

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

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## Abstract

Family is evaluated as a principal source of human capital. The process of decentralization increases the responsibility of local governance structures to support families with social services. One of the key elements while offering social services is the collaboration between local governance and civil society organizations. The paper aims to explore and evaluate 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 NGOs. Furthermore, it is an objective of this study to explore the strengths and weaknesses points of this collaboration and what they 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 interviews. In this study participated 21 representatives of non-profit organizations that operate in the field study. The findings show that the representatives of NGOs, in most cases, suggest the improvement of collaboration with the local governance. It is necessary to improve and implement the legal framework and it is necessary to increase the financial support of NGOs regarding the social services for families.

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**Keywords:** Social services for family, collaboration, non-profit organizations, local governance

## 1. Introduction

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. These organizations are crucial especially to developing countries, such as Albania, because of the services they offer to address various social needs. Family support with social services is an obligation for local governance structures.

“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. 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. Non profit organizations play an important role in offering social services, a role which for a long time has been uncared from the governances (Bastagli, F., 2013). 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. Based on this contest, takes place the aim of this study, tending to explore the perception of the representatives of NGOs regarding the collaboration with the public sector of social services. The data of this study are part of my research dissertation related to the evaluation process of family social services in the north area of Albania, which are offered from non-profit organizations and local governance.

## **2. Research methods**

The purpose of this study is to explore and analyze the perception of the representative of NGO-s regarding the collaboration of non-profit organizations with the public sector of social services toward social services for families. Furthermore, it is an objective of this study to explore the strengths and weaknesses points of this collaboration and what they suggest to improve it. A qualitative research method has been used. The instrument used for data gathering is the semi-structured interviews. In the study

participated 21 representatives of non-profit organizations that operate in the field study. The study is done in the major cities of northern Albania such as Shkodër, Lezhë, Kukës and Peshkopi. In order to achieve the goal, the study is focused on two research questions, which are:

- Which is the perception of the representatives of NGOs regarding the collaboration between public sector and non-profit organizations toward social services for families? Which are the strengths and weaknesses points of this collaboration?
- Which are the suggestions of the representatives of NGOs for the improvement of the collaboration with the public sector toward the social services for families?

### *2.1. Sampling*

In the study participated the representatives of non-profit organizations which operate in the northern regions of Albania. They offer also social services related with families. Specifically, participated the representatives of NGOs that operate in these districts: Shkodër, Lezhë, Kukës and Peshkopi. A total of twenty-one semi structured interviews were completed.

### *2.2. General data related the sampling*

In the study participated 21 representatives of NGOs that operate in the northern part of Albania, including these districts: Shkodër, Lezhë, Kukës, Dibër, specifically in their main cities: Shkodër, Lezhë, Kukës and Peshkopi. 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 the consultation with “The Map of Social Services in Albania”. There were ten representatives from organizations in Shkodër, four from Lezhë and Peshkopi and 3 representatives from the NGOs that operate in Kukës. Sixteen participants were female and five of them are men. The participants are of different ages. 8 participants are aged 26-35 years, 4 participants are aged until 25 years, 7 participants are aged 36-45 years and 2 participants are aged 46-55 years. Regarding the level of education, 11 respondents have higher education and 10 respondents have master degree level. Most of the interviewers are in the position of coordinators (10 of them), 4 of them are in the position of projects managers, 4 participants are executive directors, 2 social workers and 1 psychologist. Participants, who filled the semi-structured interview, belong to different professions. Only 15 of them accepted to declare their profession. 4 of the respondents are social workers, 2 of them are psychologists, 4 of the respondents are lawyers and teachers, and also 1 of the respondents is an environment expert. The representatives

of non-profit organizations, who filled semi-structured interviews, had different years of work experience in recent organizations and also in organizations of civil society. 7 respondents have 1-5 years work experience in the civil society organizations, 6 of them have 6-10 years work experience and 8 of them have more than 10 years work experience. In the recent organizations, 11 respondents have 1-5 years work experience, 9 respondents have 6-10 years work experience and 1 respondent over 10 years work experience. Representatives of non-profit organizations have an average of 5.8 years work experience in recent organization and 8.5 years work experience in civil society organizations.

### *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, concerning the collaboration with the representatives of public sector of social services related the 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 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.

### **3. Findings of the study**

#### ***3.1. The perception of the representatives of NGOs regarding the collaboration between local governance and non-profit organizations toward social services for families***

##### ***Strength points of collaboration***

Respondents stated that in general the collaboration with local governance is positive, friendly and efficient, characterized by the willingness to support the NGOs.

*"Very good relationship, as indicated for each problem is willing to support us, within their possibilities." (Social Worker)*

*"Collaboration with local governance, has been generally quite effective (in community needs assessment and selection of the beneficiaries) it is helping us in many projects where people and families in need were targeted." (Teacher)*

The respondents evaluate as strengths point of collaboration the reciprocal reference of cases, the identification of problematic cases, the coordination of activities, the provision of consultancy, assessment of the role of NGOs from local structures, the central governance and the community, as well as the involvement in common information activities.

*"The reciprocal support, offering consultancy, continuous monitoring and reciprocal respect." (Teacher)*

*"Inclusion in different information activities of local governance. (Psychologist)*

*"Assessing the role of NGOs from governance in order to contribute for the improvement of the situation focused on families." (Lawyer)*

*"The local governance supports us in our work, in organizing common activities and referring cases, is part of our activities, etc." (Psychologist)*

*"Productive cooperation in terms of coordination of actions, contribution of the local governance with facilities that promotes the development of activities, good reference for identifying target groups, source of information for the more immediate problems of the population." (Teacher)*

A considerable part of the representatives of NGOs appreciate also as strengths of collaboration with public sector of social services that operate in the field study, the efforts to establish networks of cooperation, especially

regarding to the problems of domestic violence, the readiness for the administrative cooperation and also the long experience of the NGOs.

