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TECHNICAL REPORT:

Rural Mahallas and their Links to the Health System

Author:

Ed Harris

August 1999

Ferghana, Uzbekistan



FUNDED BY:
THE U.S. AGENCY FOR
INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT



IMPLEMENTED BY:
ABT ASSOCIATES INC.
CONTRACT NO. 115-C-00-00-00011-00

DOC NO: UZ_TD_4(E)

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I. Abstract

This report looks at existing links, and suggests potential new links, between rural communities and the local primary health care system in the Ferghana Oblast of Uzbekistan, concentrating specifically on two traditional community structures – mahallas and kishlaks. Currently there is at least one SVP (or health facility) in each mahalla. Other than this the only existing formal links are the Inter-Mahalla Health Advisory Boards (IMHABs), established by the Hokimyat and the World Bank to promote health reform at the community level. However these appear to work only in theory. Less formally, several kishlak leaders say that they have held meetings with doctors and there is evidence that mahalla meetings have been used to explain the health reform process. The report sets out several possible recommendations to increase the links including the possibility of creating SVP or kishlak health reform representatives; of improving the efficiency of the existing IMHABs; or of adapting the current institutions to disseminate information themselves.

II. Executive Summary

This report looks at the links between mahallas (traditional community groups) and primary rural health care in the Ferghana Oblast of Uzbekistan. The first section of the report concentrates on the structure of mahallas and kishlaks (formal “self governed” community groups) and suggests that while the mahalla system does have some bearing on the community; much of what people learn on subjects such as hygiene comes from the television.

There are very few existing formal links between the community and the health system. Several kishlak leaders say that they hold regular discussions with community doctors, but this is unlikely to be true for a large majority of kishlaks.

The report shows that there is at least one, possibly two, SVPs (or health facilities), within each mahalla. Most of the medical staff at the SVPs live in the local community and it is likely that residents approach medical staff at home as well as at the medical points. As respected members of the community, elder doctors are often on the mahalla assembly and there is evidence that mahalla meetings have been used to explain the health reform process. In addition to doctors, health visitors live in the community, although they are discounted as a strong link between the mahalla and the health system.

One existing formal link are the Inter-Mahalla Health Advisory Boards (IMHABs), established by the Hokimyat and the World Bank. These boards, comprising prominent community members, were designed to help increase community interest and involvement in the reform of primary care. By August 1999, when the report was published, these boards were functioning only on paper. It appeared that the majority of those on the boards tended to be old men with no medical experience. There was a general lack of knowledge about the purposes of the board. In addition, not all mahallas were represented by IMHABs and representation on the boards was irregular.

The report brings to light two ‘non-links’. Specifically, that although women are the main factor in a family’s health, their opinions are barely listened to at mahalla level. The second non-link expressed is that the local communities are unable to influence the effectiveness of the health care they receive and may feel themselves powerless to change the system.

Several options are set out to improve the links between mahallas and the health system including promotion of reforms; encouraging residents to attend SVPs; health education programs; accountability of local clinics; patient surveys and, given the cultural climate in Uzbekistan it is suggested that the mahalla and kishlak leadership should have some kind of ‘emotional’ stake in the reforms, since their backing is essential in order to strengthen any links. In this respect the report continually asserts the non-transparent nature of Uzbek society.

Four options for moving forward are given. Firstly, there is scope for development of the IMHABs by making membership more transparent and consistent, and deepening knowledge about health reforms at the mahalla level. A second option would be to select one trained representative for each SVP who could work on disseminating information about reforms. A third option would be to select one representative for each kishlak committee. It is suggested that since kishlaks tend to be more official and uniform this option could hold more weight, although kishlak representatives could, adversely, be more distanced from the community, which could lead to failure. In both the second and third options responsibility and accountability are clearer than when there are several representatives. The fourth option presented is to divide the task between existing institutions so that, for example, doctors could carry out promotion of reforms themselves and promotional material could be distributed in the mahallas. However there is concern that this option, although developing existing institutions, could lead to inertia.

III. Introduction

A. Objectives

This report was commissioned as part of Abt Associates' ongoing work with health care reform in the Ferghana Oblast of Uzbekistan. Specifically, Abt is seeking to tie the rural system of primary health care with the local communities as part of its overall reform program. Therefore, this report seeks to fulfill three objectives as outlined below:

1. Provide a general description of rural communities (mahallas).
2. Describe the links that exist between mahallas and the health system.
3. Produce an assessment – from a sociologist's point of view – of the possibilities for a mahalla or community role in improving primary health care.

B. The History of Mahallas

“Mahalla” in Uzbek means “community”. The word may be used socially (similar to an extended family), physically (a group of houses), administratively (the lowest government-recognized administrative unit), and even architecturally. A mahalla is a traditional structure that has existed in the present territories of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan for as long as anybody can remember. Various theories explain their presence in Uzbekistan, but the most likely of these is that the mahalla came to the non-nomadic areas of Central Asia with Alexander the Great in the fourth century BC. Today they still exist all over southern Central Asia, but in Uzbekistan the mahalla is being invested with increasingly important legal status.

During the Soviet period, mahallas were tolerated by the Soviet government, but were not, officially, part of the government structure. In urban areas, people either lived in an apartment block or they lived in a mahalla. In turn, these divisions followed broadly ethnic lines since it was easier for the Slav immigrants to find space in an apartment block than in a mahalla. Thus the mahalla meant the clusters of traditional Uzbek-style, (usually) single-storey buildings. Traditionally, the mahallas were governed by a group of elders, the aqsaqaals, who presided over matters such as conflicts and social events. Instead of mahalla assemblies, the apartment blocks had “domkoms” (house committees).

In the rural areas, the mahalla was just one of several names - posyolok (settlement), kishlak, mahalla, and aul - used to refer to rural communities of varying sizes. All of these communities, however, were governed by sel'sovyets (village councils), which covered every inch of rural territory. The sel'sovyets were responsible for all institutions on their territory, including the kolkhozes (collective farms), and were immediately subordinate to the raiispolkom (rayon executive committee).

Since independence in September 1991, however, the Uzbek government has been keen to encourage the existence and role of mahallas. Since 1990 there has been increasing media attention to mahallas, and in October 1992 the government created a “Mahalla Fund”. The mahalla has been given official status and other territorial / administrative units have been merged to form official mahallas. In the towns, for example, several blocks of flats may now be governed by an official mahalla assembly. In rural areas also, there has been increasing standardization of the territorial units. Thus official mahallas have been formed from other mahallas, auls, kishlaks, and posyolki (settlements), and the sel'soviyet (village council) has been renamed the kishlak assembly (also referred to as the kishlak committee).

There are several reasons why the government may be keen to encourage mahallas. Firstly, an important aim of the Uzbek government has been to solidify an Uzbek identity. (Until 1924, the early Soviet period, the present territory of Uzbekistan consisted largely of the three khanates of Kokand, Khiva, and Bukhara.) This is in line with other nationalizing policies, such as language reform, the renaming of street names and other administrative units, and the removal of Soviet monuments. Much of the discussion of mahallas has been in terms of a return to Uzbek tradition.

Secondly, much has been made of the modernization of mahallas “to help nurture the roots of democracy in towns and villages”. Thus, by transferring responsibilities to the mahalla, the government is devolving power away from the center. This represents an attempt to encourage a self-help mentality, in contrast to the dependency culture of the Soviet system (“Give, give, give” as one interviewee expressed it). The more sinister interpretation is that by co-opting the mahalla apparatus, the government extends its reach into society.

