

THE ACTIVITIES OF THE “EKOSAN” ECOLOGICAL FOUNDATION (NGO) AND ITS HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE IN FORMING COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

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Abstract

This article provides a comprehensive analysis of the role and significance of the “EKOSAN” ecological foundation as a non-governmental, non-profit organization operating in the ecological sector of Uzbekistan. It examines the establishment of the foundation, its historical stages of development, major projects aimed at addressing environmental issues, and its organizational-practical experience in raising public environmental awareness. The article also highlights the contribution of “EKOSAN” to the formation of collective responsibility, the promotion of ecological culture, and the establishment of sustainable environmental management at the local level. Furthermore, the study analyzes the foundation’s international cooperation activities, its strategic contribution to environmental policy, and its promising future directions in ensuring ecological security.

Keywords: ECOSAN, ecological foundation, non-governmental non-profit organization (NGO), environmental awareness, collective responsibility, environmental protection, social cooperation, sustainable development.

Introduction

In the Republic of Uzbekistan, solving environmental problems and protecting the environment has been identified as one of the most important strategic tasks of our time. Since the years of independence, non-governmental non-profit organizations (NGOs) have emerged as important social institutions in the formation and development of state environmental policy. They have been increasing the effectiveness of the environmental movement by raising environmental culture, forming a responsible attitude towards nature among citizens, and widely introducing the principles of sustainable development. However, the formation of environmental awareness in Uzbekistan is not limited to the modern era. Its historical roots are very ancient, and the concept of sacredness in the attitude of our ancestors to nature is considered one of the primary sources of today's environmental principles.

In the Vandidod section of the sacred book of the Zoroastrians, the Avesta, which is considered our historical source, the elements of nature - earth, water, air, and fire - are interpreted as divine forces. Norms such as the worship of Mithra, the God of Earth and Fire, considering water pollution a crime against the Supreme God, and imposing severe punishments on those who harmed nature indicate a high level of ecological culture in civilizations before Christ. These ancient moral rules were in force in 16 states of that time, and are of historical importance as the first normative system of nature protection.[1]

In this sense, today in Uzbekistan, the policy aimed at ensuring ecological security, transition to a green economy, strengthening the environmental activity of NGOs and raising ecological culture is a modern continuation of the historical heritage. The values based on respect for nature in the Avesta, the worldview emphasizing harmony between man and the environment, are reflected in the spirit of

today's ecological reforms. Thus, the historical continuity of ecological culture, from ancient religious teachings to the post-independence ecological policy, enriches the current ecological development of Uzbekistan in content and firmly connects it with national and civilizational foundations.

This very historical heritage served as a spiritual and moral foundation for the formation of environmental policy in the years of independence. In this process, the establishment of the internationally recognized ecological organization the International "Ekosan" Fund is considered one of the important initiatives. Established in 1992 in Tashkent with the support of governmental and non-governmental institutions, international organizations, and leading expert scholars, this fund has been recognized as one of the most important environmental NGOs in Central Asia. Throughout its activity, the fund implemented numerous projects such as the protection of water resources, prevention of desertification, mitigation of the ecological situation in the Aral Sea region, and improvement of the ecological culture of the population. Although its activity today is somewhat less dynamic compared to previous years, the ecological, social, and educational significance of the "Ekosan" Fund has not lost its relevance. Its experience holds important scientific and practical value as one of the historical stages in the formation and development of the non-governmental environmental sector in Uzbekistan. [4 - 124] The name of the Foundation "Ekosan" is derived from the Greek words "ekos" (environment) and "sanos" (health), combining the concepts of ecology and human health. This name clearly expresses the main goals and objectives of the Foundation, which, along with environmental protection, serves to strengthen the health of the population, develop environmental awareness and culture. If we trace the ecological history of Uzbekistan, we can see that by 2003, hundreds of environmental public associations had been established in the republic. These associations have their own charters and actively cooperate with state bodies and self-government bodies in the field of nature protection. [4-99] Thus, the International Ecological Foundation "Ekosan" as one of the largest non-governmental non-profit organizations in the Republic of Uzbekistan serves as an important platform for promoting environmental initiatives, orienting the population towards environmental responsibility and awareness, and forming the principles of sustainable development in society. The Foundation makes a significant contribution to the legal regulation of environmental relations, increasing the legal awareness and culture of the population, as well as allocating financial resources aimed at improving the environment.

