

THE DIFFICULTIES OF LOCAL GOVERNANCE AND NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS TOWARD THE ORGANIZATION OF SOCIAL SERVICES FOR FAMILIES (NORTH ALBANIA CASE)

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Abstract

The process of decentralization has increased the responsibility of local governance structures to support families with social services. Family support with social services is an obligation for local governance structures and non-profit organizations. The key elements while offering social services for families are the difficulties concerning organization of the services. The paper aims to explore and identify the difficulties which effort the local governance and the NGOs. The difficulties are analyzed through the perceptions of representatives of NGOs and representatives of local, regional and central governance institutions. The study was done in the northern region of Albania, including these districts: Shkodër, Lezhë, Kukës, Dibër, specifically in their main cities: Shkodër, Lezhë, Kukës and Peshkopi. A qualitative research method has been used. The instrument used for data gathering is the semi-structured interview. In this study participated 21 representatives of non-profit organizations that operate with social services for families and 23 representatives of local, regional and central governance institutions that operate in the field study. A total of 44 semi structured interviews were completed. The findings showed that the representatives of local governance have estimated as main difficulties, regarding the organization of social services for families, the lack of funds and financial resources and the lack of capacities and human resources. Among other things, the respondents from central and regional institutions have explained that the difficulties are related to the lack of transparency of fund management by local governance. Based on the perception of the representatives of NGOs, it has been found, that the difficulties are related to the lack of networks and collaboration with local institutions. The representatives of NGOs, also, highlighted that socio-cultural factors are an obstacle to the organization of social services for the families. Based on the empirical findings, it is recommended to increase the financial support of NGOs regarding the organization of social services for families and to improve collaboration of local governance with the NGOs that operate in the field study.

Keywords: *Social services for families, difficulties, non-profit organizations, northern regions, local governance*

Introduction

“The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.” Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Art. 16 (3).

The support of families and individuals with social services is a process which needs collaboration of all actors in role. That is why, in national documents and more specifically in standard number 7 of the Standards for Social Services in Albania (October 2005), it is emphasized that the collaboration with other actors in order to fulfill better beneficiaries needs is of a special importance for service suppliers. It is clearly determined that non-profit organizations must have the opportunity to participate during conclusion of social services. Also, in international documents as Social Platform (2008), a platform of NGOs working in the social field at the EU level (European Federation of National Organizations. Annual Theme 2011), in order to guarantee quality in social services, it is importantly emphasized the principle of collaboration through community and other actors. In our society, non-profit organizations contribute only on social protection of vulnerable families, sustaining them with different dimensions of social services.

Feely & Gottlieb et al., (2000) and McCubbin (1993) explain that the support of family from the society and community can provide a higher sense of belonging and cohesion (cited by Black, K. & Lobo, M., 2008). Wax (2003) in his studies determines not only the government but also all members of society are responsible for the protection of human rights. He argues the fact that one should not take all the credit for what it does and achieves, as everything happens in a context that is closely related to society and its institutions. European Committee for Social Cohesion (2004) in his publication "A New Strategy for Social Cohesion", among other emphasizes that society and the social network has a responsibility to protect the family. Because traditional care institutions play a small role in this regard, it is important to develop alternative means of care wherever possible.

Civil society, including NGOs, is an important component that contributes in any democratic society. The main objective of civil society (and therefore also of NGOs) is to provide services and representation of the interests of the most vulnerable groups of society. NGOs should try to empower and mobilize these vulnerable sectors, so that they are able to protect their rights and enhance the quality of life and standard of living (The Youth Development Network, 2008).

Based on these arguments it is important to explore and identify the difficulties which effort the local governance and the NGOs toward the organization of social services for families in the northern part of Albania.

Methodology

The paper aims to explore and identify the difficulties which effort the local governance and the NGOs toward the organization of social services for families in the northern regions of Albania. Furthermore, it is an objective of this study to analyze these difficulties through the perceptions of representatives of NGOs and representatives of local, regional and central governance institutions. The study is conducted in the northern region of Albania, including her four Districts, in its main cities: Shkodër, Lezhë, Kukës and Peshkopi. In this study participated representatives of non-profit organizations that operate with social services for families and representatives of local, regional and central governance institutions that operate in the field study. This study was based on a qualitative research method. The instrument used for data gathering is the semi-structured interview. In order to achieve the goal, the study is focused on two research question, which are:

1. Which are the difficulties of local governance toward the organization of social services for families offered in the northern regions of Albania?
2. Which are the difficulties of the non-profit organizations toward the organization of social services for families offered in the field study?