Thirdly, and more prosaically, the expansion of mahalla responsibility may be interpreted as a practical necessity, where difficulties since the perestroika years have incapacitated parts of the government. Thus, for example, the mahalla assembly is to decide who is eligible for certain government benefits, thereby avoiding the administrative costs associated with more technical means-testing. More traditionally, the mahalla assembly carries enough weight that it may be able to encourage development within the community, such as insisting that cattle are not kept in the home or that ditches are kept clean.

On the other hand, in the very long-run, there are two possible threats to the mahalla in their present form. The first is increasing pressure from an authoritarian state that, despite its rhetoric, seeks to co-opt mahallas into the state system. The second pressure is increasing income gaps that may stretch non-market social bonds to their breaking point. In the short-run, however, and especially in rural society, these pressures seem negligible and may be disregarded for the purposes of this report.

C. Definitions

A mahalla is literally “a community.” An official mahalla, however, is defined by having a leader and a secretary that receive a government salary. It may consist of a single mahalla that already existed in 1991, or it may have been created from several mahallas that were considered too small to be “official”. The mahalla assembly is the governing organ of the mahalla, and is sometimes referred to as the mahalla committee. (The word committee has Soviet connotations, where the word assembly is more Uzbek.)

A kishlak is literally “a village”. An official kishlak, however, is the territory that used to be covered by the sel’sovyet. An official kishlak assembly is the body that has directly replaced the sel’sovyet (that is, the change is in name only). The kishlak assembly is often referred to as the kishlak committee.

Note, therefore, that there may be crucial differences between the local use of the words and the official titles given to the corresponding communities. That is, a small group of houses and families may be routinely referred to by the locals as a mahalla or kishlak, while that mahalla or kishlak may not, in fact, enjoy any legal status. Similarly, and confusingly, an official mahalla may contain several unofficial kishlaks, although an official kishlak tends to contain more than one official mahalla.

Note also that many recent laws refer to “organs of self-government”, rather than mahallas or kishlaks specifically. “Organs of self-government” are defined as settlements (posyolki), kishlaks, mahallas and auls. The word “posyolok” is a Russian word, and an “aul” is a much smaller settlement. Both words may be replaced by “kishlak” or “mahalla”, and neither is used further in this report.

Unless stated otherwise, all further references in this report to mahallas and kishlaks will be references to official mahallas and kishlaks.

D. Caveats

The first caveat to make is that there is an enormous variety in the nature of mahallas and kishlaks. This is overwhelmingly due to the huge variety in the quality of mahalla leadership.

Secondly, Uzbek society and polity is notoriously non-transparent. Connections (family, friends, colleagues) and personal obligations play an enormous part in the way that the system works, whatever the rules may say. This point cannot be overstated.

Finally, it is worth pointing out the specific nature of Ferghana Oblast. In comparison to the averages for Uzbekistan, Ferghana Oblast is characterized, most notably, by a very dense population. This and other regional differences may have important bearings on the way that the mahalla operates. The vast majority of research for this report took place in the Ferghana Valley.

IV. “Self-Governing Organs”

A. Mahallas

1. Mahalla Structure

An official mahalla is formed from one traditional mahalla or several mahallas that were too small to be official mahallas independently. Therefore an official mahalla may contain as many as fifteen unofficial mahallas, some which are several kilometers away from each other. Typically, an official mahalla will have a population of between two and four thousand people.

The mahalla has a leader called an *aqsaqaal* (literally meaning “white beard”), who is usually an old man. (Unofficial mahallas also have such leaders, but official mahalla leaders receive a government salary.) Note that not every *aqsaqaal* is a mahalla leader, and there is some overlap in usage of the term. The mahalla leader is elected by the mahalla, but requires confirmation from the *hokimyat*. The election generally takes the form of approval following discussion, often at the mahalla *chaikhana* (tea house), by interested male members of the community. By law, elections take place every two and a half years. However, they are not competitive elections in the Western sense, and incumbent leaders tend to maintain their position. Qualities desired in a mahalla leader are education above all, but experience in government departments is also attractive. Many mahalla leaders appear to be retired teachers.

Both the mahalla leader and his secretary are paid salaries by the government. A third paid post, the “defender of the people” was also created on 19 February 1999, three days after the bombings in Tashkent. The defender of the people is ostensibly to keep the peace and prevent crime in the mahalla, but is usually discussed in the context of Islamic extremism. The defender of the people is supposed to be young and fit, and his duties include taking note of all suspicious activities in the mahalla, patrolling at night, and coordinating with the police.

The mahalla leader also heads the mahalla assembly, which is elected at the same time as the mahalla chairman. The mahalla assembly consists of about five to ten advisors plus about fifteen to fifty representatives (*vakils*); the advisors are usually selected from the representatives. In the mahalla assemblies, there tend to be about one representative for every fifty people in the mahalla. Again, the most desired qualities of the mahalla assembly members are education and life experience. The representatives are selected from different areas (different streets, for example) of the mahalla. They vote on behalf of their area, and distribute mahalla assembly news and decisions. The numbers of female mahalla assembly members are very low, but not unheard of. The only female mahalla leader that was interviewed had previously worked in the *hokimyat*. Public gatherings of the mahalla assembly take place no less than once a month, usually at the mahalla *chaikhana*. The level of attendance at these meetings is not clear. Certainly, few women attend and it seems to be the case that few young men attend either.

There are also a series of commissions within the mahalla. By law, there will be an auditing commission and an administrative commission, which cover the basic administration of the mahalla. However, other commissions are sometimes described: such as commissions for youth, the prevention of crime, social events, and there is also a women’s association within every mahalla. Given the cultural context, it seems that the women’s associations are largely powerless organizations. However, they are coordinated by the women’s association within the *rayon hokimyat*. Their main duties are to assist in the organization of social events (such as weddings), and intervene where possible in domestic conflicts. There may also be a specific mahalla commission to deal with applications for government benefits (see below). With the exception of the mahalla commission and the women’s association, most mahalla commissions, though, appear to be largely ad hoc, and casual evidence suggests that their effectiveness may be limited. One

member of the youth commission explained that his commission's duties were to lecture the parents of unemployed men about their failings as parents and to lecture the young men in question about the benefits of employment.

The mahalla committee has an office, typically consisting of one small room for the mahalla leader, and an even smaller room for the secretary. The tasks of the mahalla assembly are described by mahalla leaders largely in terms of propagating government laws and decisions, keeping the mahalla tidy, preventing divorces, advising on social functions such as weddings and funerals, and providing certificates (*spravki*) of family and place of residence.

The principle sources of mahalla income (both cash and in kind) are: rayon hokimyat budgets, social and charitable funds, farms and businesses situated on the mahalla territory, and voluntary donations (23 August 1994, Presidential Decree on "Measures to strengthen the social protection of poor families", Article 2) and the Mahalla Fund. Furthermore, the mahallas have been tasked with assisting tax collection, and an incentive structure has been established to encourage this (13 January 1999, Presidential Decree on "Increasing the role of self-governing organs in providing social assistance for the population", Article 3). In practice, it has not been possible to gather any reliable information, or even an impression, about the levels of cash flow. In the present economic situation, however, the most likely source of income for rural mahallas is the government.