*"There have been meetings for networking among associations to strengthen and protect the family, mainly on the topic of domestic violence."* (Social Worker)

*"Assessing our work by them, during the organization's experience in local / regional level, the visible results by the beneficiaries, the beneficiaries and community support that have for our organization and a very positive image for the organization in its work."* (Executive Director)

#### **Weak points of collaboration**

It should be emphasized that, in general, the weak points of collaboration are viewed in terms of insufficient capacity of local governance to support NGOs. Respondents appreciate weak points the incomplete data provided by the public sector, associated with problematic cases of families in need, the lack of flexibility of the sector, the limited financial resources of local governances, limited experience of local units to offer services according to the needs, few local policies regarding family social services, as well as, insufficient capacity and not very professional staff of public sector social services.

*"Incorrect and unreported data, or some categories of children."* (Lawyer)

*"The lack of data regarding the exact number of poor families, as there are many families that are not supported by economic and though living on the minimum living (\$ 2 a day, INSTAT 2011) and in the margins of a poverty extreme."* (Social Worker)

*"The lack of flexibility of the structures in the planning of the capacities and resources, limited experience of local units associated with the provision of social services according to the needs, interests mainly focus on investments in infrastructure and construction, few policies at local level on specific issues at local unit, the limited financial resources of the local units."* (Executive Director)

*"The financial support provided by the Municipality does not respond to community needs."* (Teacher)

*"The lack of information and the difficulty to get it because of multiple objective and subjective barriers."* (Lawyer)

A large part of the respondents appreciate as weak point the lack of financial support for organizations from local governance. In some cases, too, the lack of responsibility of public sector staff to social services for the implementation of agreements, lack of infrastructure for the provision of social services for families, the need to improve the legal framework, are considered by respondents as weak points of collaboration. In a few cases also the refusal of the community to interact, is seen as a weak point of this

collaboration. In few cases, political factors, is estimated as an element which affects the stability and efficiency of public sector and NGOs services.

*"A weak point of collaboration is the lack of financial support from the local governance." (Psychologist)*

*"Lack of financial support for certain activities." (Teacher)*

*"The dismissive mentality of the community creates difficulties in the collaboration with families, misunderstanding and underestimation of the social services from the community, and the lack of knowledge about the social services." (Lawyer)*

*"The low level of the ability of local governance staff to work on everything, lack of planning, limited understanding of working for "the common good "- work still viewed as a means to obtain personal benefits." (Executive Director)*

### ***3.2. The suggestions of the representatives of NGOs for the improvement of the collaboration with the public sector toward the social services for families.***

The representatives of NGOs, in most cases, suggest that for the improvement of collaboration with the public sector, it is necessary to improve and implement the legal framework.

The respondents emphasize that the improvement of this collaboration, is related to the need of NGOs for financial support from local governance, as well as efforts to expand the services at the municipal level.

*"Forecasting financial resources as a separate item in local budgets, developing action plans, starting from the municipality to the national level and especially associating national policies for social issues with realizable budgets that are part of the governance budget, not based on donor funds." (Executive Director)*

*"Improvement of the laws and their application." (Lawyer)*

*"It is important that local authorities start offering services through local grants so that responsibilities are shared for both sides." (Social Worker)*

*"Local governances should allocate larger budget in order to support people in need." (Teacher)*

*"Increase collaboration with local actors, better adaptation of the legislation." (Social Worker)*

From the perspective of the representatives of NGOs, in order to improve collaboration with local social services, it is necessary that public sector of social services provide more services, more collaboration among these two actors in order to promote the process of social inclusion. An important element is considered the promotion of the role of civil society organizations.

*"Increasing the capacity of the local level for applying new methods of social services." (Lawyer)*

*"Unfortunately, there is lack of civil reaction and the role of civil society organizations is weakened." (Panelists)*

*"I suggest that such forms of collaboration (referred to issues related to domestic violence) initiated by the municipality have to be developed also on other families issues such as: employment, mental health, etc." (Social Worker)*

#### **4. Conclusion**

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, the identification of problematic cases, the coordination of activities, providing consultancy, assessing the role of NGOs from the local structures, the central governance and the community, as well as the involvement in joint information activities. The weak points of collaboration refer to the lack of complete data provided by the public sector, regarding the problematic cases of families in need, lack of flexibility of the sector, the limited financial resources of local governances, limited experience of local units to offer services according to the family needs, few local policies regarding social services for family, as well as, insufficient and not very professional staff capacity of public sector for social services. The representatives of NGOs suggest that the improvement of the collaboration with the public sector of social services, 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. An important element is considered the increased efforts to promote the role of civil society organizations.

#### **5. 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 the collaboration of the municipal units with NGOs operating in the field of social services for family, based on clear definition of roles, responsibilities and communications between social actors, including planning, development, financing and evaluation of social services for the families.
- Take measures to overcome and minimize bureaucratic barriers to apply and benefit from public 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, offering suggestions for the improvement of social services for the families.
- The municipal units of social services should support through the roundtables the policy initiatives of NGOs for the improvement of the legislation.
- Undertake activities in collaboration with the other local authorities and NGOs to raise awareness of the local business representatives, in order to provide support for family social services.
- NGOs should institutionalize collaborative relationships with the local institutions.
- 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.
- NGOs should encourage local governances to implement the legal framework regarding social services, as well as press for the establishment of new services for families in need. In this process they should include recipients of services and persons / families in need.

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