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NGOs AND HUMAN SECURITY: CONTRIBUTION TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2030 AGENDA IN NORTH MACEDONIA

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ABSTRACT

In North Macedonia, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) play an important role by addressing specific Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) themes that prioritize human security. This study aims to answer the research question: How engaged are NGOs in North Macedonia in fulfilling the SDGs that touch on human security themes? The hypothesis is that NGOs in North Macedonia are moderately engaged in achieving the SDGs due to limited information and financial opportunities. The methodology used in our scientific paper is based on a qualitative analysis of United Nations reports on the SDGs in North Macedonia, the Government of North Macedonia's strategic documents, and NGOs' reports on their engagement with the SDGs. Some NGOs in North Macedonia are engaged in achieving the SDGs, with a special emphasis on human security. It is expected that further analysis will establish that NGOs play an important role in human security, as they operate at the local level and can more easily foster regional cooperation that advances the SDGs with a human security character. NGOs in North Macedonia are an important factor in connecting sustainable development and human security by engaging in work aligned with the SDGs across various themes. Their efforts to fulfill the SDGs with a human security character are constrained by the limited support they receive from institutions and donors. Strengthening capacities, creating new opportunities, and providing greater institutional and financial support are essential to their commitment to fulfilling the SDGs.

Keywords: Non-Governmental Organizations, Sustainable Development Goals, Human Security, Agenda 2030, North Macedonia

INTRODUCTION

Human security is closely related to people's sense of concern for job security, financial security, health security, environmental security, and security from crime. According to the 1994 UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) Human Development Report, human security is a comprehensive concept for people everywhere in the world because the above-mentioned threats are common. Based on the terminology of "common", nations must react in the same way in the fight against these threats (UNDP, 1994). In the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the human security approach is closely linked to the achievement of most of the SDGs, using NGOs as key tools in their

completion. In this case, we can emphasize the important role that NGOs have in achieving the SDGs with an emphasis on human security by contributing to several themes in particular such as education, gender equality, ecological stability and institutional inclusiveness (United Nations, 2015). For countries like North Macedonia, the realization of the SDGs in the context of human security by putting the role of NGOs into function for the needs of the community becomes an important factor.

The research question that guided us during the scientific paper is “How engaged are NGOs in North Macedonia in fulfilling the SDGs that affect human security topics?”. Civil society in North Macedonia is organized through NGOs and actively contributes to various activities. Most of the fields of action are closely related to the concept of human security. But this connection is not strong in practice due to the lack of communication and lack of cooperation that NGOs have with national structures for fulfilling the SDGs. Therefore, the hypothesis of this scientific paper is that “NGOs in North Macedonia are moderately engaged in achieving the SDGs due to lack of information and limited financial opportunities”.

The objective of the scientific paper begins with an analysis of the role and activity of NGOs in key areas of human security. The paper aims to identify institutional gaps that limit their impact on human security. It assesses the involvement of NGOs in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and provides practical recommendations for more qualitative results. The importance of this scientific paper lies in emphasizing the role of NGOs in the development of human security by contributing to the sustainable development of North Macedonia.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

According to researcher Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh, the concept of human security deals with the ability to identify threats, to avoid them and to mitigate their effects when they occur. The use of the term “human security” includes two directions: one is that the notion of security now goes beyond security in the traditional sense of “physical security” and the other that people’s lives must be guaranteed through “social security” against human threats. Therefore, new actors appear on the international scene that leave aside the activity of traditional security by focusing on human security such as: international organizations, international corporations, NGOs and other non-state entities (Tadjbakhsh, 2005).

The SDGs are 17 global goals designed to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that all people enjoy prosperity and peace. The SDGs address various social, economic, health, education, environmental, and international issues. Human security is therefore considered an aspect that enriches and complements the mechanisms for achieving the SDGs (Olaniyan et al, 2020). According to economist Hickel, one of the main advocates for the fulfillment of the SDGs are NGOs and sustainable development policies, using their expertise, networks, and resources to raise awareness, mobilize support, and promote the adoption of ambitious goals and commitments. Their advocacy efforts have not only been instrumental in generating political will, but also in ensuring that the voices of marginalized and vulnerable groups are represented in policy discussions (Hickel, 2016).

Civil society in North Macedonia is characterized by limited breadth and depth of participation in civil life. NGOs have quality communication, coordination and cooperation among themselves. Also, within the framework of structural organization, NGOs are well organized by respecting legal acts and norms. As for inter-institutional cooperation, work still needs to be done. In North Macedonia, only a small part of NGOs participate in activities due to the lack of communication, coordination and cooperation with decision-making institutions (Kelmend Zajazi et al, 2008). Based on the NGO Sustainability Index recently conducted in 2021 in North Macedonia by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), we find that funding constraints, political pressures, weak consultations between NGOs and public institutions, and weak institutional cooperation create a gap between local-

level engagement and integration into national-level policies, including the SDGs (USAID, 2022).

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach mainly because it fits better with what the research is trying to understand. Instead of relying on numerical data, the analysis here relies on documents that talk about public policies, the role of NGOs and how they work in the field. The materials were selected by looking at the reports of state institutions, international organizations and the civil sector itself, as they provide a broader view of what is happening in different areas such as education, gender equality, the environment and governance. The idea was to create a balanced picture, not perfect, but sufficient to understand where NGOs are positioned within the 2030 Agenda.