In theory, it seems, the mahalla income is to be spent on social projects and, more importantly perhaps, benefits. Poor families with children are supposed to receive approximately 600 to 2,400 sum per month, and non-working mothers with children under two years old are supposed to receive approximately 2,000 sum per month. [A small loaf of bread costs about 25 sum, and a kilogram of meat costs 400-500 sum.] Money from the Mahalla Fund is meant as material help for "poor families, invalids, orphans, lonely pensioners, and other social necessities". Again, it has been extremely difficult to establish how much of this money actually reaches the intended beneficiaries.

The mahalla has been responsible for assessing the requests for low-income family benefits since 1994. The mahalla discusses and assesses the formal applications that are made for social assistance. The principle is that, firstly, the mahalla itself is best able to decide whether the family needs the benefit and, secondly, that those not in need would be too ashamed to make an unworthy application. If the application is successful, further assistance requires another application in three months time.

The influence of the mahalla *aqsaqaals* and committees amongst the mahalla is hard to gauge accurately from interviews. However, there are several reasons to suggest that the mahalla leader and committee have considerable leverage over individuals within the community. The first factor is the cultural significance of age and experience, which are treated with considerably more deference than in the West. This factor is highlighted, when one considers that people very rarely move between mahallas, so that there is more incentive to co-operate with the unspoken rules of the community. (People usually move to another mahalla only when they get married or when land is granted for a new home elsewhere.) In any case, mahalla committee members are apparently selected precisely for the respect that they enjoy among the community. Secondly, the mahalla committee may be able to impose its solutions on a problem, because the next best option is to turn to the police (*militsiya*) or other official organs. Thirdly, the mahalla committee provides certificates which prove family size and place of residence among other things, and without which, in a highly bureaucratic system, life becomes more difficult.

Influence within the community as a whole is much more difficult to assess. There are plenty of examples of mahalla committees solving community problems, such as a family that insists on building a latrine near a ditch. Anecdotal evidence suggests that people distrust outsiders' motives and interests far more than their own mahalla leaders. On the other hand, anecdotal evidence also suggests that most of what people learn is from the television rather than, say, mahalla-organized seminars on subjects as diverse as hygiene, housing, the environment, and narcotics. In addition, there are stories of mahalla committees which have

been unable even to prevent people throwing rubbish in the streets. Clearly, the most important factor in the success of a mahalla is leadership.

Interestingly, an article in *Narodnoye Slovo*, dated 16 June 1999, described various aqsaqaals who had made false declarations of the money required for benefits in their mahallas. The sums involved varied from 10,000 to 284,000 sum. Perhaps this shows that mahalla leaders are not immune to temptation. On the other hand, perhaps it gives an example of mahalla leaders trying to win money for their communities. Possibly it just serves as an example of a government warning to mahalla leaders of what might happen if they try to cheat the government (*Narodnoye Slovo* is a government newspaper).

Another aspect of the mahallas that is worth mentioning is the hashar, sometimes compared to the Russian subbotnik. A hashar is voluntary work for a (respected) member of the community. The hashar is announced in advance (together with the unspoken promise of lunch), and on the given day volunteers from the mahalla will do the work. Interestingly, one interviewee commented that since providing lunch may be as expensive as hiring labour, an important aspect of the hashar is to show how much respect one enjoys in the community. Whatever, it is clear that the hashar is a regular and important part of mahalla life. In addition, many interviewees have been keen to talk about the level of other voluntary work, so that rural representatives of Kamelot (the government-organized “NGO” for youth) and many mahalla officials do not receive salaries.

The mahalla leaders are still subordinate to the official kishlak assemblies (*sel'sovvety*), and according to the law a further function of the mahalla assemblies is to see that the will of the kishlak assemblies is carried out on the mahalla territory. However, official kishlak assemblies do not receive nearly the same amount of attention in everyday conversation. Mahalla leaders usually meet with their kishlak leaders at least once a week in the kishlak assembly building (one kishlak leader boasted that he summoned his mahalla leaders for a daily meeting at 0800). Both mahalla leaders and kishlak leaders are also summoned to the *hokimyat* for meetings. There is some variation in the frequency of these meetings, but the kishlak leaders appear to meet with the *hokim* at least once a week, and the mahalla leaders at least once a month (and often once a week also).

B. Kishlaks

As stated already, the official kishlak assembly is a direct replacement for the Soviet *sel'sovvety*, and therefore the kishlak assembly coordinates the activities of the mahallas within its territory. Every rural mahalla is subordinate to a kishlak assembly, and within each rayon there are usually about ten to fifteen such kishlak assemblies. Note, however, that there are also some communities within the kishlak territory that do not form official mahallas. These communities do not have leaders and secretaries who are receiving government salaries, and they are often directly subordinate to the kishlak leader (rather than to an official mahalla leader).

As another type of “self-governing organ”, there are many similarities with the mahallas. So, the kishlak assembly also has a leader and secretary, both of whom receive salaries from the government. It also has an assembly composed of a leader and his representatives, who meet no less than once per month. The stated roles of the kishlak, both in the law and in interviews with kishlak leaders, are broadly similar to those of the mahalla. It is difficult to avoid the implication that this implies a large duplication of effort, but this is consistent with widely acknowledged levels of hidden unemployment in the rural areas. The kishlak assembly meets once a month, and is similar in form to the mahalla assembly. However, there tend to be only one representative for every two hundred or so people in the kishlak. The kishlak assembly is, therefore, arguably less representative and therefore further from the people. In practice, the main task of the kishlak assembly is to coordinate and direct the activities of the mahallas, and some kishlak officials describe themselves as “information centers”.

Interestingly, many kishlak leaders seemed younger than many mahalla leaders. Often, the kishlak leaders explained that before they were the kishlak leader, they had been a mahalla leader. Therefore one might speculate that there is a strong natural element of meritocracy at work. One kishlak leader even had a

scoreboard in his office for the different mahallas, with points added or subtracted for sporting competitions, domestic conflict, crime, and a general category. The kishlak leaders claim to know the large proportion of people in their kishlak, but casual evidence suggests a large proportion of people in the kishlak may not know the kishlak leader by sight or by name.

Interestingly, there is a small staff of other officials who work in the kishlak assembly building. These include representatives from the people's bank, the tax inspectorate, the Interior Ministry (MVD), the employment office (birzha truda) and the post and communications service. The representatives all receive salaries from their respective departments. There is also an indigenous NGO for youth called Kamelot that has representatives in some kishlak committee buildings (although whether or not it is really an NGO is contentious, given that it has replaced the Soviet youth organization, the Komsomol). These representatives work with and coordinate the mahalla committees on the relevant matters such as tax and internal security.

The following tables give the names of the official kishlak assemblies within each rayon, and also the official mahalla assemblies for each kishlak.

