

“International Legal Cooperation for Sustainable Agricultural Development: The Case of FAO and IFAD in Uzbekistan.”

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Abstract: This article explores the international legal framework governing cooperation between the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) in promoting sustainable agricultural development in Uzbekistan. It examines how these institutions contribute to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), through technical assistance, legal reforms, and financial mechanisms. The paper also analyzes the national strategies of Uzbekistan aligned with FAO and IFAD projects, assessing the effectiveness of international legal instruments in supporting food security, rural development, and women’s empowerment in agriculture.

Keywords: FAO, IFAD, Sustainable Development, International Law, Agricultural Policy, Uzbekistan, SDGs, Food Security, Legal Cooperation.

Sustainable agricultural development is a central component of global food security and poverty reduction. International organizations such as the FAO and IFAD play a crucial role in assisting developing countries in achieving these goals through legal, institutional, and technical cooperation. Uzbekistan, as a member of both institutions, has benefited from their joint projects focused on rural development, land management, and climate adaptation. This article aims to assess the legal foundations and institutional mechanisms of FAO–IFAD cooperation in Uzbekistan, highlighting how these partnerships support national policies in alignment with international obligations.

Both FAO and IFAD are specialized agencies of the United Nations, established under international treaties — the FAO Constitution (1945) and the IFAD Agreement (1976). Their cooperation is grounded in the UN Charter, particularly Articles 55–57, which call for international collaboration to achieve economic and social progress. The partnership between FAO and IFAD is institutionalized through Memoranda of Understanding and Joint Framework Agreements aimed at promoting sustainable agricultural practices, legal capacity building, and inclusive rural development.

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) is a specialized agency and international financial institution of the United Nations, headquartered in Rome, Italy — the global center for UN food and agriculture agencies. Established in 1977, IFAD’s mission is to enable rural populations, particularly smallholder farmers, to increase their food production, improve nutrition, raise their incomes, and contribute to broader goals of rural development and poverty reduction.¹

FAO and IFAD have implemented several joint initiatives in Uzbekistan, including programs on climate-smart agriculture, water resource management, and

¹ A.Khodjayeva. “Issues of international legal cooperation between Uzbekistan and FAO” (PhD) Dissertation of legal sciences. T:2024 y. 103-106 pages.

rural entrepreneurship. FAO's Country Programming Framework (CPF) for Uzbekistan (2021–2025) and IFAD's Strategic Framework align with the government's national strategies on food security and rural development. These initiatives are legally supported by bilateral agreements and cooperation protocols between Uzbekistan and the UN agencies, ensuring compliance with international standards in sustainable development and human rights.

IFAD primarily invests in projects targeting vulnerable rural communities by providing grants and low-interest loans. These investments aim to enhance agricultural productivity, support rural entrepreneurship, improve access to markets, and build climate resilience among poor farming households.

Since its inception, IFAD has mobilized more than US\$15 billion in funding, directly benefiting over 410 million rural people across developing countries. By promoting inclusive and sustainable rural transformation, IFAD plays a critical role in achieving global objectives such as poverty eradication, food security, improved nutrition, and environmental sustainability.²

Moreover, IFAD (the International Fund for Agricultural Development) is an international financial institution and a specialized agency of the United Nations, headquartered in Rome, which serves as the UN's center for food and agriculture. The Republic of Uzbekistan officially became a full member of IFAD for the first time during the 34th session of the IFAD Governing Council held in Rome on February 19–20, 2011.³

In Uzbekistan, the foundations of cooperation with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) are aimed at fostering the sustainable growth of rural incomes by expanding production systems comprised of small-scale agricultural enterprises. This approach aligns with national efforts to modernize the rural economy and improve the livelihoods of the rural population.

² IFAD and FAO combine their expertise for better management of projects in fragile states.

<https://www.ifad.org/en/web/latest/-/news/ifad-and-fao-combine-their-expertise-for-better-management-of-projects-in-fragile-states>

³ <https://www.ifad.org/en/web/operations/w/country/uzbekistan>

Significant economic reforms are currently underway in Uzbekistan, with the objective of establishing a more open and market-oriented economy. The new policy trajectory places particular emphasis on the role of agriculture as a key driver of export-led economic growth. It also prioritizes the revitalization of rural areas and seeks to harness the productive potential of smallholder (peasant) farms more effectively.

Uzbekistan's population is experiencing steady growth. According to the latest data from the United Nations, the country's current population stands at approximately 34,875,757. As of July 1, 2022, the UN estimated the population to be 34,627,652. Demographic projections indicate that this figure is expected to rise in the coming decades, reaching around 44.4 million by 2070. By the end of the 21st century, the population is projected to stabilize at approximately 42.27 million.⁴

Uzbekistan is currently experiencing an annual population growth rate of 1.48%, marking a gradual decline from 1.66% recorded in 2016. This downward trajectory in the growth rate is projected to persist until approximately 2070, in line with broader demographic trends observed in the region.

