will have on development efforts.

UNDP will continue its support for the legal and judicial reforms by supporting policy development and the implementation of reforms. Specifically, UNDP will support efforts to increase the efficiency and responsiveness of the judiciary and its administration,

particularly the Supreme Court and Higher Economic Court, with the goal of achieving greater alignment with international standards of accountability, rule of law, and judicial performance.

These efforts form part of a larger plan to support further reforms in public administration. In particular, a functional review of public administration bodies and redesign of business processes will be promoted to optimize and further strengthen the efficiency of government authorities and their service provision, as well as incorporate international best practices.

Uzbekistan will also be supported in meeting national development targets through the provision of technical and policy advice. This advice will focus on the incorporation of the SDGs (particularly Goal 16) and international best practices into those targets, and on identifying and discussing gaps in national priorities.