Table 2.1 Showing Kishlaks and Mahallas in Besharek Rayon

No.	Kishlak	Official Rural Mahallas	No. of mahallas
1	Besharik	Oktovuk, Uttizambar, Ittifok, Kuui Ittifok, Dekhontuda, Chorbogturangi	6
2	Korazhiida	Soilabi, Kum, Pastki Yangikurgon, Nabi, Korayantok	5
3	Batan	Shodlikobod, Shoberdi, Bakhmal, Yangikishlok, Kozokurgon, Gambai	6
4	Beshsari	Navkat, Shur, Chimboi	3
5	Yakkatut	Pastki Yakkatut, Buston, Korabuiin, Beshkapa, Eshon	5
6	Tovul	Uzun, Galcha, Korakuili, Dultali, Yukoi Tovul	5
7	Andarkhon	Sobirtepa, Chimobod, Kapayangi, Kiyali	4
8	Rapkon	Yangi Rapkon, Kurgoncha, Dekhonobod, Telov, Shaitonkul	5
9	Kashkar	Borukh Dasht, Abdurazzok, Abduvoi, Yangi Kashkar	4
Total			43

NB Besharek Town has 9 official mahallas, so Besharek Rayon has a total of 52 official mahallas.

Source: Besharek Rayon Hokimiyat

Table 2.2 Showing Kishlaks and Mahallas in Kuva Rayon

No.	Kishlak	Official Rural Mahallas	No. of Mahallas
1	Akbarobod	Yuzia, Kandibulok, Oltiarik, Damarik	4
2	Bainal minal	Chilon, Kalin Pustin, Tozhik	3
3	Bakhor	Mutakillik, Uraboshi, Coikeldi	3
4	Ittifok	Begobod, Cultonobod	2
5	Madaniyat	Khonobod	1
6	Mukhitdinov	Sufi, Naiman, Kairima	3
7	Namumna	Yangi khayot, Tolmazor, Yangi chek, Turk, Kakir	5
8	Dekhhonobod	Kattakishlok, Zhalayer, Kashkar-I	3
9	Yangi kishlok	Tozhik, Yangi kishlok, Okkurgon	3
10	Yangi Khayot	Yangiobod, Dekhonobod	2
11	Turkrobot	Pasti Khuzha Khazan, Korashokhs, Kashkar-II, Navkent	4
Total			33

NB Kuva Town has 11 official mahallas, so Kuva Rayon has a total of 45 official mahallas.

Source: Kuva Rayon Hokimiyat

Table 2.3 Showing Kishlaks and Mahallas in Yazyevan Rayon

No.	Kishlak	Official Rural Mahallas	No. of mahallas
1	Yazyevan	Yazyevan-chek, Yoklashobod, Toshkhovuz	3
2	Gulistan	Soibuye, Chopkilik, Chuyanobod, Kumkishlak, Takalkik-I, Takalik-II,	8

		Guliston, Navbokhor	
3	Khonobod	Khonobod, Suvli-arak, Eshontepi	3
4	Korasokol	Korasokol, Mingchinor	2
5	Kotortol	Kotortol, Pinazh	2
6	Koratepa	Koratepa	1
7	Ishtirkhon	Ishtirkhon, Gaston	2
8	Yangiobod	Yangiobod	1
9	Yangibuston	Yangibuston	1
10	Chulguliston	Kairogoch, Butkachi, Korasoi, Navruz, Chulguliston, Michurin	6
Total			29

NB Yazyevan Town has 3 official mahallas, so Yazyevan Rayon has a total 32 official mahallas.

Source: Yazyevan Rayon Hokimyat

C. The Mahalla Fund

The Mahalla Fund was created in October 1992 by the government with the stated purpose of material support for the poor. In theory, the Mahalla Fund is an independent fund that exists to help mahallas financially, operating hierarchically so that there are representatives from republic level down to rayon. Its sources of income are ad hoc transfers from the government and whatever other sources the Mahalla Fund can establish. The reality is probably very different. One member of the Mahalla Fund at oblast level, was eager to describe his schemes for making money (parks, record shops, tea houses), but not very expansive on the ways in which he had managed to help mahallas. Income and expenditure have rarely been welcomed as topics for conversation

The Mahalla Fund is always discussed in terms of being an NGO. However, the Mahalla Fund was set up by the government with government money. In addition, from republic level down to the rayons, the Fund offices are housed in government buildings, have an Uzbek flag in the room and a large picture of President Karimov. One interviewee suggested that the Mahalla Fund was established with the intention of soaking up public sector jobs that were shed soon after independence. It is easy to gain the impression that the Mahalla Fund was set up, like many other Uzbek NGOs, in the hope of attracting easy Western donor money.

The more generous interpretation is that the Mahalla Fund was set up, in keeping with other mahalla policy, to help mahallas to help themselves. As a result, by giving the Mahalla Fund some “start-up” money, the Mahalla Fund is given the opportunity to create more income for itself, using the profits for the poor. Interestingly, the impression given is that few transfers take place from republican level to oblast to rayon. Certainly very little of this money ever seems to reach the mahallas themselves.

Whatever, the overwhelming impression is that the Mahalla Fund is not an institution to be taken seriously.

D. Inter-Mahalla Health Advisory Boards (IMHABs)

Inter-Mahalla Health Advisory Boards (IMHABs) were created during the design of the rural health care reform program and the World Bank Health Project by the Hokimyat and the World Bank. They were designed to be advisory boards, comprised of prominent members of the community that could increase community interest and involvement in reform of primary care. The boards would meet periodically with the director and staff of the primary care facility in order to discuss the community’s health problems and to develop or share recommendations on ways to improve the facilities’ operations. The primary care facilities would rely on these boards for help in developing and conducting health education and outreach programs.

Although these IMHABs have been created on paper, they are not functioning yet. Much work will need to be done to convince them about the reform process and to encourage the boards to move beyond their imposed structures to take a more active role in assuring the health of their communities. The IMHAB

membership lists are composed largely of old men, and no members appear to have any medical background. So far, many board “members” cannot describe the purpose of the IMHABs or explain how or why were organized.

In addition, many mahallas are not represented by the IMHABs. In Besharek, 25 official mahallas have been identified from documents describing the IMHAB membership, out of a maximum of 43 official names in the hokimyat list of mahallas (=58%). For Kuva and Yazyevan, the corresponding figures are 28/33 and 20/29, equal to 85% and 69% respectively. In addition, different mahallas are unevenly represented within the mahallas, so that one mahalla has four IMHAB members where other mahallas have only one (or none at all).

E. “Self-Governing Organs”: Government or Non-Government?

As an obvious point of entry into the community, there is massive donor and NGO interest in working with mahallas. However, donors and NGOs seem divided over the nature of these mahallas: are they governmental or non-governmental bodies? The implications for funding, within a civil society program for example, may be considerable. This report argues that the dichotomy between government and non-government is a false dichotomy, since the mahallas contain elements of both. (The most straightforward definition of a civil society institution is a non-profit institution that fits between the family and the state.)

The mahallas may be described as a state institution because their leaders receive government salaries and training. Furthermore they are ultimately accountable to their respective kishlaks and hokimyats, meeting in the rayon hokimyat and the kishlak offices at least once a week. According to the law, their duties include: co-operating with local government organs to conduct political and spiritually enlightening events; inhibiting the activity of non-registered religious organizations; determining the recipients of state benefits; assisting the law-enforcing organs to keep social control; propagating state laws; and ensuring that taxes are paid.

