

LIFE AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF THE RURAL POPULATION OF UZBEKISTAN IN 1945–1965: THE CASE OF SURKHANDARYA REGION

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ABSTRACT	KEYWORDS
This article analyzes the life and socio-economic conditions of the rural population of Uzbekistan in 1945–1965 using the example of the Surkhandarya region. The article examines how post-war factors such as low wages for rural workers, inconsistencies in labor systems in state and collective farms, the role of personal subsidiary farms, land deprivation, and material hardships, as well as government programs and monetary reforms, affected the living standards of the rural population. Additionally, the article analyzes the impact of market-linked wages, advance payment systems, and pension provision on rural welfare.	Surkhandarya region, rural population, socio-economic conditions, collective and state farms, wages, personal subsidiary farms, pension provision, post-war period, rural economy.

Introduction

During the war years and the subsequent post-war reconstruction period, expenditures allocated for the development of the social sector in the USSR were significantly limited. This was because the difficulties of the war and reconstruction period pushed back the tasks aimed at improving the social sphere. Funds for social programs were allocated from the leftover resources after production expenditures. During this period, as throughout the entire country, the situation of the rural population in Uzbekistan was extremely difficult.

Results and Discussion

During the war years, the weakening of the material and technical base of the agricultural sector and the sharp decline in agricultural production exacerbated the economic situation of the rural population, leading to the impoverishment of Uzbek peasants. During this period, participation in social production was the main source of income for the population. However, the wages paid in kind through recorded workdays could not even meet the minimum needs and demands of the population. For example, in 1945, only 363.7 million workdays were recorded for all work in the republic's collective farms. The average number of workdays recorded per collective farmer fell from 311 in the previous year to

293[1]. At that time, payment for collective farmers' labor was mainly made in products, which significantly limited the rural population's engagement with the market. Moreover, the amount of products paid for a workday was extremely low.

Uzbek rural families were generally large. According to calculations as of January 1, 1945, the average family size in collective farms was 4.6 persons, while in state farms it was 3.9 persons[2]. Despite insufficient wages, members of collective farms worked in the fields from early morning to late evening. Severe penalties for failing to meet the minimum workday requirements were still enforced. Leaders at all levels considered punishment the main tool to strengthen labor discipline.

During this period, wages in state farms (sovkhozes) were also quite low. For instance, in 1946, while industrial workers earned 453 rubles, state farm workers earned only 165 rubles[3]. Of course, the political leadership of the Union and the republic tried, in the immediate post-war years, to mobilize all resources to develop agriculture, to encourage rural labor, and to modify existing systems of calculating workdays and paying wages. On April 19, 1948, the USSR Council of Ministers adopted a resolution "On improving labor organization in collective farms, increasing labor productivity, and regulating it"[4]. This resolution slightly improved the payment system for collective farm labor.

Additionally, the monetary reform of 1947 played an important role in improving the material situation of the rural population. Furthermore, the USSR Council of Ministers' resolution of February 4, 1949, "On developing cotton-growing in collective and state farms," was also significant for strengthening the rural economy and increasing farm incomes[5]. In 1949, cotton producers in the republic received 4.076 billion rubles for the cotton delivered to the state, including 904 million rubles as bonuses[6].

It is clear that the living conditions of Uzbek peasants began to improve somewhat. For instance, the wages paid to the rural population in the Surkhandarya region increased. For example, collective farms in the oblast received 87 million rubles for cotton in 1948, which rose to 283 million rubles in 1949[7]. The increase in cotton prices and measures to increase the income of collective and state farms helped to stabilize the economic situation of farms and improve the material living standards of peasants to some extent.

Nevertheless, the post-war years and the early 1950s remained difficult for the absolute majority, especially the rural population. Administrative governance, full of empty voluntarist ideas, negatively affected agricultural development and the social protection system. Human factors were marginalized, and priority was given to residual principles in financing social sectors. Consequently, deficiencies in housing and cultural construction in rural areas, as well as measures to improve the material well-being of the rural population, were insufficient. Rural areas faced acute shortages of housing, schools, and medical facilities.

The system of wage payments to agricultural workers was inadequate. Moreover, rural workers were not paid monthly, and even collective farmers were deprived of old-age pensions. The wages paid barely covered daily needs, forcing the rural population to rely on household plots. In the post-war years, household plots were the main source of material support for the rural population. However, the state provided no assistance to plot owners and even reduced their plots several times in the early post-war years. For instance, in September 1946, according to the decision of the VKP(b) Central Committee and the USSR government "On measures to eliminate violations of the collective farm charter," 752 hectares of land were seized from the household plots of 6,137 collective farm families in Surkhandarya[8]. Land confiscation continued into the 1950s.

