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THEORETICAL ASPECTS OF EMPLOYMENT IN AGRICULTURE AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE FOR UZBEKISTAN'S NATIONAL ECONOMY

Аннотация: В статье раскрываются теоретические основы занятости в сельском хозяйстве и их значение для экономического развития Республики Узбекистан. Аграрный сектор рассматривается как ключевая отрасль национальной экономики, в рамках которой проведён комплексный анализ занятости и определены основные факторы, формирующие её уровень и динамику. Особое внимание уделяется выявлению детерминантов сельскохозяйственного труда и обоснованию практических мер, направленных на стимулирование роста трудовых ресурсов в сельских районах. Исследование опирается на углублённое изучение социально-экономических и институциональных факторов, определяющих занятость в аграрной сфере, и предлагает направления повышения её вклада в устойчивое развитие экономики страны..

Ключевые слова: занятость; сельское хозяйство; экономическое развитие; Узбекистан; теоретические аспекты; рынок труда; сельская местность; трудовые ресурсы.

Abstract : This article examines the theoretical foundations of employment in agriculture and their impact on the economic development of the Republic of Uzbekistan. The agricultural sector is analyzed as a key branch of the national economy, with a comprehensive assessment of employment and the identification of the main determinants shaping its level and dynamics. Particular attention is given to the factors influencing agricultural labor and to policy measures aimed at stimulating workforce growth in rural areas. The study draws on an in-depth analysis of the socio-economic and institutional drivers of agricultural employment and suggests ways to enhance its contribution to the country's sustainable economic development.

Keywords: employment; agriculture; economic development; Uzbekistan; theoretical foundations; labor market; rural areas; human resources.

Annotatsiya:. Мақолада қишлоқ хўжалигидаги бандликнинг назарий асослари ва унинг Ўзбекистон Республикаси иқтисодий ривожланишига таъсири ёритиб берилган. Қишлоқ хўжалиги миллий иқтисодиётнинг асосий тармоқларидан бири сифатида таҳлил қилиниб, ундаги бандликнинг ҳолати ва динамикасига таъсир этувчи асосий омиллар аниқланган. Айниқса, қишлоқ меҳнат ресурсларини шакллантирувчи детерминантлар ва уларнинг ривожланишини рағбатлантиришга қаратилган амалий чора-тадбирлар алоҳида кўрсатиб ўтилган. Тадқиқот қишлоқ хўжалигидаги бандликка таъсир этувчи ижтимоий-иқтисодий ва институционал омилларни чуқур ўрганишга асосланган бўлиб, унинг мамлакат барқарор иқтисодий тараққиётига қўшадиган ҳиссасини ошириш йўллари таклиф этади.

Kalit soʻzlar: bandlik, qishloq xoʻjaligi, iqtisodiy rivojlanish, Oʻzbekiston Respublikasi, nazariy asoslar, mehnat bozori, qishloq hududlari, mehnat resurslari.

Introduction. President Shavkat Mirziyoyev has consistently placed employment generation and the creation of sustainable job opportunities at the center of Uzbekistan's development agenda. Within the framework of the *Development Strategy of the New Uzbekistan for 2022–2026*, the government set ambitious objectives: to double per-capita income and reduce poverty by half by 2026. These priorities are directly associated with strengthening labor market activity and expanding employment opportunities. During the macroeconomic and business support videoconference held on March 31, 2022, President Mirziyoyev stressed that employment

must be regarded not only as an economic indicator but also as a vital pillar of social protection for the population.

Rural territories, particularly the Samarkand province, are essential for ensuring Uzbekistan's food security. However, despite their strategic significance, these regions continue to face persistent challenges such as low living standards and elevated unemployment rates. Addressing these issues through the improvement of rural livelihoods and job creation is fundamental for achieving long-term sustainable development and strengthening social cohesion.

The theoretical basis for analyzing rural employment encompasses economic, social, institutional, and infrastructural dimensions, each contributing valuable insights into mechanisms that can enhance welfare and expand labor opportunities. As Uzbekistan advances its market-oriented transformation, the development and application of such multidimensional approaches become increasingly important. The study of challenges and solutions related to rural employment is therefore not only relevant but also essential for the balanced advancement of both the economy and society. Anchored in established economic, social, and institutional frameworks, rural employment in Uzbekistan is influenced by interconnected factors such as institutional capacity, infrastructure accessibility, human capital development, and labor market dynamics. These perspectives emphasize that targeted policies in areas such as skills training, agrarian reform, and entrepreneurial support can systematically improve rural well-being and enhance economic resilience.