On the other hand, mahallas cannot be exclusively described as state institutions. In the rural areas, mahallas are organic, “naturally occurring” communities, and the sense of community is strong. As one interviewee put it, if somebody in the mahalla dies, then members of the mahalla attend the funeral before even the dead person’s relatives. Secondly, few people seem to identify with their mahallas in terms of its official status, so that, for example, an official mahalla is more likely to be referred to as a kishlak than as a mahalla. Indeed, the turnout at the mahalla assembly meetings as a percentage of the mahalla population appears to be very low. Thirdly, it would be wrong to say that the state reaches into or controls all aspects of mahalla life. There are some issues on which the mahalla is genuinely committed to solving its own problems. Such issues may include divorce, the environment, agriculture, or health. Even the law allows mahallas and other self-governing organs space in resolving their own issues. Fourthly, the mahalla leader is always selected from within his own community, so that the emotional loyalty is more likely to be to the community than to the government. Fifthly, if the mahalla is receiving a negligible amount of money from the government, then presumably the mahalla is less dependent on the government.

Note the caveat that the role of leadership is crucial in the mahalla, and the type of role that the mahalla plays in the everyday lives of the population. In addition to this, the distance of the mahalla or kishlak from the rayon capital may also play a large role in how far the state is able to reach into the mahalla’s daily affairs. In the mahallas and kishlaks that are further from the towns, the mahalla leaders seem less concerned about their state roles.

Note also the caveat that the system is notoriously non-transparent. For example, the mahalla elects its leader, who requires approval from the rayon hokimyat. On the one hand, this could be an example of the mahalla choosing its own leader. On the other hand, this could be an opportunity for the hokimyat to impose his own choice of leader. In any case, there may be no conflict of interests between the hokimyat’s preferred candidate and the mahalla’s choice.

V. Links with the Health System

A. Existing Links

Table 3.1 Showing Links Between the Health System and Rural Community Organizations

Rayon	SVPs (1998)	SVPs (1999)	Kishlaks	Mahallas
Besharek	14	17	11	57
Kuva	14	16	11	34
Yazyevan	9	11	10	29

Sources: (1) Health care and finance departments at the oblast bokimyat: "List of SVPs with legal status from 1 January 1999"; Abt Associates, Fergana Office; (2) USAID Funded ZdravReform Project "Project Management Structure and Staff" Tashkent 1998; (3) Besharek, Kuva and Yazyevan rayon bokimiyats.

The most basic connection between the medical points and the mahallas and kishlaks is that the medical points are all situated within the mahallas and kishlaks. From Table 3.1, it can be seen that on average, every kishlak will have at least one, and possibly two, SVPs. Most of the medical staff live in the community (some of the doctors appear to commute from the towns). When one considers that people rarely move from the mahalla that they grew up in, this is an important link.

Therefore some doctors and nurses may be approached for help within their own communities rather than at the medical point. A recent newspaper article described the way in which the names and addresses of all doctors in a mahalla had been collected and distributed to all families in case of an emergency (Narodnoye Slovo 1 June 1999). More prosaically, people might prefer to visit nurses at home rather than at the medical point for a variety of reasons: the patient's place of work (the fields) is too far from the medical point; the patient is less likely to be asked for payment when he or she visits a friend within the mahalla; or perhaps it is just easier to visit a neighbor than the health facility (especially when the health facility may have no medicines).

Secondly, as respected members of the community, the older doctors are obvious candidates for their mahalla assemblies. There are, therefore, occasions when the doctors and the mahalla assemblies convene quite naturally. In addition, the mahalla leader may ask the doctor to explain something at a mahalla meeting, or the doctor may wish to draw attention to a problem with potential medical consequences. One or two doctors pointed out that they had used meetings of the mahallas to explain the health reform process.

Beyond these informal links, however, and with the exception of the health visitors (patronazhnyye sestry) there appear to be few formal links with the mahallas and kishlaks. Given that each patronazhnaya sestra has to cover about 1,000 people, however, one may question how strong this link is. Some kishlak leaders said that they held regular discussions with the community doctors, but it seems likely that is only true for a minority of the kishlaks. More likely is that doctors may approach the kishlak leaders for help as the need arises, for example with procuring medicines where possible. Attention is drawn back to the caveat that leadership is the key to the operation of a mahalla or kishlak.

Since the mahallas are such close communities, people talk. If there is a perception that the medical system works, then people will use it. The reason most often given for not using the local medical point was the lack of medicines. Experience in rural Azerbaijan, also, was that attendance at the local primary health care clinics shot up within a day or so of medicines being delivered. Note, however, that the local understanding of improvements in the health system (more drugs) may be slightly different from the interpretations of others (more efficient financing, for example).

Perhaps the most important "non-link" is that although women appear to play the greater role in the health of the family, their opinions are listened to least of all. Presumably this question will be covered in detail by the forthcoming ZdravReform household survey, but anecdotal evidence on this is overwhelming. A recent Medecins Sans Frontieres survey in Karakalpakstan also came to the conclusion

that the education of the female household head was the key determinant of child and reproductive health.

A second non-link may be that the local communities are unable to influence the effectiveness of the health care that they receive. For example, individuals within the community may not have sufficient education to judge the system, and they probably have no other experience with which to compare their community health care. In addition, they may consider themselves completely powerless to effect any changes, especially where personal contacts often carry more weight than legal and civil rights.

In summary, there are links between the local communities and the medical points, although these links tend to be highly informal. On the other hand, there are also significant non-links as stated above. Perhaps these points are best tested by the household survey, but the reality is likely to vary from individual to individual.

B. Options and Recommendations for Further Links

Greater linkages between the SVP and the community can be achieved through:

- Promotion of the reforms and encouragement of attendance at SVPs.
- Health education programs.
- The passage of information about local health conditions to the doctors.
- Accountability of the local primary health care clinics.
- Other activities as required, e.g. patient surveys.

It is difficult to imagine an individual or institution selected from the community that could satisfactorily fulfill many of these five stated functions. Firstly, promotion of the reforms requires a deep understanding of the reforms themselves. If those promoting the reforms do not support or understand the reforms, then their message is unlikely to be effective. Secondly, many of the functions require medical knowledge. Thirdly, accountability, in the short run, is unlikely to take root.

Given the cultural context of Uzbekistan which places great emphasis on leadership, a more realistic way to tie the health facility to the community might be to give the community leaders a stake in the survival of the reforms. In any case, resistance from the mahalla and kishlak leaders will create large obstacles, and an obvious way to prevent this resistance is to involve the respective leaders in the reform process. Community leaders should be given an emotional stake in the survival of the reforms. The most appropriate way to work with the leaders is to keep constant contact with them, discussing the reforms as they progress, requesting help with any problems where appropriate. With the caveat that much depends on the individuals, the leaders, especially the kishlak leaders, seem to be the “movers and the shakers” of the communities.

Having said all of this, four options to link the SVP to the community are detailed below. Note that the options are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and elements may be taken from each option to create a “best solution”.

1. Further Development of the Inter-Mahalla Health Advisory Boards

It has been shown that to date the development of the Inter-Mahalla Health Advisory Boards (IMHABs) has not gone entirely smoothly. However, this is not necessarily to say that the process cannot be corrected. Therefore, this option might take the form in every rayon as follows:

1. A realistic scope of work is established for the IMHABs.
2. The mahalla committees are limited to one representative from each mahalla.

3. The selection process is made transparent and the mahalla leaders visibly select their own representatives.
4. The various representatives are trained to do the specified tasks.
4. A procedure is set up for the IMHABs to work together with the SVPs.

