

International Journal of Non-Profit Sector Empowerment

Vol 3, No 1 (2024)

International Journal of Non-Profit Sector Empowerment



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doi: [10.12681/npse.38098](https://doi.org/10.12681/npse.38098)

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COMMENTARY

The Role of the Third Sector in the Development and Implementation of Family Policy: An Overview

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Abstract

The Third Sector functions as a critical component in the ecosystem of social support and policy development. Its involvement in family policy is particularly noteworthy due to the sector's ability to provide innovative solutions, foster community engagement, and advocate for marginalized groups. The Third Sector contributes to family policy, by playing a significant role in advocacy, service delivery, innovation, and community engagement. This commentary, also addresses the challenges and limitations faced by Third Sector organizations in this domain.

Keywords: Children, Community, Family Policy, Governance, Non-Governmental Organizations, Social Policy, Third Sector, Voluntarism

Introduction

The Third Sector, encompassing non-governmental organizations (NGOs), non-profit organizations (NPOs), charities, voluntary organizations, and social enterprises, plays an important role in complementing governmental efforts in various policy domains. Despite that, the Third Sector's role in family policy is far from the core of family policy research. One of the most significant fields where the Third Sector's potential can be leveraged is in the development and implementation of family policy.

Family policies, that aim to support families through social services, financial assistance, and protective legislation, can benefit immensely from the innovation, community engagement, and specialized knowledge that Third Sector organizations offer. The significance of non-profit organizations in addressing social issues and fostering socio-economic development in regions,

particularly in the context of family policy, is widely acknowledged through relevant literature (Salamon & Anheier, 1996; Bradsen & Pestoff, 2006; Nekrasova & Mukhin, 2023).

The Role of the Third Sector in Family Policy

The Third Sector's involvement in family policy is multifaceted. These organizations often fill gaps left by public services, providing essential support that is more tailored and flexible than that offered by state-run programs. For example, NGOs and community groups frequently operate at the grassroots level, with a better understanding of the unique needs of local populations and thus delivering more personalized and effective services (Anheier, 2014). This local knowledge is of pivotal importance in developing policies that are responsive to the actual needs of families. Furthermore, one of the key contributions of NPOs is their ability to respond quickly to societal problems, often more effectively than government agencies. This flexibility allows them to form solutions to specific social issues, conduct pilot projects, and propose mechanisms for state authorities and local self-government to adopt in effective and drastic manner (Nekrasova & Mukhin, 2023; Gorsky, 2023).

Additionally, Third Sector organizations can advocate for family policies that reflect the needs of marginalized or underserved groups. Their advocacy efforts can influence public policy by raising awareness, mobilizing communities, and lobbying for legislative changes. Research shows that Third Sector advocacy has been pivotal in shaping policies related to child welfare, domestic violence, and parental leave (Salamon & Anheier, 1996).

Policy Development

In the development of family policy, the Third Sector acts as both an advocate and an innovator. Advocacy by Third Sector organizations often help shift the political agendas towards the needs of families, particularly those from more vulnerable or marginalized communities. These agents bring grassroots perspectives to the forefront, ensuring that the voices of those most affected by family policies are heard. For instance, NGOs have been instrumental in advocating for comprehensive parental leave policies and child welfare protections, shaping legislative frameworks that prioritize family well-being (Salamon & Anheier, 1996).

Research indicates that the Third Sector is pivotal in advocating for family-friendly policies and influencing legislative agendas. Anheier (2014) makes clear how Third Sector organizations bring grassroots perspectives to policymakers, highlighting the needs of marginalized families and pushing for inclusive and comprehensive family policies. Salamon and Anheier (1996) provide a historical

overview of how Third Sector advocacy has shaped child welfare and parental leave policies, emphasizing the sector's role in raising public awareness and mobilizing communities for policy shift and relevant policy change.

Moreover, Evers and Laville (2004) argue that the Third Sector acts as a conduit for social innovation in policy development. By experimenting with new approaches to family support, these organizations offer evidence-based models that can be adopted by public institutions. The Third Sector's role as an innovator in policy development cannot be overstated. These organizations frequently pilot new approaches to family support that can be scaled up by public institutions. For instance, social enterprises might develop novel childcare solutions or digital platforms for parental guidance, which can later inform public policy. This experimentation is highly important, as it allows for the testing of new ideas in a flexible environment, by providing evidence-based models for broader implementation by local, national and international agents (Defourny & Nyssens, 2010).

Policy Implementation

When it comes to policy implementation, the Third Sector's strengths lie in its ability to deliver services effectively and engage with communities on a deeper level than public institutions often can. Third Sector organizations typically operate with a high degree of flexibility, allowing them to tailor services to the specific needs of different family structures and cultural contexts. Thus, the implementation phase of family policy also benefits from the Third Sector's participation. Third Sector organizations can act as intermediaries between the state and the community, facilitating the delivery of services in a manner that is culturally sensitive and accessible. For example, charities and community groups often provide parenting programs, childcare services, and support for single parents, which are essential components of family policy (Lewis, 2006). Their involvement ensures that these services are delivered effectively, reaching those who might otherwise be excluded.