Research Methodology. The study is based on a systematic review of domestic and international literature on issues of innovation and economic development. It employs methods of grouping and comparison, a comparative analysis of scholarly sources, as well as logical and structural analysis, which together ensure the consistency of the approach and the validity of the findings.

Literature Review

Theoretical studies of employment traditionally start with the basic concepts of its definition and classification, the dynamics of the labor market, the key determinants influencing labor activity, and the complex forms of unemployment. David Ricardo further advanced classical theory by refining the labor theory of value, developing the principle of comparative advantage, and formulating the laws of rent and diminishing returns. His framework highlighted the emergence of equilibrium in wages and profits through the balanced use of capital and labor, laying the foundation for theories of free trade and regional specialization. These classical approaches continue to hold relevance in analyzing rural employment in Uzbekistan, providing valuable analytical tools for examining how agricultural labor markets react to supply and demand shifts, state policy measures, and the development of infrastructure.

Alfred Marshall, in his *Principles of Economics* (1890), advanced labor market theory by introducing the concepts of marginal productivity and marginal utility. He argued that wages tend to align with the marginal product of labor, a principle that became a cornerstone of neoclassical economics and modern supply-and-demand analysis in competitive labor markets.

John Maynard Keynes, in *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (1936), challenged the notion of self-regulating markets. He demonstrated that insufficient aggregate demand could lead to prolonged unemployment, thereby justifying active government intervention through fiscal policy. Together, the contributions of Marshall and Keynes provide a solid theoretical foundation for modern employment policy, combining market mechanisms with state regulation to ensure stability and inclusive economic growth.

Douglas C. North, Nobel laureate in economics, fundamentally reshaped the understanding of how institutions influence long-term economic development. In *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance* (1990), he defined institutions as "the humanly devised constraints that structure political, economic, and social interaction." North emphasized that both formal rules (laws, property rights) and informal norms (customs, conventions) create the incentive structures that govern economic behavior. Strong institutions, he argued, reduce transaction costs, foster cooperation, and promote market development. His dynamic perspective on institutional change—

driven by learning and adaptation—laid the foundation for New Institutional Economics, highlighting the interplay of structures, norms, and outcomes.

Thorstein Veblen, in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), offered a different but complementary view, showing how cultural norms and social institutions shape economic behavior. He introduced the concepts of conspicuous consumption and conspicuous leisure, describing how individuals signal status by acquiring luxury goods or abstaining from productive labor. In this framework, work itself can be devalued, reinforcing social hierarchies through institutionalized consumption practices. Veblen's analysis demonstrated that economic systems are deeply embedded in cultural and social expectations rather than being purely utilitarian.

Applied to Uzbekistan, these insights suggest that both institutional quality and cultural norms strongly affect entrepreneurial behavior. Family-owned enterprises (FOEs) and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), especially in the service sector, operate not only within financial and regulatory frameworks but also within social contexts where prestige, reputation, and community standing matter as much as profitability. Policies to support entrepreneurship should therefore account for both structural-economic and socio-cultural dimensions, creating a more holistic framework for sustainable modernization.

In Uzbekistan, issues of employment and rural labor dynamics have received considerable scholarly attention. Academician K. Kh. Abdurakhmanov emphasized the crucial role of education quality and vocational training in shaping labor market outcomes, stressing the need for stronger integration between education, science, and entrepreneurship. Similarly, researchers Shayzak Kholmuminov and N. U. Arabov analyzed socio-economic mechanisms to improve rural employment, highlighting strategies to reduce informal labor and expand opportunities in the formal sector. Taken together, these studies demonstrate that institutions, social norms, educational systems, and local conditions form an essential theoretical basis for understanding agricultural employment and its economic impact. By combining global theoretical frameworks with Uzbekistan-specific research, it becomes possible to more clearly identify the structural challenges and opportunities that shape labor market policy in rural areas.

Analysis and Results. Improving human well-being and creating sustainable employment remain key indicators of effective socio-economic policy. In the traditional Uzbek understanding, “well-being” reflects sufficiency and abundance, highlighting not only the quantity but also the quality of living conditions. In contemporary discourse, the term is interpreted more broadly, encompassing both material and non-material benefits, as well as the opportunities to access and utilize them. In Uzbekistan, the notion of “standard of living” is frequently applied to assess how adequately people's material, cultural, and social needs are met.

Well-being emerges from the interaction of social expectations, institutional capacity, and economic opportunities. As living standards rise and cultural aspirations expand, demand for improved infrastructure and services also grows, stimulating targeted investments in physical and social capital. Technological advancements—such as digital platforms and automation—contribute to higher productivity and lower costs, thereby enhancing working conditions and daily life. At the same time, community trust and strong ethical foundations strengthen social cohesion, creating an environment of security and support. Education is a decisive factor in building human capital and enabling access to more qualified jobs, which in turn leads to higher incomes. These income improvements allow households to invest in health, education, and leisure, generating a sustainable cycle of prosperity. All these processes unfold within a wider cultural and institutional framework, where traditions, governance systems, and regulations can either constrain or foster economic potential and social resilience.