Strengths:

- It returns power to the mahalla leaders to select their representatives. The previous selection process appears to have been highly non-transparent, and many mahalla leaders appear not even to have heard about the IMHABs.
- Every mahalla has the opportunity of equal representation.
- It works directly with the mahallas, the most basic form of community, through which any rural development work will have to operate at some stage.

Weaknesses:

- This system is still vulnerable to manipulation. With so many people involved, and IMHABs spread over large areas, monitoring becomes difficult (and ideally is not required anyway).
- Re-selection of the IMHABs may be resisted by those with vested interests in the status quo.
- The IMHABs are an imposed solution. It is difficult to imagine an incentive scheme that would keep the IMHABs together. Furthermore, it is difficult to predict how the different mahalla representatives would share the benefits between the different communities.
- It is not clear how the IMHABs would make the local clinics any more accountable, or why the SVPs would feel the need to heed the IMHABs' advice.
- Administratively, there may be difficulties where the number of SVPs (and therefore IMHABs required) is continually changing.

Opportunities:

- The mahallas understand the importance of the reforms, and the potential for the IMHABs.
- The kishlak leaders get involved and ensure that the system works.

Threats:

- The hidden networks in Uzbek society may mean that the real power relationships are distorted, so that the mahallas are not given equal power within the IMHABs.
- The temptation for manipulation of the system may prove overwhelming for key individuals.

2. Select a Single Representative for Each SVP

A second option, therefore, is to have a single representative at every SVP rather than a board of people. In this case ZdravReform would adopt the following strategy:

1. A single representative is selected for each SVP.
2. Acceptability of the candidate to every mahalla is ensured.
3. The representative is trained.

4. The SVPs and mahalla assemblies are informed about the role of the representative.

Strengths:

- Accountability is clearer. If the system does not work, there is somebody to take the blame.
- Constant discussions among a body of people are not required, so that decisions and solutions are more easily arrived at.
- The representative is physically closer to the health system and is therefore likely to have a better idea of what is going on.

Weaknesses:

- Mahallas and individuals may not trust the representative, especially if he is not a member of “the correct” mahalla.
- There may be disagreement about selection of the representative.
- The system is dependent on the representative.
- The representative may be unable to add anything to the doctors’ functions and knowledge, so that the representative becomes superfluous.

Opportunities:

- The representative is liked and respected by all concerned.

Threats:

- The candidate is not up to the job, and the system fails altogether.
- The candidate turns out to be superfluous.

3. Select a Single Representative for Each Kishlak Committee

Perhaps the most unorthodox option would be to select a representative from each kishlak, since all rural territory is covered by the kishlaks (sel’sovyets). It would be unorthodox, because despite their description as “self-governing organs”, they are essentially government organizations. A possible plan of action for ZdravReform might be as follows:

1. The reforms are explained to the kishlak leaders.
2. Each kishlak leader selects a single representative.
3. This kishlak representative could, in turn, request the mahallas to select a single representative.

Strengths:

- It works more closely with the existing system.
- It would have “teeth” since the kishlak leader is likely to have more influence over the medical points than any IMHAB or mahalla leader.
- It is administratively easy. A kishlak committee covers every piece of rural territory. Furthermore once the kishlak system of representatives is set up, it will not require changes as the number and structure of primary health care points change.
- Where there is a single representative, responsibility and accountability are clearer.

Weaknesses:

- The kishlak committees are arguably government-controlled organizations.
- A representative in the kishlak may be physically distant from the local communities if they are spread over a large area.
- The representative may not be trusted by all of the mahallas.

Opportunities:

- If the kishlak leader is involved, this will considerably increase the chances of success.
- The representative may be able to work with the kishlak representative of the women's assembly, therefore linking the health representative with the female population.

Threats:

- If the kishlak representative is not good at his job, then the system falls apart.

4. Divide the Tasks between Existing Institutions

In theory, the five stated tasks could be divided between existing institutions or carried out on an ad hoc basis as follows:

1. Promotion of the reforms could be done via doctors at their mahalla meetings, the mass media, and poster campaigns. In any case, it is likely that once the benefits of the reforms become clear, then attendance will increase swiftly anyway.
2. The experience of international NGOs suggests that there is a role for NGOs to play in health education programs, although it is difficult to assess how successful these educational programs have been. Anecdotal evidence suggests that there is a large role for television to play in health education. Perhaps the results of the household survey will reveal more in this respect.
3. The local medical staff explain that they know best about local health conditions: after all they treat and keep statistics on the patients. There seems to be little point in creating a new position in order to gather such information.
4. Accountability is the point at which this option would be least suitable. It does not seem to be the case that the local primary health clinics are accountable to the local populations.
5. Perhaps other functions can be dealt with as they come up.

Strengths:

- It makes use of and develops further those institutions already existing.

Weaknesses:

- If the present system works so well, then why is it being reformed?

Opportunities:

- Once the principle of "tying the health facility to the community" is established, the communities will undertake to do this themselves.

Threats:

- Inertia will settle in.

Appendix - Laws on Mahallas

Note that the details below do not necessarily give the complete articles and sentences, only those articles and phrases which are considered relevant for the purposes of this report. Therefore, these details are intended as an indication of the main points, rather than a full and authoritative summary of the law.

a.) 12 September 1992, Number UP-472, Presidential Edict on “The creation of a national charitable Mahalla Fund ”

This edict aims to provide state support for the preservation and encouragement of historically developed national and spiritual values, to encourage the people’s best cultures and traditions, to extend culturally enlightening work among mahallas, and similarly to consolidate mahallas in the long term, socially and economically. Therefore this edict:

(1) Approves the suggestion of many mahalla activists in Uzbekistan for the creation of a charitable Mahalla Fund.

(2) Establishes that the order of registration and activity of the Mahalla Fund is set out by acting legislation of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

(3) Considers that the main tasks of the newly created Fund are:

- comprehensive assistance for the preservation and enrichment of historically developed Uzbek customs and traditions;

- propagation of the ideas of humanism and kindness with respect to poor families, invalids, orphans and lonely pensioners, and the provision to them of material and spiritual help;

- assistance in the social, economic and cultural development of mahallas under conditions of a market economy.

(4) The Cabinet of Ministers is to make a resolution, within a month, establishing the necessary conditions for the creation and activity of the Mahalla Fund.

b.) 8 October 1992, Number UP-478, Presidential Edict to “Earmark means for The Mahalla Fund”

This decree aims to establish the Mahalla Fund, which is tasked with material support for the poor.

(1) The reserve fund of the Cabinet of Ministers is to transfer 25 million rubles to the Mahalla Fund. The main purpose of this sum is material help for poor families, invalids, orphans, lonely pensioners, and the satisfaction of the population’s needs and necessities.

c.) 17 October 1992, Cabinet Of Ministers Decree

No information was found on this law.

d.) 1 December 1993, Cabinet of Ministers Decree on “Improving the functions of the Mahalla Fund”

No information was found on this law.

e.) 23 August 1994, Number UP-938, Presidential Decree on “Measures to strengthen the social protection of poor families”

This decree is intended to strengthen state support for poor families and to increase the role of self-governing organs in the provision of social protection.

(1) Bank accounts are to be established for all legally recognized self-governing organs in the settlements, kishlaks, auls and mahallas. Special funds are to be set up within those organs to provide material help for poor families.

(2) The basic sources of income for these funds are local budgets, non-budget sources, social and charitable funds, farms and businesses, and voluntary donations.