Uzbekistan's cooperation with FAO and IFAD demonstrates how international legal principles—such as the right to food, sustainable development, and equality—are reflected in domestic agricultural and environmental policies. The country's commitment to SDGs and its active participation in UN frameworks illustrate the practical implementation of international law at the national level.

The total fertility rate in Uzbekistan presently stands at 2.43 births per woman, while the median age of the population is 27.8 years. These figures reflect a demographic profile that remains conducive to continued population growth in the near future. Although the current fertility rate remains above the replacement level of approximately 2.1 births per woman, it represents a significant decrease compared to historical levels. For instance, in 1980, the fertility rate was recorded at 5.46 births per woman, indicating a more than twofold reduction over the past four decades.

⁴ Uzbekistan population 2022 (live):. <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/uzbekistan-population>

This demographic transition suggests a shift towards lower fertility and an aging population structure over time, which may have far-reaching implications for labor market dynamics, social services, and long-term economic planning. As such, these trends warrant close monitoring within the framework of national development strategies and population policies.⁵

IFAD's support is more investment-driven, aiming to empower smallholder farmers and rural communities through direct funding and credit mechanisms. Since 2011, IFAD has approved several programs in Uzbekistan, targeting:

- Rehabilitation of rural infrastructure (roads, irrigation systems)
- Access to microfinance and agricultural inputs
- Capacity building and training for farmers and rural youth
- Promotion of gender equality and women's leadership in agriculture

The “*Daryo Qishloqlari Rivoji*” project, implemented jointly with the Government of Uzbekistan, is a key example of how IFAD's investments are improving livelihoods in the Fergana Valley and Karakalpakstan regions.

While FAO and IFAD have distinct mandates, their collaboration offers synergy by combining policy support (FAO) with investment on the ground (IFAD).

- Their joint programs are particularly focused on:
- Integrated land and water management
- Agricultural extension services
- Climate change mitigation and adaptation
- Institutional strengthening for rural governance

Moreover, both institutions contribute to knowledge-sharing platforms and support regional cooperation initiatives, such as Central Asia's Green Development dialogues and the 2025 Samarkand Climate Forum.

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) play a critical and strategic role in supporting Uzbekistan's transition toward a more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable agricultural

⁵ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. (2022). *World Population Prospects 2022*. Retrieved from <https://population.un.org/wpp/>

sector. Through their complementary modalities — FAO’s provision of specialized technical assistance and IFAD’s targeted financial investments — these institutions jointly contribute to strengthening the country’s capacity to address complex environmental, economic, and socio-structural challenges facing rural areas.

Deepening this institutional collaboration is particularly imperative in light of accelerating climate change and mounting concerns regarding regional food security. A reinforced partnership will not only facilitate the realization of Uzbekistan’s long-term development objectives but also advance the country’s alignment with the broader goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

A significant milestone in enhancing Uzbekistan’s agricultural sector was marked by the Presidential Decree issued on 15 September 2024, titled “On Additional Measures for the Implementation of the Project on Agricultural Diversification and Modernization with the Participation of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).” The decree represents a critical policy step in deepening cooperation with IFAD and accelerating sectoral modernization.⁶

Pursuant to the decree, goods (including works, services, and vehicles) procured under the Project using IFAD credit resources are exempt from customs duties (excluding fees for customs clearance), value-added tax (VAT), and other mandatory charges. This measure significantly reduces the financial burden associated with project implementation and facilitates a more efficient allocation of development financing.

Under the same resolution, the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Uzbekistan has been designated as the main executing agency, responsible for ensuring the timely and effective implementation of the project and achieving its intended results. Commercial banks participating in the initiative are tasked with managing the credit line, ensuring the timely and targeted disbursement of IFAD

⁶ President of the Republic of Uzbekistan. (2024, September 15). On additional measures for the implementation of the project on agricultural diversification and modernization with the participation of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) [Presidential Decree]. Retrieved from <https://lex.uz/>

loans, and maintaining detailed reporting and monitoring mechanisms for the implementation of sub-projects.

In conclusion, the primary objective of the aforementioned Presidential Decree is to ensure the effective implementation of the Strategy for Agricultural Development of the Republic of Uzbekistan for 2020–2030, while simultaneously expanding cooperation with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). The realization of this initiative is expected to contribute to increased rural employment and income levels by promoting the diversification of agricultural production and the expansion of value chains across the sector.

A distinctive feature of Uzbekistan's collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) lies in its focus on addressing hunger and preventing food insecurity within the context of increasing interdependence among countries affected by regional and global food crises. This partnership reflects Uzbekistan's commitment to proactive engagement in international efforts aimed at strengthening food security and agricultural resilience.

FAO and IFAD's partnership in Uzbekistan serves as a model for effective international legal cooperation in agriculture. Their joint actions contribute not only to improved food security but also to the realization of fundamental human rights and sustainable rural livelihoods. Strengthening the legal and institutional foundations of this cooperation will be crucial for advancing the country's transition toward a resilient and inclusive agricultural economy.

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