The Samarkand region, situated in the heart of Uzbekistan, exemplifies both opportunities and challenges. While the region is renowned for its cultural heritage and tourism potential, its rural areas continue to face notable socio-economic difficulties. Therefore, enhancing rural well-being and creating sustainable employment represent strategic priorities for the region's long-term development. Recent macroeconomic trends in Uzbekistan confirm robust growth. In 2024, GDP at current prices reached 1,454,573.9 billion soums, reflecting a real increase of 6.5% compared to 2023, while the GDP deflator stood at 113.3% of the previous year's level. These figures indicate that growth was driven not only by higher output but also by managed price dynamics.

Such trends suggest that Uzbekistan's economy is demonstrating structural resilience, combining expansion in production with relatively balanced inflationary processes.¹

Uzbekistan GDP Growth & Volume 2020–2024 y.

Table1.

Year	GDP Volume (billion UZS)	Real Growth (%)
2020	668,038.0	101.6 %
2021	820,536.6	108.0 %
2022	995,573.1	106.0 %
2023	1,204,485.4	106.3 %
2024	1,454,573.9	106.5 %

Note: The growth percentages reflect real GDP growth versus the previous year; data for 2024 at current prices with inflation-adjusted index at 113.3 %. Official sources confirm a real growth of 6.5 % in 2024

In recent years, Uzbekistan has demonstrated strong and sustained economic growth. By 2024, the country's GDP at current prices reached 1,454.6 trillion UZS, showing a 6.5% real increase compared to the previous year. The GDP deflator, at approximately 113%, indicates moderate inflationary pressure, reflecting stable price dynamics. This trajectory highlights the effectiveness of ongoing economic reforms and structural modernization efforts within the national economy.

The Samarkand region, situated in the heart of Uzbekistan, is among the country's most important economic and cultural centers, distinguished by its rich historical heritage and tourism potential. However, despite these advantages, rural areas of the region continue to face socio-economic difficulties. Enhancing the well-being of rural residents and creating sustainable employment opportunities remain critical priorities for ensuring balanced regional development.

As the analysis shows, while Samarkand successfully leverages its cultural assets to strengthen tourism, its rural sector still lags behind in key socio-economic indicators. Bridging these gaps—through expanded employment opportunities, investments in rural infrastructure, and the promotion of agritourism—can foster deeper integration of the rural economy into regional growth processes, improving local income levels and strengthening social stability.

Currently, the economic contribution of the Samarkand region to national GDP stands at 30.4 trillion UZS, or around 15% of Uzbekistan's total GDP (202 trillion UZS). This underscores its pivotal role in the country's economic landscape, combining cultural significance with growing structural importance.

ectors amounted to 426.264 trillion soums, reflecting a 4.1% increase compared to the same period in 2022. A sectoral breakdown shows that crop and livestock production, hunting, and related services generated 411.595 trillion soums (+4.1%); forestry products reached 10.400 trillion soums (+2.7%); and fisheries output rose to 4.270 trillion soums (+7.4%).

Growth in agricultural production was supported by notable increases across several sub-sectors: fish production (+7.3%), cocoons (+6.5%), cotton (+6.0%), cereals (+5.5%), melons (+5.5%), fruits and berries (+4.1%), eggs (+4.4%), meat (+3.9%), and potatoes (+3.8%).

A structural assessment indicates that the bulk of agricultural output is generated by household-based dehqan and subsidiary farms, which account for 63.1% of total production. Farmer-run holdings contribute 29.8%, while formal agricultural enterprises provide only 7.1%. Such a distribution underscores the predominance of small-scale agriculture in Uzbekistan's rural economy.

These dynamics demonstrate how policy-driven reforms have translated into measurable progress in agricultural productivity, GDP growth, and rural economic indicators, particularly in regions such as Samarkand. At the same time, ensuring sustainable employment remains one of

¹ Госкомстат РУз.

the country's most pressing challenges. Employment here encompasses diverse forms of participation by the working-age population in productive activities, which generate income and shape living standards.

The model of a socially oriented market economy, advanced under the leadership of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, places particular emphasis on expanding employment and ensuring the effective utilization of labor resources, especially in rural areas. To this end, a number of priority measures have been implemented.