(3) Payments are to be made to poor families monthly.

(4) Decisions on the level of payments are to be made by the citizens' assemblies in the settlements, kishlaks, auls, and mahallas. Payment is to be 1.5 to 3 times the minimum salary, depending on the level of income and property. Any funds that are not used up may be used on construction, gas, water, or other public needs.

(5) Decisions on payments should be based on the principles of social justice, openness, ... and efficiency.

f.) 12 December 1996, Presidential Decree on “further increases in state support for families with children”

This decree is intended to help families with children, and to increase the responsibility of self-governing organs in the provision of social protection for the population.

(1) Benefits for families with children under 16 should only go to those that require this material help.

(2) From January 1997, benefits for families with children will be decided and paid by the self-governing organs, taking into account the needs of those families, and in the following proportions:

- families with one child.....50 percent of the minimum salary
- two children.....100 percent
- three children.....140 percent
- four or more.....175 percent

Decisions on payments should be based on the principles of social justice, openness, ... and efficiency

(3) In every self-governing organ, special funds with legal status are to be established. These are to be used to pay benefits to poor families with children. Therefore, the People's Bank of Uzbekistan is to open special accounts for the self-governing organs under the heading “Child benefits”. These funds are to have legal status, and for the 1997 budget, the Ministry of Finance is to set aside the necessary funds for these payments.

(7) Monthly benefits for children under two years old is to remain at 150 percent of the minimum salary.

g.) 23 April 1998, Number UP-1990, Presidential Decree on “Support for the citizens' self-governing organs”

This decree is intended to increase the socio-political activity of the chairmen and secretaries of the citizens' assemblies, their responsibility, and their social protection and support.

(1) From May 1998, the pay for chairmen and secretaries of citizens' assemblies should be increased by two levels. These costs should be covered by the local budget.

(2) In order to attract those citizens with life experience and those that have earned special authority among the people, chairmen-pensioners of citizen's assemblies will receive a full pension. These costs should be covered by the pension fund.

h.) 3 November 1998, Number 698-I, Oliy Majlis resolution on "Elections of self-governing organs"

In accordance with Article 105 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan and Article 1 of the Law on "Citizens' self-governing organs", and in connection with the expiry, in November-December 1998, of the term of powers of the chairmen (aqsaqaals) of self-governing organs and their advisors, the Assembly of the Republic of Uzbekistan decrees that:

(1) The Republic of Karakalpakstan, oblast hokims and the Tashkent town hokim are advised to organize the conduct, in November and December 1998, of the elections of the chairmen (aqsaqaals) of self-governing assemblies and their advisors, and also to study the recommendations for extending the rights of self-governing organs from activists, interested officials and specialists. These recommendations emerge from the concept of a gradual transfer of power from organs of state power to citizen's self-governing organs.

(2) Rayon and town hokims will assist with the preparations for, and conduct of, the selection of personnel in citizens' assemblies.

(3) Citizens' assemblies, rayon hokims, and town hokims are advised to select people to the posts of assembly chairmen and their advisors, those people who have organizational abilities, good reputations, the necessary level of education, an understanding of the new democratic values, the ability to support citizens' initiatives and the ability to help such initiatives materialize.

(4) The Secretariat of the Oliy Majlis:

- will ensure that there are timely, organizational measures for the elections, a uniform application of the legislation, the collection and dissemination of suggestions for expanding the rights of citizens' self-governing organs;

- will deliver recommendations for the conduct of the elections to citizens' self-governing organs, and also to provide the necessary sample documents;

- will prepare for the outflow of Secretariat workers to election sites in order to help with the preparation for the elections in the citizens' self-governing organs.

i.) 13 January 1999, Number UP-2177, Presidential Decree on "Increasing the role of self-governing organs in providing social assistance for the population"

This decree is intended to increase the powers and responsibilities of citizens' self-governing organs in the provision of social protection of the population...

(1) From March 1999, self-governing organs are also to administer benefits for non-working mothers with children under 2 years, and provide basic foodstuffs for poor and lonely pensioners. The Ministry of Finance is to set aside the necessary funds in its annual budget, and provide them at the point of payment.

(2) The People's Bank of Uzbekistan is to open special sub-accounts for citizens' self-governing organs under these two categories [i.e. children under 2, and pensioners].

(3) Citizens' self-governing organs are to accept responsibility for the full and timely payment of maintenance bills [i.e. gas, electricity, and water] through the People's Bank. Therefore, an incentive system is created as follows: in the event of 100 percent payment, the self-governing organs will receive 20 percent of the total sum; for 75 percent payment, the self-governing organs will receive 10 percent. The self-governing organs may use these rewards to help poor families...

(5) The oblast, town, and rayon hokims are to check that the principles of openness, social justice are observed and that the money is used for the intended purpose.

j.) 14 April 1999, Oliy Majlis resolution on "Self-governing organs" (new edition)

(3) Citizens realize their constitutional right to self-government through the elections of citizens' assemblies in the settlements, kishlaks, auls and mahallas ...

(5) ... The territorial units of self-government are settlements, kishlaks, auls and mahallas.

The formation and division of settlements, kishlaks, and auls or any other changes to their borders requires consideration of the opinion of the corresponding organs of citizens' self-government. The same is true for their naming and re-naming...

The formation, joining, division, or annulment of mahallas, and also the establishment of and changes to such borders are done by local government organs upon the initiative of the citizens' self-governing organs.

(7) The following are organs of citizens' self-government:

- the citizens' (representatives') assembly in the settlement, kishlak auls, and mahallas of town, settlement, kishlak, and aul...;
- the citizen's assembly (kengash);
- the principal commissions for activities of the citizens' assembly;
- the inspection commission of the citizens' assembly;
- the administrative commission, formed ... for settlements, kishlaks and auls that are hard to reach or far from the rayon center;

Organs of self-government do not form part of the government system of power.

Organs of self-government enjoy the rights of a legal entity. They have a fixed seal, and are accountable to the local government organs.

(9) ... The citizens' assembly is the highest organ of citizens' self-government, possessing the right to represent the interests of its population and take decisions in its name...

(10) Citizens' assemblies in settlements, kishlaks, auls and town mahallas are authorized to examine and resolve any issue, which is related to the corresponding settlement, kishlak, aul and town mahalla...

The citizens' assembly in settlements, kishlaks, auls and town mahallas:

- selects the chairman (aqsaqaal) of the citizens' assembly, his advisors, his representatives and members of the citizen's assembly's principal commissions;
- listens to their quarterly reports;

- selects the auditing commission and the administrative commissions of the citizen's assembly, and ratifies their conduct;
- sets the numerical composition of the chairman's (aqsaqaal's) advisers and the apparatus;
- nominates a responsible secretary for the citizens' assembly at the chairman's (aqsaqaal's) suggestion;
- sets the strategies for the assembly, auditing and administrative commissions, and listens to their quarterly reports;
- confirms the program and budget for the self-governing organ's program of activity, including social events;
- ensure that laws and other legislative decisions are observed;
- makes recommendations for the conduct of weddings and other ceremonies;
- listens to the quarterly reports of the rayon, town and oblast hokims on issues that fall within the self-governing organs' sphere of activity. ... ;
- listens to the reports of those enterprises, establishments, and organizations that are situated on the corresponding territory...;
- organizes collections from the population for construction work, repairs to common property, and also assistance for poor families in the repairs of their houses and flats;
- organizes voluntary donations from enterprises and organizations, situated on their territory...;

Citizens' assemblies in urban mahallas settle issues of material support and determine benefits for poor families with children.