As a republican-wide structure, Ecosan has been consistently implementing large-scale environmental programs. Millions of citizens participate in the "Ecology and Health Days" held annually in collaboration with government agencies and public organizations. As part of these events, an average of 40-60 km of irrigation networks are cleaned, 30 - 40 thousand tons of waste are removed, and illegal landfills are eliminated. The first head of the fund was Yusufjon Shadimetov from 1992 to 2009. Since April 2009, Ecosan has been headed by Nariman Umarov, but in September of the same year, the head of the fund temporarily became vacant due to his appointment as chairman of the Ecology Committee of Uzbekistan. Despite this, the organization's environmental and social activities continue consistently. [8]

The Ecosan International Foundation, as a non-governmental and non-profit organization, has been working to address global and regional environmental and sanitary and hygienic problems in the Central Asian region. The main goal of the Foundation is to attract investments to ensure environmental safety and direct them to projects aimed at improving the ecological situation in the region. The

Tashkent branch of the internationally famous Club of Rome, the Tashkent Club, was established under the Ecosan Foundation, which laid the foundation for further strengthening the Foundation's position in the international intellectual arena.[5 - 44]

The EKOSAN Ecological Foundation, through its activities, serves to involve the public in environmental protection, raise environmental awareness and form collective responsibility. The Foundation uses innovative methods in its projects, combining social and environmental knowledge, while involving young people and citizens in environmental activities. Scientific research shows that NGOs are an effective mechanism for forming environmental awareness and protecting the environment, and they have a significant impact on the sustainable development of society. In this regard, the EKOSAN Ecological Foundation not only implements practical environmental initiatives, but also contributes to the formation of an ecological culture by developing collective responsibility.[6]

The main activities of the fund include the following directions:

- educating the population on environmental awareness and promoting a healthy lifestyle to provide knowledge on sanitation and hygiene, prevent diseases, and raise ecological consciousness;
- providing medical and humanitarian assistance to populations living in environmentally unfavorable areas, offering preventive care and humanitarian support;
- addressing ecological crises by attracting attention and funding from international funds and governmental organizations to solve environmental problems in the Aral Sea region;
- financing the fund's activities primarily through the "EKOLOT" ecological lottery mechanism. [6]

These activities, which include ecological tourism projects attracting visitors from various countries, aim not only to ensure the physical health of the population but also to promote their moral and spiritual development. A healthy and morally mature generation is not only a guarantee of a prosperous present but also of a happy future for the next generations. Furthermore, within the framework of its ENVIRONMENT program, the fund contributes to addressing global ecological issues such as climate change, ozone layer depletion, pollution of water bodies, biodiversity conservation, and combating desertification. Since environmental purity depends on human activity and production processes, the ecological situation in each country has global significance. Therefore, the Global Environmental Fund pays special attention to financially supporting projects in Uzbekistan, recognizing the international importance of these issues. [7]

From a historical perspective, the "EKOSAN" Foundation has served as an important platform for the development of the environmental movement in the republic. Through the activities of the Foundation, not only the population gained environmental knowledge, but also projects in line with international standards for nature protection were implemented. Thus, "EKOSAN" has gained historical significance not only as a non-governmental non-profit organization, but also in forming the environmental responsibility of society and attracting young people to environmental activism.

Ecosan's international cooperation is one of the largest areas of its activity. Representatives of the organization regularly participate in major conferences such as the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, international meetings in Thessaloniki and Philadelphia, and forums on ecology and demography in Bali. Also, in 2007, an international eco-forum dedicated to the ecological and economic development of the Aral Sea region was held at the initiative of Ecosan with the support of the Embassy of Uzbekistan in Austria. In addition, Ecosan organizes visits of members of the

diplomatic corps to regions with a difficult ecological situation, and cooperates with international organizations such as the Ecological Foundation of Turkey and the Eurasian Information Center.[8] Also, based on a cooperation agreement with the International Academy of Noosphere (Sustainable Development), work has been launched to support the environmental legislation and sustainable development policies of the Central Asian countries. Through conferences and public hearings with the participation of the environmental community, Ecosan serves as an important platform for highlighting such pressing issues as the implementation of environmental legislation, the protection of forests and air basins, water resource pollution, waste management, sanitation and food safety.

Based on the Concept of Environmental Policy of the Republic of Uzbekistan for 2022-2030, the Concept defines long-term strategic directions for ensuring environmental safety, rational use of natural resources, and adaptation to climate change.[2] The main goals are: introducing the principles of a green economy by 2030; increasing the share of waste recycling; gradually transitioning to the principle of "zero waste"; and expanding environmental education and civic awareness programs.[3-607]

The formation and development of environmental policy in Uzbekistan is a logical continuation of long historical processes. The ancient worldview of our ancestors, who considered natural elements sacred, and their understanding of the purity of earth, water, air, and fire, have served as the initial sources of ecological culture and moral standards. It is well known that since the late 20th century, the intensification of ecological problems has increasingly drawn public attention to environmental responsibility. As a result, environmental protection has become a priority direction for state policy, social movements, and international cooperation. In this process, non-governmental organizations, particularly large ecological foundations such as "Ekosan," have played a significant role in developing the practical aspects of environmental policy. Strengthened cooperation among state institutions, civil society, and international ecological structures has contributed to the formation of ecological culture, the assurance of environmental security, and the establishment of a systematic approach to the rational use of natural resources.

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