2.1. Sampling. In the study participated the representatives of non-profit organizations and the representatives of local, regional and central governance institutions which operate in the northern regions of Albania. The NGOs offer social services related with families. Specifically, participated the NGOs and the state institutions that operate in these districts: Shkodër, Lezhë, Kukës and Peshkopi. A total of 44 semi structured interviews were completed. Information about the selection of the organizations was provided by the local public social services entities which have all the contacts of the non-profit organizations that operate in the field of family services and also was realized the consultation with "The Map of Social Services in Albania".

2.2. General data for the respondents. In this study participated 21 representatives of non-profit organizations that operate with social services for families and 23 representatives of local, regional and central governance institutions that operate in the field study. There were ten representatives from organizations in Shkodër, four from Lezhë and Peshkopi and 3 representatives from the NGOs that operate in Kukës. From 44 participants, 32 participants were female and 12 of them are men. The participants are of different ages. 9 participants are aged 26-35 years, 11 participants are aged until 25 years, 15 participants are aged 36-45 years, 4 participants are aged 46-55 years and 5 of them are aged 56-65 years. Regarding the level of education, 28 respondents have higher education (62.8%), 12 respondents have master degree level (27.9%) and 4 of them have secondary education (9.3%). Participants, who filled the semi-structured interview, belong to different professions. Only 38 of them accepted to declare their profession. 12 of the respondents are social workers, 4 of them are psychologists, 6 of the respondents are lawyers, 7 of them are teachers, 5 of them are economists, 1 of the respondents is an environment expert, 1 respondent is sociologist, 1 of them is agronomist and also 1 respondent is representatives of political science. The representatives of non-profit organizations, who filled semi-structured interviews, had different years of work experience in respective organizations/institutions. 19 respondents have 1-5 years work experience and also 19 of them have 6-10 years work, 5 participants have more than 10 years work and 1 respondent has one year work experience. Representatives of non-profit organizations and local, regional and central institutions have an average of 6.3 years work experience in respective organization/institution.

Regarding the representatives of local, regional and central governance institutions, 16 participants are representatives of public sector of social services (representatives of four Municipalities, the respective Directories of Social Services) and 7 participants are representatives of regional and central institutions (the representatives from Regional Directorates of State Social Service, representatives from MPCSSHB, now the Ministry of Social Welfare and the Youth).

2.3. Instrument. The interview's questions have been organized in order to achieve the study objectives and to address research questions. Data collection was achieved through the instrument of the semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interviews include thirteen questions, where six of them provide socio demographic data. Some of the topics included in the interview were part of the dissertation theme, which is related to the evaluation of social services for family offered by public sectors and non-profit organizations. In this article are treated only topics related to perception of non-profit organizations representatives, and local, regional and central institutions representatives concerning the difficulties toward the organizations of social services for families.

2.4. *Procedure.* The data were gathered via email. The semi-structured interview provided for the participants information about the aim and the main objectives of the study. The participants were presented with the confidentiality policy and anonymity was insured not using their real names and presenting the data in an aggregate form (there are used codes). The instrument have been filled out by the NGOs and local, regional and central institutions representative and they were sent via email (the participants felt more comfortable in this way and manage the time of completion of the instrument according to their agenda), in order to respect their agenda and necessary time to complete them.

2.5. *Method of analysis.* Each interview is dumped into a database in Microsoft Excel program, and then are defined the codes for every participant. Determination of the main themes and creation of categories was conducted manually. Creating categories was conducted in two phases. Terminology used by subjects may be helpful for analysis and data transcripts (I. Meho, L., 2006). Specifically the process of transcription was a strong point of data analysis in this study, given that semi-structured interviews emailed and the respondents had enough time for completion of the interview. Another helpful element in this process was the considerable professional experience of subjects in social services field.

Findings of the study

The difficulties of local governance toward the organization of social services for families offered in the northern regions of Albania

Most of the representatives of the public sector of social services to the municipal units of the study area, explain that they faced many difficulties in organizing and providing social services for families. Respondents affirm that one of the main difficulties facing the public sector social services is the lack of funds and financial resources for the organization of specific services for the family. They argue that municipality units involved in the study area have limited funds to provide social services, also there is a lack of real funding for social services for the family. Funds delegated by the central government for social services are generally insufficient. Even the child protection and women against violence units have limited capacity to provide services. It should be emphasized that these elements influence the planning of social services for families in particular.