Citizens' assemblies in settlements, kishlaks, and auls assist the mahallas' citizens' assemblies, and hear them report on the use of centrally distributed means.

(11) Citizens' assemblies of mahallas in settlements, kishlaks and auls:

- select the chairman (aqsaqaal) of the citizens' assembly, his advisers, his representatives and members of the citizen's assembly's principal commissions;
- listen to their quarterly reports;
- set the numerical composition of the chairman's (aqsaqaal's) advisers and apparatus
- nominate a responsible secretary for the citizens' assembly at the chairman's (aqsaqaal's) suggestion;
- ensure that laws and other legislative decisions are observed;
- ensure that decisions of citizens' assemblies in settlements, kishlaks and auls are observed;
- control expenditure, select an auditing commission, ratify its situation, and listen to its quarterly reports;
- settle issues of material support and determine benefits for poor families with children;

(12) Gatherings (kengash) of the citizens' assemblies consists of the citizens' assembly's chairman (aqsaqaal), his advisors, the chairmen of the principal commissions and the secretary. The kengash of the citizens' assembly:

- summons the citizens' assembly
- coordinates the work of the principal commissions, conducts joint social events with charitable and other organizations;
- co-operates with local government organs to conduct mass-political, spiritually-enlightening, cultural, sporting, and other events;
- acts to protect women's' interests, and to increase their role in social life;
- acts to create a spiritual and moral atmosphere in the family and to raise the younger generation;
- acts to inhibit the activity of non-registered religious organizations, to ensure religious freedoms, and to prevent the compulsory inculcation of religious views;
- works with educational establishments on matters of upbringing;
- determines and pays, in the established manner, benefits to non-working mothers, with children less than two years old, with funds from the government budget that are set aside for this purpose;
- assists with help for old and lonely people, who need looking after, with funds from the government budget that are set aside for this purpose;
- takes decisions about the creation, reorganization and liquidation of small enterprises, hairdressers, repair workshops, shoe repairs, trade shops, and other everyday services;
- organizes volunteers for construction, planting, maintenance of homes, courtyards and buildings, and children's and sporting equipment; organizes volunteers for the building, reconstruction, repairs and maintenance of roads, bridges, streets, pavements, statues, cemeteries. For these purposes, it uses materials and other means from the rayon hokimyat, the town hokimyat, and private sources; it organizes social help (hashar), arranges tests and competitions;
- assists with the development of peasant and agricultural enterprises;
- controls the use and protection of land on the corresponding territory;
- assists the law-enforcing organs to keep social order on the appropriate territory; this includes the maintenance of records on the movements of citizens, and work to prevent crime among adolescents and youths;
- protects the sanitary and ecological condition of populated areas, water supplies, living areas, schools and other educational establishments;
- works to ensure the timely payment by the population of taxes and compulsory payments;

(13) The chairman (aqsaqaal) of the citizens' assembly:

- summons the citizens' assembly

- presents candidates for elections to become the chairman's advisors, secretary, chairmen and members of the principal commissions and of the administrative commission
- organizes work to ensure that the laws, other legislative acts, and decisions of the citizens' assembly and its kengash are carried out
- assists the law-enforcing organs in keeping social order on the appropriate territory; this includes the maintenance of records on the movements of citizens, and work to prevent crime among adolescents and youths;
- organizes social events associated with holidays and significant dates;
- acts to inhibit the activity of non-registered religious organizations, to ensure religious freedoms, and to prevent the compulsory inculcation of religious views;
- provides citizens with family and property certificates, and other documents envisaged by the legislature

(15) The inspection commission checks the financial-bookkeeping activities of the citizens' self-governing organs.

The administrative commission checks for administrative offences.

(16) Citizens and legal entities (including their officials) who live on or who are situated on the territories of the villages, kishlaks, auls, and mahallas are obliged to observe the decisions taken by the self-governing organs and their officials that fall within their powers.

The non-fulfillment or inappropriate fulfillment of these decisions will be treated according to the law

Decisions of the self-governing organs and their officials may be reversed by the self-governing organs and their officials, or recognized as non-existing by a court of law.

(17) Republic, oblast, rayon, and town coordinating councils for the affairs of self-governing organs may be created with the aim of coordinating the activities of self-governing organs.

(18) The citizens' assembly is called by the chairman (aqsaqaal), or the kengash of citizens' assembly as necessary, but no less than once every three months. The citizens' assembly may be called on the initiative of the rayon or town Council of people's deputies, and the hokim, or by a minimum one third of permanently residing citizens over eighteen years old;

The citizens' assembly is authorized with the presence of fifty percent of inhabitants that have the right to participate in the citizens' assembly.

Decisions on all issues are taken with a simply majority in an open or secret vote.

If it is not possible to call a meeting of the citizens' assembly, then there will be a meeting of the citizens' representatives. Representatives may be delegated from courtyards, blocks of flats, streets, mahallas, microrayons, and blocks.

(19) Meetings of the citizens' assembly is conducted by the chairman (aqsaqaal) of the citizens' assembly, and take place as necessary, but no less than once a month

(20) The chairman (aqsaqaal) of the citizens' assembly and his advisors are chosen for two and a half years. The chairman (aqsaqaal) of the citizens' assembly is selected with the agreement of the corresponding rayon or town hokim, and the advisors according to the chairman's (aqsaqaal's)

suggestion. The chairman (aqsaqaal) of the citizens' assembly and his advisors are elected if they receive more than half of the votes of those present at the citizens' assembly.

(21) The chairman's (aqsaqaal's) powers may be removed ahead of time in the event of:

- retirement
- decision by the citizens' assembly
- an admission by the aqsaqaal of disability
- a guilty verdict in a court of law

(24) Finances for the activity of the self-governing organs is drawn together from private means, budgetary means, set aside by the rayon and town Soviets of people's deputies, and voluntary donations from judicial and physical entities.

The financial means of citizens' self-governing organs are kept in an independent bank account, used freely, and are not subject to confiscation. The use of these financial means will be accounted for quarterly at the meeting of the citizens' assembly

(25) The citizens' self-governing organs are accountable for their activities and must present their book-keeping to the local statistical and tax organs.

(26) Citizens' self-governing organs and their officials are subject to compulsory examination by government organs, enterprises, establishments and organizations, and their relevant officials.

(28) Arguments, connected with the activities of the citizens' self-governing organs, are examined in a court of law.

Citizens' self-governing organs and their officials have the right to complain about the activities (decisions) of state and other organs, and likewise their officials who are breaking the rights of citizens to self-government.

The decisions of the citizens' self-governing organs, and likewise the activity (or inactivity) of their officials may be appealed against in a court of law.

(29) Those who are guilty of breaking the law about citizens' self-governing organs will bear responsibility in a manner established by law.

k.) 19 April 1999, Cabinet of Ministers Resolution on the Development of Defenders of People.

No information was found on this law other than information given by a representative from the Mahalla Fund who said that it existed, and conversations with others who seemed to be aware that this law existed.

Note that, at time of writing, the minimum salary is equal to 1,320 sum, and is set by the central government.