

THE PERCEPTION OF THE REPRESENTATIVES OF PUBLIC SECTOR REGARDING THE COLLABORATION BETWEEN NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS AND PUBLIC SECTOR TOWARD SOCIAL SERVICES FOR FAMILIES (NORTH ALBANIA CASE)

Brilanda Lumanaj

Department of Psychology and Social Work, Faculty of Education Sciences, University of Shkodra “Luigj Gurakuqi”, Shkodra, Albania, Email: blumanaj@gmail.com

Abstract

Family is evaluated as a principal source of human capital. Therefore, it is very important to insure a sustainability and support of family with social services. Based on the decentralization process, administrative structures of local governance have a special responsibility in organizing and offering social services. Support of families with social services is a necessity of govern structures and civil society. One of the key elements while offering social services is the collaboration between local governance and civil society organizations. The paper aims to explore the collaboration of the public sector of social services with the representatives of non-profit organizations. This collaboration is analyzed through the perceptions of representatives of public sector. Furthermore, it is an objective of this study to explore the strengths and weaknesses points of this collaboration and what the local representatives suggest to improve it. The study was done in the northern region of Albania, including her four Districts, in its 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 23 representatives of local, regional and central governance institutions that operate in the field study. The findings show that the representatives of public sector, in most cases, evaluate as positive the collaboration with the representatives of NGO-s. Based on the empirical finding and the suggestion of the representatives of local government, it is necessary to improve the collaboration towards the community needs assessment, referral of cases reciprocally finalizing the interactions with concrete agreements and to minimize the possibility of overlapping.

Keywords: *local governance, social services for families, non-profit organizations, northern regions of Albania*

Introduction

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. National legal framework, involving:

Social Service Strategy (2005-2010), Law No. 9355 for “Social Services and Aid” (2005), Strategy of Decentralization and Local Governance and also Law No. 8652, date 31.07.2010 “For the organization and function of local governance”, Article 1. These documents contribute in the regulation, organization and function of the local governance units in the Republic of Albania. But, the support of families and individuals with social services is a process, which requires a collaboration of all actors.

“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 family is considered as a major welfare state intervention policies and services that require combat social exclusion (Hughes, N., 2010).

Branco, F. (2009) states that the role of the state is essential to guarantee the right to social care and protection of families from social problems. The commitment of the welfare state to support families with low economic level, with different social problems and psychological, is an obligation to guarantee the right of the family to social.

Farrow, F., Grant, T., Meltzer, J., (1990) explain that family support is very important to strengthen the family and helps them to better face the stresses of contemporary life. 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.

The process of decentralization increases the responsibility of local governance structures to support families with social services. Albania's northern region has many economic and social problems. Family support with social services is an obligation for local governance structures. Based on these arguments it is important to explore and identify the suggestions of the representatives of public sector toward the improvement of the collaboration with the representatives of non-profit organizations for the families social services offered in the northern region of Albania.

Methodology

The paper aims to explore the collaboration of the public sector of social services with the representatives of non-profit organizations. This collaboration is analyzed through the perceptions of representatives of public sector. Furthermore, it is an objective of this study to explore the strengths and weaknesses points of this collaboration and what the local representatives suggest to improve it. The study was done in the northern region of Albania, including her four Districts, in its main cities: Shkodër, Lezhë, Kukës and Peshkopi. A qualitative research method has been used. In this study participated representatives of local, regional and central institutions that operate with social services for families 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:

The research question 1: Which is the perception of the representatives of local, regional and central government's institutions toward the collaboration with the representatives of non-profit organizations for social services for families in the northern regions (respective Municipalities) of Albania?

The research question 2: Which are the suggestions and recommendations of local, regional and central government's institutions toward the improvement of the collaborations for the social services for families offered in the northern regions of Albania from the public sector?

Sampling. In the study participated the representatives of local, regional and central governance institutions which operate in the northern regions of Albania. Specifically, participated the state institutions that operate in these districts: Shkodër, Lezhë, Kukës and Peshkopi. A total of 23 semi structured interviews are completed. 16 participants are representatives of public sector of social services (representatives of four Municipalities, the respective Directorates of Social Services, specifically 4 responsible social service sector, 2 social service specialists, 1 director of economic aid sector, 1 specialist on gender equality and domestic violence, 1 specialist profiled on children's issues, 1 specialist for the protection of young people and elderly people, 1 social worker and 5 social administrators.) 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).

General data for the respondents. In this study participated 23 representatives of local, regional and central governance institutions that operate in the field study. From 23 participants, 16 participants were female and 7 of them are men. The participants are of different ages. 1 participant is aged 26-35 years, 7 participants are aged until 25 years, 8 participants are aged 36-45 years, 3 participants are aged 46-55 years and 4 of them are aged 56-65 years. Regarding the level of education, 17 respondents have higher education, 2 respondents have master degree level and 4 of them have secondary education. Participants, who filled the semi-structured interview, belong to different professions. 8 of the respondents are social workers, 2 of them are psychologists, 2 of the respondents are lawyers, 3 of them are teachers, 5 of them are economists, 1 respondent is sociologist, 1 of them is agronomist and also 1 respondent is representatives of political science. The representatives who filled semi-structured interviews had different years of work experience in respective institutions. 8 respondents have 1-5 years work experience and also 9 of them have 6-10 years work, 6 participants have more than 10 years work. Representatives of local, regional and central institutions have an average of 6.9 years work experience in respective institution and 8.1 years work in the field of social services.

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 local, regional and central institutions representatives concerning the collaboration with the non-profit organizations and the recommendations toward the improvement for the social services of families offered from the public sector in the northern regions of Albania.

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 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.

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 perception of the representatives of local, regional and central government's institutions toward the collaboration with the representatives of non-profit organizations for social services for families in the northern regions (respective Municipalities) of Albania.