"The main obstacle is the lack of a real fund for services to the family and social services in general." (Social Worker)

"Failure to provide sufficient funding from The Ministry for this layer that is high risk." (Social Worker)

"The main obstacle is the lack of appropriate capacities in family function, lack of funds earmarked by the central government or local government." (Lawyer)

"The fact that decentralization is still in a phase in process and not yet finished, which creates difficulties in managing the centres, without the financial aspect creates its own difficulties." (Social Worker)

A considerable number of respondents evaluate the lack of human resource capacity, as one of the difficulties associated organization of family social services. Respondents explain that public sector staff in municipality units is insufficient for the establishment and management of new services and qualifications needed for the organization of social services for family. Lack of infrastructure, referring to the lack of shelters in local units, makes more difficult organization and delivery of services set up to protect victims of domestic violence. The small number of NGOs in several districts, as well as the lack of a strategy for social services family, is factor that hinders family support with social services.

"The main obstacle is the lack of a shelter across the northern area, for victims of domestic violence." (Psychologist)

"It would be also required the presence of an employee / social / psychologist's or / and for having as main focus work with families in their entirety." (Social Worker)

"The main obstacle is the lack of residential facilities in our county" (social Administrator)

"The main obstacle is the lack of adequate capacity to function in social services for the family." (Lawyer)

"First, the small number (1-2) of NGOs that provide services in our region, and secondly, the lack of a strategy for the family in general." (Director)

"Needs for training seminars with all regional committees. Strengthen the Office of the National Coordinator immediately to enable the implementation of the activities provided." (Social Worker)

Respondents consider the need to improve the legal framework for social services, as an obstacle toward the organization and delivery of social services for family. In many cases, lack of services and socio-cultural factors, are treated as barriers to social services.

"Alongside the achievements there are many difficulties such as improving the legal framework and specifically the adaptation of procurement law for social services as specific and different services from the public services." (Social Worker)

"Improving the legislation has families with economic problems and for the lack of documentation deprived from the assistance." (Director)

"Changing the law for social services would result in improving the functioning of the organization and delivery of social services, this set together with national or foreign specialists of social fields." (Lawyer)

"Lack of support from the community, not understanding the role of employees/specialists who provide services." (Psychologist)

Representatives of central and regional institutions, despite some evaluation practices of community-based services raised by some municipalities of the northern area of the country, explain that the main difficulties are related to the lack of financial and human resource capacity of local government, the lack of transparency of fund management by local authorities and lack of coordination between governments for allocating funds. They view local government as responsible for the establishment of new services. In particular, representatives of central state institutions consider the lack of family needs assessment periodically, in order to provide social services at the regional level including all local government units, as an obstacle to the organization of social services for family.

"In applying the legal obligations local governments in accordance with needs should raise new services. Local Government due to insufficient capacity and limited financial possibilities does not respond to requests for establishment of new services in accordance with the dynamics of the needs of vulnerable persons or family support except the implementation of NE program (economic assistance)." (Economist)

"I should emphasize that in all government the decisions for family care is the obligation of the authorities (local) governments." (Director)

The difficulties of the non-profit organizations toward the organization of social services for families offered in the field study.

Difficulties and obstacles faced by NGOs toward the organization of social services for families are related to internal and external factors. In most cases, by the view of the representatives of NGOs, the difficulties are related to the lack of network and cooperation with local institutions. Respondents argue that faced with a lack of information from these institutions regarding issues facing families in need, and emphasize that lacks a unified

system of data in the public sector social services in their respective municipalities. There are few opportunities for employment to mediate vulnerable family members, as well as, lack of coordination of the activities of public institutions to maximize the impact on families. This lack of cooperation by local government creates difficulties in many cases for extraction aid for families in economic difficulty. Local government, in the view of representatives of NGOs, do not support financially projects of civil society organizations. They think that in addition to financial support should also create fiscal incentives for NGOs. Representatives of NGOs involved in the study, claim that local government structures are less aware about the fact that they are primarily responsible for the provision of social services. In this way, they suggest the need to increase the role of local government in terms of social services with a focus on family.