The analysis of the documents was done by reading the materials several times and noting themes that were repeated most often. These themes were then compared between the reports to see where they matched and where differences emerged. From this it was seen that NGOs contribute in several areas, but also have clear challenges, especially when it comes to cooperation with institutions and the lack of sustainable resources. This way of working, although not strictly formalized, offered a more natural and honest understanding of the current situation.

RESULTS

In North Macedonia, based on official statistics from the Central Registry of North Macedonia, there are 16,466 NGOs operating. Of the total number, 9,195 are active NGOs, while 7,271 are passive. This distribution shows a numerically large civil sector, but with different levels of activity and functionality, suggesting that the real capacities of organizations are uneven and depend on their resources, structure and practical commitment (Central Registry of North Macedonia).

The analysis of the documents shows that the activities of NGOs in North Macedonia are focused on several areas that are directly related to human security. In education programs, many organizations work with young people, provide support to the most vulnerable communities, and develop non-formal education initiatives, which are also highlighted in the annual reports of the United Nations (UNCT 2021). A similar pattern is seen in the area of gender equality, where NGOs provide support services and interventions against gender-based violence, a topic also highlighted by UN Women (2022). In the environment, organizations carry out anti-pollution campaigns and climate initiatives, which are mentioned in the UN country assessments (UNCT 2022). These data create a clear picture that the civil sector has a broad role in the social and environmental dimensions of human security.

However, the findings suggest that this multifaceted work on the ground is not fully reflected in official sustainable development documents. The 2020 National Voluntary Report mentions “limited” participation of NGOs in consultations and reporting processes (Government of North Macedonia 2020). UNDP reports also note that civil society contributions are rarely systematically included in national SDG policies (UNDP 2020). This creates a gap between the practical activities of the civil society sector and the institutional structures of policy-making. Simply put, their work has local impact, but does not always find its place at the national level.

The structural barriers that influence this lack of coordination are also clearly evident in the documents reviewed. Many organizations operate with unstable funding and depend on short-term projects, which is clearly highlighted in the CSO Sustainability Index (USAID 2021, 2022). Some reports mention that cooperation with institutions remains sporadic and without regular consultative mechanisms, which makes it difficult to include them in policy-making processes (Donevska 2018; Markovik 2018). Also, some organizations lack the

necessary capacities for data collection and monitoring of results, which reduces their ability to contribute to official reporting on the SDGs. These obstacles are not unique to North Macedonia, but in the country's context they remain particularly visible.

Despite the challenges, some positive trends are observed in the literature. Youth activism is growing, especially on issues related to human rights and environmental protection (UNCT 2022). The use of digital platforms has offered new forms of engagement and interaction with citizens, a development reported as positive by UNDP (2021). In some cases, civil society organizations are experimenting with alternative forms of financing, such as social entrepreneurship and crowdfunding, which USAID (2022) presents as potential opportunities for increasing sustainability. These developments provide signals that the civil sector is adapting to structural challenges and finding new ways of acting.

Another important outcome relates to the opportunities for greater involvement of NGOs in SDG processes. UN reports indicate that civil society representation in the National SDG Council can serve as a step towards more regular cooperation between institutions and the civil sector (UNCT 2021). NGOs have the capacity to provide valuable information from the local level, which institutions often do not collect or have the opportunity to monitor. The documents suggest that, with better coordination and consultation mechanisms, their role in promoting human security and achieving the SDGs can become much more inclusive and visible in public policies.

CONCLUSIONS

When putting all the findings together, it becomes quite clear that NGOs in North Macedonia play a steady and often necessary role in different areas tied to human security, even if this role is not always fully visible in national planning documents. A lot of their work happens quietly at the community level, where organizations step in when public services are limited or slow to respond. This is noticeable in education, gender support, environmental actions and different forms of community assistance. Their impact is real on the ground, but it does not always make its way cleanly into the SDG structures at the national level, and that gap is visible throughout the documents reviewed.

Part of this disconnect seems to come from very practical issues. Many NGOs depend on short-term projects that don't allow them to plan ahead, and cooperation with institutions is sometimes irregular: sometimes it works well, sometimes it's more formal than meaningful. Collecting and organizing data is also a challenge for a lot of organizations, simply because they do not always have the staff, time or tools to document everything consistently. These limitations make it harder for their work to be recognized or reflected in national reporting, even when they are doing valuable things locally.

Still, there are signs of positive movement. Young people are becoming more involved, especially in topics like the environment and human rights, and digital tools seem to be helping NGOs communicate and organize more effectively. A few organizations are trying new funding methods, like small social enterprise activities or community fundraising, which may help them rely less on traditional donor cycles. These changes are not dramatic yet, but they show that the sector is adapting and looking for new ways to stay active.

Overall, the study suggests that NGOs do contribute meaningfully to human security in the country, but the connection between their local work and national sustainable development strategies is not strong enough. More stable funding, clearer cooperation with institutions and better opportunities for civil society to join policy discussions would help bridge that distance. If these gaps were reduced, the work happening at the community level would have a better chance of influencing long-term development goals and supporting the country's progress toward the 2030 Agenda.

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