First, the development of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) has been prioritized as a driver of job creation. This includes supporting startups through tax incentives and financial instruments, as well as introducing training programs and improving the overall business environment.

Second, modernization of agriculture is being actively pursued. The introduction of advanced technologies, the expansion of agro-industrial complexes, and the creation of new employment opportunities in rural regions are central to this process.

Demographic dynamics further reinforce the urgency of these policies. By early 2024, Uzbekistan's population had reached approximately 36.8 million. Between 2020 and 2023, the annual growth rate accelerated to around 2.1%, adding roughly 700–800 thousand people each year. Importantly, about 57% of the population is of working age, although this share has gradually begun to decline since the 2010s due to demographic shifts linked to higher birth rates of the early 2000s.

Number of Economically Active Population 2010–2024y

Table 2

Region / Entity	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Republic of Uzbekistan	13,767.7	14,022.4	14,357.3	14,641.7	14,876.4	14,979.4	15,038.9	15,038.3	15,096.4
Republic of Karakalpakstan	665.4	675.1	688.8	779.5	782.2	790.0	781.5	786.1	796.6
Andijan region	1,347.3	1,375.2	1,404.1	1,401.6	1,413.9	1,376.5	1,403.1	1,429.7	1,423.9
Bukhara region	872.4	872.4	874.6	887.7	875.4	881.9	862.2	856.4	853.5
Jizzakh region	465.4	480.8	492.6	539.4	590.3	600.1	612.6	602.7	599.4
Kashkadarya region	1,210.0	1,247.0	1,296.6	1,353.3	1,345.3	1,317.9	1,339.5	1,331.5	1,377.1
Navoi region	443.6	444.2	445.7	446.3	450.9	440.9	450.2	445.8	455.1
Namangan region	1,022.1	1,057.9	1,099.0	1,162.6	1,214.7	1,217.2	1,224.1	1,208.5	1,228.7
Samarkand region	1,530.6	1,575.7	1,629.8	1,620.6	1,604.2	1,592.9	1,599.7	1,611.0	1,607.7
Surxondaryo region	953.5	984.5	1,018.3	1,062.7	1,089.3	1,128.8	1,108.3	1,115.8	1,083.1
Syrdarya region	369.1	368.5	371.9	390.7	385.9	373.4	372.1	369.5	373.0
Tashkent region	1,336.0	1,342.4	1,360.9	1,349.8	1,353.5	1,315.8	1,348.6	1,321.4	1,327.4
Fergana region	1,545.7	1,570.9	1,596.6	1,630.5	1,606.6	1,625.7	1,648.8	1,665.6	1,666.4
Khorezm region	735.5	754.7	773.3	786.0	810.0	804.5	806.4	815.5	827.5
Tashkent city	1,214.6	1,213.6	1,226.8	1,228.3	1,276.5	1,352.3	1,466.4	1,476.4	1,477.0

The data clearly indicate that Uzbekistan's economically active population has been on a steady upward trajectory over the past decade, increasing from roughly 13.8 million in 2016 to about 13.97 million in 2024. This overall growth of nearly 1.3 million people reflects the national economy's ability not only to absorb new entrants but also to sustain continued labor force expansion. At the regional level, the dynamics are uneven but illustrative. Tashkent City remains the dominant contributor, with approximately 1.48 million people in the labor force, reaffirming its role as the country's primary economic hub. The Fergana and Samarkand regions display stable and consistent growth, highlighting their expanding importance in labor absorption. Smaller territories such as Jizzakh and Karakalpakstan also demonstrate growth, though from relatively low baselines, resulting in modest absolute increases. Surkhandarya, by contrast, experienced strong expansion in the mid-2010s but recorded a slight decline after 2021, pointing to its vulnerability to sector-specific fluctuations.

These trends underscore the critical need to ensure that labor force expansion translates into meaningful employment opportunities across all regions. This requires:

- **Regional job creation:** extending employment programs beyond metropolitan centers to support emerging labor markets in mid-sized and smaller regions;
- **Skills development:** strengthening vocational training systems and aligning workforce preparation with the industrial profiles of specific regions;
- **Infrastructure and industrial investment:** particularly in slower-growing regions such as Karakalpakstan and Jizzakh, where targeted initiatives can enhance equitable participation in the economy.

As of the third quarter of 2024, labor market engagement in Uzbekistan appears relatively balanced, with unemployment declining and labor force participation stabilizing at around 72–73%. Sustaining this momentum will depend on further investment in SMEs, rural entrepreneurship, and digital economy initiatives, which are crucial for fostering inclusive employment and balanced socio-economic development nationwide.

Employment Rate (%) by Region in Uzbekistan 2010–2024

Table 3.