Community engagement is another critical area where the Third Sector excels. By building trust and relationships within communities, these organizations can mobilize local resources and volunteer networks to support family policy initiatives. This grassroots involvement ensures that services are not only accessible but also culturally relevant and sustainable. For example, community-based organizations often provide peer support groups for parents, which have been shown to enhance family resilience and social cohesion (Lewis, 2006).

Takin into consideration that these organizations have - as a general rule - strong community roots, community engagement is a core strength of the Third Sector. Defourny and Nyssens (2010) discuss

how social enterprises and community groups build trust and foster social cohesion through local initiatives. By engaging community members in the design and delivery of services, Third Sector organizations ensure that family policies are relevant and effective. In addition, Brandsen and Pestoff (2006) highlight the importance of co-production in the Third Sector, where service users and providers collaborate to develop and implement solutions. This approach not only empowers families but also enhances the sustainability and impact of family policies by leveraging local knowledge and resources.

Challenges and Limitations

Despite its potential and strengths, the Third Sector faces significant challenges in both policy development and implementation. One major issue is the sustainability of funding. Many Third Sector organizations rely on short-term grants and donations, which can lead to financial instability and limit their capacity to engage in long-term planning. This funding volatility can impede the ability of these organizations to consistently deliver services and advocate for policy changes (Kendall & Knapp, 1996). Moreover, the relationship between the Third Sector and governmental bodies is often complex. Effective collaboration requires navigating bureaucratic structures, aligning objectives, and addressing power imbalances. While partnerships between the state and the Third Sector can lead to synergistic outcomes, they also risk co-optation or mission drift, where organizations may compromise their values or strategic goals to secure funding or political support (Pestoff, 2012).

Critique

As neo-liberalism has dominated most of the capitalist world, concerns have been raised about the outcome of the Third Sectors involvement in family policy and social policy in overall. The main critique is about the extent of that involvement and the possible undermining of the states' responsibilities towards their own citizens. This condition, has been critiqued about an emerging danger of practically "outsourcing" those responsibilities (Paniagua & D'Angelo, 2016) in a frame of an ever-weakening social state. Critiques also advance to put the rise of the Third Sector's importance in social policy in the frame of the neo-liberal privatization of important public sector services (Myers, 2017). This kind of critiques is useful for the relevant public dialogue and discourse, as the weakening of the social state, leads to growing inequalities, that function as fuel and deepen many social problems.

Future Directions for Enhanced Impact

To fully leverage the potential of the Third Sector in family policy, strategic integration with public institutions is essential. This involves creating frameworks that support sustainable funding, such as

multi-year grants and capacity-building initiatives. Additionally, fostering a collaborative environment where Third Sector organizations can contribute to policy development without compromising their autonomy is crucial. This could include participatory policy-making processes, where Third Sector representatives are involved in drafting and reviewing legislation.

Furthermore, the implementation of family policies can be enhanced by formalizing partnerships between the state and Third Sector organizations, ensuring that these entities are recognized as equal partners. This can be achieved through joint training programs, shared service delivery models, and integrated funding mechanisms that align the goals of both sectors (Brandsen & Pestoff, 2006). In addition, Pestoff (2012) suggests formalizing partnerships through joint training programs, shared service delivery models, and integrated funding mechanisms. These strategies can enhance the synergy between the state and the Third Sector, leading to more robust and responsive family policies.

It is also safe to conclude that fostering collaborative environments where Third Sector entities can contribute to policy development without compromising their autonomy is crucial for effective partnerships. Collaboration with public authorities in family policy by proposing innovative solutions, attracting funding, creating information platforms for coordination, and providing services on behalf of the public sector can be a key process for utilizing the Third Sector's potential for positive social impact. This collaboration is crucial for addressing complex family policy issues effectively.

Conclusions

The Third Sector holds considerable potential in the development and implementation of family policy. By leveraging their unique strengths—such as local knowledge, advocacy capabilities, and innovative approaches—these organizations can significantly enhance the effectiveness and reach of family support services. To fully harness this potential, it is essential to address challenges related to funding and collaboration, ensuring that Third Sector contributions are sustainable and well-integrated into the broader policy framework. Through strategic partnerships and supportive policies, the synergy between the state and the Third Sector can lead to more robust and responsive family policies, ultimately benefiting society as a whole.

Taking all the above into consideration, along with the relevant scientific consent, the Third Sector's role in the development and implementation of family policy is indispensable. By acting as advocates, innovators, and service providers, these organizations contribute to more effective and inclusive family policies. However, to maximize their impact, it is essential to address the challenges of funding

sustainability and collaboration with public institutions. Through strategic integration and supportive policy frameworks, the Third Sector can continue to play a vital role in enhancing family well-being and social cohesion.

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