Such injustices could not be challenged because the collective farm regulations were designed without regard for the wishes of the people, and there was no way to adapt them to benefit the rural population. A totalitarian regime suppressed any free thought. However, without improving the material well-being of the population, achieving high labor productivity was impossible. Consequently, in 1947–1950, retail prices for essential goods and food products were reduced several times. Nevertheless, monetary reform and price reductions did not significantly increase purchasing power. For example, in the Sherobod district of Surkhandarya, members of the Kirov collective farm received 65 tyiyn per workday, while the Lenin collective farm members received 36 tyiyn[9]. In some collective farms, the wage per workday was even lower. In 1951, in 239 collective farms in Uzbekistan, wages were paid only in kind with grain, and 42 agricultural cooperatives did not pay wages even in kind[10].

Thus, the share of wages in rural incomes amounted to only 5.8 percent. Collective farmers' total income was about 1.5 times lower than that of industrial workers. On average, a collective farmer's family received 1,090.1 rubles per year, of which 674.2 rubles were spent on food, and 207.9 rubles on non-food items, mainly cloth and clothing[11]. Despite favorable conditions for growing vegetables and fruits in the republic, consumption of these products in the 1950s was about 8–9 times below the physiological norms.

However, after the September 1953 plenum, significant changes occurred in the material conditions of the rural population. Tax policy was regulated, compulsory deliveries to the state were reduced, and procurement and preparation prices were increased. This created some conditions for increased agricultural productivity and farm incomes. Following the plenum decisions, cash and in-kind payments for workdays were increased. Important steps were also taken in 1953–1955 to regulate the advance payment system for collective farmers. On March 6, 1956, the CPSU Central Committee and the USSR Council of Ministers adopted a resolution “On monthly advance payments to collective farmers and additional payments for labor”[12]. This resolution significantly regulated advance payments to rural workers.

By the late 1950s, average wages for collective farmers had also changed. For example, in 1956, the S.M. Kirov collective farm in the Sherobod district of Surkhandarya achieved a total income of 4,632 thousand rubles, of which 890 thousand rubles were awarded to collective farmers[13]. However, in collective farms, payments in kind alongside cash remained predominant, limiting market engagement and access to necessary goods at free-market prices. Nevertheless, rural incomes increased to some extent. For instance, in 1957, a member of the K. Marx collective farm in Sariosiyo district of Surkhandarya received 36,500 rubles in cash and 46 centners of grain, 10,200 rubles more than in 1956. In Jarkurgan district, a member of the Lenin collective farm, Boytora Khalikulov, received 50,960 rubles as household income[14].

The main indicator of labor productivity was, of course, the wages paid for work. During this period, the “sovkhozization” process, a vivid example of state control over collective farms, expanded widely. In 1958 alone, 45 mechanized cotton brigades in Surkhandarya were converted to state farms[15]. However, in such farms, a unified wage system predominated, and payment according to skills and labor contribution was not established.

In 1953, the share of personal subsidiary plots in the total income of collective farm families was 36.3 percent. By 1961, it had risen to 43.8 percent, while the share of income from socialized farm work decreased from 53.5 percent to 41.7 percent[16]. Due to the neglect of the rural population's vital needs, they often did not receive state pensions and other benefits. In the early post-war years, the

average monthly pension of agricultural workers was about 10 rubles. Private laborers and housewives received nothing. Pension provision for collective farmers in Uzbekistan was introduced in 1959[17]. It should be noted that pensions were much lower than average wages. In 1960, the average pension was almost two-thirds of the average wage, and by the late 1960s, it reached nearly half. In 1955, the average monthly wage of state farm workers was 68.8 rubles, while the average pension was 30–35 rubles[18].

Until 1965, pension provision for collective farmers was primarily funded from annual farm incomes. Consequently, only economically strong farms could provide pensions to their members. In 1962, 28 out of 64 collective farms in Surkhondaryo had such funds[19]. Therefore, pension coverage for collective farmers in this region was relatively low compared to other regions. For example, in 1964, there were only 172,000 pensioners in republic's collective farms, with an average pension of 8 rubles[20].

Conclusion

From 1945 to 1965, the rural population of Uzbekistan, especially in Surkhondaryo, experienced the social and economic hardships of the post-war period. The war and its aftermath weakened the material and technical base of agriculture and sharply reduced living standards. Collective farmers survived mainly on workdays and produce, but low wages and insufficient social guarantees were inadequate. Several resolutions between 1948 and 1956, including labor organization, monetary reforms, and the regulation of advance payments, helped slightly improve the material conditions of the rural population. At the same time, the uniformity of wage systems, land confiscations, and limited pensions and social protection prevented fully meeting the vital needs of the rural population.

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