"Opportunities to mediate in finding a job through employment offices are very slim." (Social Worker)

"The process of data collection is already a process which has passed its own difficulties, but still lacks a unified system of data." (Lawyer)

"The greatest difficulties encountered in collecting data, since in most cases are very institutions that derive obstacles because they lack the data and do not reflect those they deny the very existence of different indicators." (Social Worker)

"Despite the aim to provide these services in partnership, is still difficult to actors at the local level to embrace this approach. In most cases we have realized something like that but there is still work to be done in this direction." (Social Worker)

"Malfunctioning of all levels of institutions often become an obstacle to us and gives us difficulties in our work." (Psychologist)

"Not understanding enough of the institutional division of responsibilities." (Lawyer)

"Local government structures are less aware of the fact that they are the main responsible for the provision of social services. There is no clear information, detailed and ongoing review related to vulnerable groups at local unit and their specifications." (Executive Director)

Respondents explain that socio-cultural factors are an obstacle to the organization of social services for family. They argue that issues related to the mentality of the areas where they provide services, hinder the process of organizing services and limit the possibility of collaboration with families. Perception of families in some cases NGOs also hinders organizing services. This relates to the fact that in some municipalities there are a small number of NGOs. Specifically, a considerable part of of respondents see social-cultural factors related to: the lack of understanding by family members, treatment of family problems as "taboo", hesitation of families to their admission problems, perception of services of NGOs just as access to support materials and in some cases related with the refusal of family members for the acceptance of services. In the view of the representatives of NGOs, in some cases, lack of service delivery at the local level and the limited influence of local institutions in some municipalities have made community and family members to have a lack of confidence in local institutions. This has contributed to reduce the level of cooperation of the community, in cases where efforts are made for the referral and collaboration with institutions of local government.

"The first difficulty faced when working with families is: Do they want to be part of their troubles? This is especially when the family problems are not just economic. It is like a psychologist, who at the moment that the client accepts that there is a problem, and then it is half solved." (Teacher)

"There is a lack of these services by the local government and the civil society, it has made the change of mentality of the family to be very difficult." (Social worker)

A small part of respondents evaluate as obstacles in organizing the social services by NGOs: the duplication of services, the lack of attendance during the service by the beneficiary, the lack of a data network, the few opportunities to monitor services after project completion, and the lack of financial support for families in need.

"The main difficulty facing our organization is the lack of funds (donors potential) to the extent that we need in different cases and low social community to engage voluntarily to our association." (Teacher)

"Funding for these projects, not strict attendance of project beneficiaries, refusal of jobs in the job they are trained beneficiaries, few opportunities to monitor beneficiaries in post-project stage." (Teacher)

Conclusions

The findings showed that the representatives of local governance have estimated as main difficulties, regarding the organization of social services for families, the lack of funds and financial resources and the lack of capacities and human resources. Among other things, the respondents from central and regional institutions have explained that the difficulties are related to the lack of transparency of fund management by local governance. The main obstacles to organizing and establishing of new social services for the family are also associated with lack of human resources and the need for further professional qualifications related to the field of social services for families. The small number of NGOs in some counties, the lack of a strategy for social services for families in need, the need for improvement of the legal framework, the lack of transparency of fund management by local authorities and lack of coordination between local for allocation of funds, lack of needs assessment committees in all municipalities, which hinders the process of assessing the needs of families periodically, treated as difficulties related to the organization of social services for family.

Based on the perception of the representatives of NGOs, it has been found, that the difficulties are related to the lack of networks and collaboration with local institutions. The representatives of NGOs, also, highlighted that socio-cultural factors are an obstacle to the organization of social services for the families. Representatives of NGOs report that they do not have financial support for projects that refer to family. The perception that families in some cases have for the NGOs, lack of understanding by family members, assessment of family problems from family members as "taboo", and the perception of NGO services only as access for support materials, are socio-cultural factors that hinder the organization of social services for family. The small number of NGOs in several local units, as well as limited services and not at the appropriate level of public social services sector has contributed to weakening confidence in the contribution that the community can give to the organizations and local governments to reduce the problems of families in need.

Recommendations

Based on the empirical findings and on conclusions derived, it is necessary to consider certain recommendations related the organization of social services for families offered by local governance and non-profit organizations.

Recommendations for public sector services in municipal units

- Strengthening the capacity of professional staff of municipal units in terms of qualifications for the organization and delivery of social services for family.

- Building financial capacity at the local level to support families in need.
- Increased capacity of municipality unit's staff to social services associated with needs assessments families. After this assessment municipality unit's social services should know to budget social services for families in need in each commune and municipality.
- Providing financial support for projects implemented by civil society organizations at the local level.

Recommendations for NGOs

- Organizations should mobilize for the support in terms of funding from local government regarding family social services.
- NGOs that operate in the area must realize research study related on the necessity of social services for families in need, in order to awareness of local, regional and central authorities, to the delivery of social services more focused on family issues.
- Given the fact that civil society organizations provide a variety of services for the family, they should mobilize for the support in terms of funding from local government regarding family social services.

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