Strength points of collaboration

Representatives of municipal units of the study area describe the relations of cooperation with NGOs as a mutual association, close, fruitful and characterized by mutual confidence. They explain that in some cases, public social services sector as well as NGOs operating in the same areas and have common objectives. Predisposition to help each other, as well as assessment of the role of NGOs in the field of social services related to family, are elements that are evaluated by representatives of the public sector social services. It is estimated the referral process from NGOs to local government institutions and the implementation of standards of social services by NGOs. A small part of the respondents, evaluate as a strong point of the cooperation, also the exchange of information between public sector and NGOs.

"Cooperation with NGOs is substantially more efficient, and one of the main policies and the most important social services, is very close and fruitful cooperation with these NGOs." (Social Worker)

"Cooperation with NGOs is very good, more related to awareness campaigns." (Lawyer)

"In terms of legislation exist standards and modalities of monitoring of social services. Based on a plan by institutions that operate, employees of the Office correctly monitor and report on the implementation of standards by NGOs." (Director)

"It created a climate of co-ordination of work, mutual confidence and desire to work common objectives." (Social Worker)

Weak points of collaboration

Respondents evaluate as a weak points of cooperation between the public social services, referring to municipalities of the study area and NGOs, the lack of sharing information, the problems related to the legal framework, meetings and the few roundtables and the lack of financial support to NGOs by the local government.

"One of the weak points, encountered difficulty is the lack of a regulatory law to offer the opportunity to tender Municipality social services to third parties." (Social Worker)

"We need more support from the local government with specific funds." (Social Administrator)

"Meetings are conducted mainly in cases of annually analysis." (Director)

"Lack of financial support by the municipality to services set up by NGOs or continuous tracking on the projects." (Social Worker)

In a few cases of are estimated as a weak points duality of services, the concentration of NGOs in urban areas and in some cases action organizations independently by not cooperating with the local government, and the level of monitoring of system of social services is not satisfactory monitoring.

"Taking the initiative too much, and take action beyond their capacity." (Social Administrator)

"The relationship of our institution's cooperation with NGOs has been welcomed in any case sought assistance from our side, but there are cases that they operate independently from us." (Lawyer)

"You have to focus and extend services to remote mountainous areas where needs are greater." (Social worker)

"Undertake initiatives that they cannot realize." (Social Administrator)

The suggestions and recommendations of local, regional and central government's institutions toward the improvement of the collaborations for the social services for families offered in the northern regions of Albania from the public sector.

Most of the respondents explained that it is necessary to increase and strengthen cooperation between local government and NGOs. For this they suggest that this collaborative relationship has to be fair, accompanied by more frequent meetings in order to assess the common community needs, referring the cases reciprocally finalizing interactions with concrete agreements and to make efforts in order to minimize the possibility of the overlapping services.

"There should be more cooperation between the two actors NGOs and local government." (Teacher)

"One point that may need improvement continued in this cooperation may be the referral of cases from each organization, in order to avoid overlapping, or replication services." (Psychologist)

"To organize regular meetings with NGOs and issues arising." (Director)

"It is required that needs to be viewed in cooperation with local authorities." (Psychologist)

"To reach a concrete agreement." (Social Administrator)

Representatives of public sector municipal units suggest the improving the legal framework, aiming the drafting of the laws on social services in cooperation with NGOs and not providing absolute independence for organizations, and increasing the role of social administrators and the inspectorate for social services. It is suggested, also, that local governments should have more space in its budget for the financial support for social services for families and NGO support for the projects referred to family. Increasing the number of NGOs that provide social services for the family is another element suggested by respondents.

"The law on NGOs is biased and gives them independence nearly absolute, we think that the law should be changed, and for its design should take into consideration the suggestions of all stakeholders operating in this field." (Director)

"It is necessary to make changes to the legal framework in order to enhance the role of social administrator. Building capacity and human resources in the field of social services." (Director)

"There may need more space in the municipal budget plan to giving more priority to the social aspect." (Social Worker)

Conclusions

This study provides the opportunity for institutional representatives of central and local government to get acquainted with the views of representatives of local, regional and central government's institutions regarding the evaluation and improvement of the collaboration with NGOs regarding the social services offered for families. In general the findings highlight that the relationship of collaboration between NGOs with the representatives of public sector of social services governance is positive. Respondents estimate as strengths of collaboration the reciprocal reference of the cases, having common objectives, also the exchange of information between public sector and NGOs. The weak points of collaboration refer mostly to the lack of sharing information, the problems related to the legal framework and the lack of financial support to NGOs by the local government. The representatives of public sector suggest that for the improvement of the collaboration with the NGOs, it is necessary to improve and implement the legal framework. Improving this collaboration according to the respondents is the need of NGOs for financial support from local governance, as well as the efforts of increasing the services at the commune level. Results of the study may influence the reorganization and improvement of this collaboration for the organization of social services for families at the local level. The recommendations of the study are a contribution to the field of social services, and in particular to improve social services for families at the local level.

Recommendations

Based on the empirical findings and on conclusions derived, it is necessary to consider certain recommendations related the improvement of collaboration between NGOs and the public sector of social services:

- Increase collaboration of NGOs with the local institutions through the more frequent meetings with all stakeholders regarding the improvement of the legal framework.
- The municipal units of social services should support through the roundtables the policy initiatives of NGOs for the improvement of the legislation.

- Given the fact that civil society organizations provide a variety of social services for families, NGOs must be mobilized more to provide more funds from local governances regarding family social services.
- Increase the collaboration of the municipal units with NGOs operating in the field of social services for family
- Take measures to overcome and minimize bureaucratic barriers to apply and benefit from public social services.

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