Region	2010	...	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Republic of Uzbekistan	66.9	...	66.0	67.0	67.2	67.9	68.3
Republic of Karakalpakstan	57.3	...	62.0	61.1	61.6	62.9	63.5
Andijan Region	69.3	...	66.5	68.2	69.5	70.6	70.7
Bukhara Region	74.5	...	68.3	67.2	67.2	68.7	68.6
Jizzakh Region	56.8	...	66.2	67.5	66.2	66.3	66.7
Kashkadarya Region	61.7	...	60.9	62.2	61.9	64.0	64.9
Navoi Region	75.3	...	66.8	68.3	67.7	69.8	70.1
Namangan Region	57.4	...	65.0	65.5	64.8	65.9	66.8
Samarkand Region	64.7	...	63.2	63.7	65.0	64.7	64.8
Surkhandarya Region	62.5	...	63.9	64.5	64.2	63.8	63.4
Syrdarya Region	72.0	...	64.8	64.5	64.0	63.8	65.3
Tashkent Region	71.5	...	68.2	72.4	71.0	72.2	72.3
Fergana Region	69.4	...	65.1	66.2	67.1	68.4	68.0
Khorezm Region	63.2	...	63.7	64.0	64.7	66.9	66.5
Tashkent City	81.6	...	81.7	81.3	82.5	82.3	81.5

Uzbekistan's employment rate grew from 66.0% in 2020 to 68.3% in 2024, reflecting the effectiveness of national labor policies and overall market resilience. While Tashkent city and

region, Navoi, and Andijan demonstrate high and improving employment levels, regions such as Samarkand, Surkhandarya, Syrdarya, and Karakalpakstan continue to lag, highlighting the need for targeted investments in education, SMEs, and rural infrastructure to achieve balanced regional growth.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Recent labor market dynamics in Uzbekistan reveal steady progress, though they also expose persistent regional disparities. Over the past five years, national unemployment declined from 10.5% in 2020 to 6.8% in early 2024, while the number of economically active individuals rose to 19.7 million. These improvements illustrate the resilience of the labor market and the effectiveness of state measures, particularly job creation programs, SME support initiatives, and the expansion of vocational training. At the same time, they underscore the urgency of ensuring that economic growth translates into broad-based employment opportunities across all regions of the country.

The capital and industrial centers such as Tashkent, Navoi, and Andijan continue to demonstrate the highest employment levels, reflecting the concentration of infrastructure, services, and industrial activity in these areas. By contrast, regions like Karakalpakstan, Jizzakh, and Surkhandarya remain less dynamic, where employment rates lag behind and opportunities are limited. This uneven pattern highlights a structural imbalance in the national labor market, showing that while some regions benefit from industrial diversification and strong investment inflows, others still struggle with outdated infrastructure, limited access to finance, and weaker institutional support.

A crucial driver of employment growth has been the expansion of small and medium-sized enterprises. SMEs not only serve as a backbone of formal job creation but also stimulate entrepreneurship and innovation, especially when supported by tax incentives, credit opportunities, and a favorable regulatory environment. However, their potential is unevenly realized across regions: in advanced areas, SMEs integrate effectively into industrial and service ecosystems, while in rural districts they remain constrained by limited infrastructure and insufficient logistical support.

Human capital development plays an equally central role. The effectiveness of vocational training and educational reform depends on their alignment with regional labor market needs. International partnerships, including GIZ, OECD, and World Bank programs, have supported digital skills training and professional education, providing people in lagging regions with greater access to qualified employment. Expanding such initiatives across the country would not only enhance employability but also reduce structural unemployment, strengthening Uzbekistan's capacity for inclusive economic growth.

The importance of infrastructure cannot be overstated, as improved transport links, digital connectivity, and rural facilities directly influence labor mobility and economic diversification. Ongoing projects in digital inclusion and skills development already point to the transformative potential of targeted investments. When coupled with the expansion of SMEs and human capital strengthening, infrastructure development creates the conditions for underdeveloped regions to catch up, helping reduce economic disparities and improving the overall resilience of the labor market.

Ultimately, employment in Uzbekistan is more than an economic statistic; it represents a foundation for social stability and improved quality of life. Rising incomes enable households to invest in education, healthcare, and cultural activities, creating a virtuous cycle of development. If rural areas are to share fully in the benefits of national growth, policies must be designed not only to address financial and institutional barriers but also to strengthen community ties, uphold cultural values, and ensure that employment becomes a reliable pathway to well-being. The experience of recent years suggests that Uzbekistan has laid the groundwork for such a transformation, but continued effort will be required to balance regional development, expand formal employment, and make sustainable prosperity accessible to all.

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